Is a picture worth a thousand words? A case study led investigation into the use of picture books to support the teaching of disciplinary literacy in the primary school setting.

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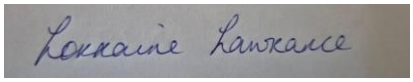
ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore the stance of curricular reform and teacher planning in relation to the burgeoning area of disciplinary literacy (DL) in the Irish primary setting. At the centre of this research is the recognition that picturebooks have the capacity to play a central role in teaching and learning across the curriculum in primary schools with this research deciphering whether picturebooks may aid disciplinary literacy learning and the teaching of the specific language associated with the various disciplines. With the introduction of disciplinary literacy in the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA 2019), and the subsequent disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers are now starting to explore how this approach can be integrated into daily planning and practice. This renewed focus, supported by the DES, saw the facilitation of a nationwide PDST webinar on disciplinary literacy in 2023. This qualitative piece of research used semi-structured interview, open-ended questionnaire, nationwide survey and a professional learning community model to engage key educational stakeholders, practitioners and librarians in discourse in relation to disciplinary literacy, the use of picturebooks in the primary classroom and in teachers' planning and preparation for teaching and learning (TPPTL). The Irish curricula is currently in a period of drastic reform, with the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) laying the foundations of what is yet to come- this research considers the most up-to-date expectations from the National Council for Curriculum Design and Assessment (NCCA) in relation to DL, at the cusp of the dissemination and transfer into practice of a remodelled, learning outcome-based curricula. Considering the teacher as 'agentic' and 'the curriculum maker', as suggested by policy-makers, this research thoroughly explores the position of disciplinary literacy in the Irish primary setting by liaising with teachers and key educational stakeholders to identify the ways in which educators may plan for disciplinary literacy in a meaningful and purposeful way. As the INTO in their *Primary Curriculum Review and Development* (INTO 2022, p.3) publication propose-"The input of teachers cannot be underestimated as their contributions are based on real-life situations and lived experiences in a school context and we must ensure that the voice of the teacher continues to resonate in any updated curriculum."

The study's conceptual framework, informed by Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner, and theories of academic and cultural literacies, addresses four key areas: curricular reform, preparation for teaching and learning, disciplinary literacy, and the use of picturebooks. The research underscores the need for further exploration into how picturebooks can be effectively integrated into curricula to support DL. It also highlights the necessity for ongoing professional development to help teachers adapt to and implement DL principles amidst evolving curricular demands. This study contributes valuable insights into the interplay between curricular reform and teacher agency, offering a foundation for future research in this critical area of education.

DECLARATION

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

Signed: 

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DEDICATION

Once upon a time there was a little girl who was named after a TV presenter. A product of the 1980s, she wore her dark hair in a bob, had a fringe with a cows-lick and wore a waist-coat with a pocket watch. She loved to create. She spent her days immersed in art projects and her evenings engrossed in the adventures of the girls from Malory Towers. She was a stamp collector. Following a poor bill of health, she learned to play the clarinet. She loved to learn. She was academically driven. Whatever she put her mind to, she succeeded at. She was determined, diligent and devoted to education. That girl became a teacher, fulfilling an ambition which sparked her journey into adult education. She progressed along a path of continuous professional development, leading teams, projects and seeking out new opportunities in the education profession. With four children in tow, she took on the enormous task of a PhD. She believed she could do it, so she did. This thesis is dedicated to children everywhere-that they may find their spark and be a shining light in this world. As my daughter's motto implores, "Do what you love, and love what you do".

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBI	Children's Books Ireland
CF	Conceptual framework
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CKF	Core Knowledge Foundation
CKS	Core Knowledge Sequence
CL	Critical Literacy
CPA	Concrete, pictorial, abstract
CSL	Children's School Lives
CT & BT	Critical Thinking and Book Talk 423
CVL	Critical Visual Literacy
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DI	Direct Instruction
DCU	Dublin City University
DL	Disciplinary literacy
DLT	Disciplinary literacy teaching
GRR	Gradual release of responsibility
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
LAI	Literacy Association of Ireland
LAOS	Looking at Our School
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEU	National Education Union
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PBs	Picturebooks
PCF	Primary Curriculum Framework
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PCSP	Primary Curriculum Support Service
PD	Professional Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PPA	Planning, preparation and assessment
PTL	Preparation for Teaching and Learning
SET	Special Education Teaching
SPHE	Social and Personal Health Education
SLG	School libraries group
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
STEM	Science, Technology and Mathematics
TPPTL	Teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning

TP	Teacher planning
TSI	Transactional Strategy Instruction
UDL	Universal design for learning
UK	United Kingdom
U.S.	United States
WPBs	Wordless picturebooks
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

‘Teaching is about teaching, but it is also about learning’

(*Cosán Framework for Teachers’ Learning*, The Teaching Council of Ireland 2016)

Image 1: The Journey by Francesca Sanna

1.1 Introduction

The idea that teaching is intrinsic to learning goes back to the Socratic idea of teaching as a maieutic process[1], that is, a bringing out what is already there (Biesta 2013). In contrast, the French philosopher Emmanual Levinas, interprets revelation-an understanding of teaching, in terms of transcendence, where teaching brings something radically new to the student- as the experience of being taught (Biesta 2013). This piece of research offers a unique perspective by merging two traditionally distinct realms: the concept of disciplinary literacy, typically addressed at secondary and tertiary levels, and the use of picturebooks, conventionally considered a teaching tool for very young children. In doing so, it combines the Socratic concept with Levinas' interpretation of teaching. Central to the focus of this research is the acknowledgement that explicit teacher modelling of research based best practices, aligned with the nurturing of playful pedagogy, in accordance with the *Aistear framework* (NCCA 2024; 2009), (superseded by the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023), captures the essence of curricular regeneration in Ireland. This research, situated within academic and cultural literacies, draws on Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) and language theory (Vygotsky 1962), *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory* (1979) as well as E.D. Hirsch's *Core Knowledge Sequence* (2023; 2010; 1990) , in its efforts to situate disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in the current Irish primary context. As a teacher-researcher, this study aimed to deepen the understanding of practitioners, researchers, and key educational stakeholders regarding the shift in Irish educational policy and its translation into classroom practice.Through discoursing the key areas of disciplinary

[1] A maieutic process is a method of learning or discovery that involves asking questions to stimulate critical thinking and guide someone to uncover knowledge or insights for themselves, often associated with Socratic questioning

literacy, picturebooks and teacher planning, this study deciphers how recent and ongoing curricular reform in the Irish primary sphere culminates and applies to actual classroom planning and practice.

In light of the sobering findings from *the Irish National Teachers Organisation's* study on *Teacher Workload* (INTO 2023), this inquiry further highlights teacher wellbeing and workload through its investigation. The study made conscious efforts to open up the dialogue with practitioners and key educational stakeholders to ascertain and to seek ways to maintain and improve the practical considerations for practitioners in their planning and preparation for teaching and learning whilst fulfilling the purpose of this research. Central to this piece of work is the discovery of what literacy planning and teaching, specifically disciplinary literacy, looks like or may look like according to Irish primary school practitioners and how this practice is evolving in light of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023), alongside the *Preparation for Teaching and Learning: Guidance for all Primary and Special Schools* (NCCA 2021). Just as Scott & Usher (1996) remark in the understanding of educational research: 'a primary concern is to widen understanding beyond, rather than develop knowledge within, the boundaries of academic disciplines on the one hand, and 'practical concerns' on the other' (Scott & Usher 1996, p.106). This research, through its case study model, sought to widen understanding amongst key educational stakeholders through purposeful conversation; specifically targeted at disciplinary literacy and the exploration of picture books as a tool for teaching disciplinary literacy across a range of subjects in the Irish primary setting.

1.2 Research Rationale

It is indisputable that generic literacy strategies are inadequate for meeting the goal of disciplinary instruction (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008; Moje 2008). Indeed, these generic tools (e.g. decoding, pre-reading, comprehension skills, knowledge of high frequency vocabulary) increasingly fail to serve to meet the needs and demands to thrive in academia and in the workforce of today's rapidly evolving society (Oakhill *et al.* 2014; Block 2008). Inevitably, twenty-first century pupils require more than Sir William Curtis's (1807) traditional three R's: reading, writing and arithmetic (Beck 1956) and indeed more than the aims of curricula itself (Null 2023). After all, children today are growing up in what Claude Shannon (1916-2001) called 'the digital age', where artificial intelligence is growing at an alarming rate and has begun to seep its way into school life (Schiff 2021). Whilst artificial intelligence may be an aid and accomplice to many enhancements in life (Tulkunovna *et al.* 2022), time will tell the impact this will have on the foundations of language for young school goers. With that in mind, the rationale for the exploration of explicit training in the teaching of language- language that will transfer across the disciplines has never been more timely. On balance, this explicit language instruction may be the next step in a learning process which will serve to equip children with the necessary skills to navigate academia and society into the future. Such explicit training would ensure readiness, confidence and competence in thinking and learning across disciplinary literacy pedagogical content knowledge (DLPCK), as summarised by Fang & Patrick (2024). In essence, as the 2019 *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) promotes, the transference of skills, such as those necessary for disciplinary literacy, is an essential toolkit for successful teaching and learning. Such a skillset would help to equip students to meet the challenges of 21st century life including 'the Google era' (Page & Brinn 1998, cited in

McPherson 2010), ‘the wellness era’ (Travis, Ardell & Hettler 1970s, cited in Baker 2022) and ‘the Anthropocene era’ (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000, cited in Benner *et al*. 2022).

1.2.1 Why disciplinary Literacy?

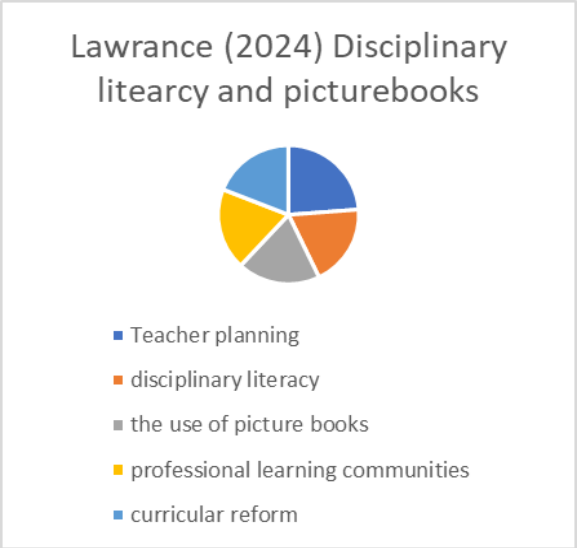
Disciplinary literacy (DL) refers to the specific reading, writing, and thinking skills required to effectively engage with and understand the language, concepts, and practices of a particular academic discipline. DL primarily is about developing students capacity to think, read and write like an expert and although foundational skills are important (Gabriele 2023; Mortimore 2020; Leng & Voigt 2018; Lent 2015; Oakhill *et al*. 2014), children need to develop specialised literacy skills and practices necessary to navigate complex text across the disciplines (Lee & Spratley 2010). By providing children with these tools, they are more prepared to navigate texts of increasing difficulty and thus achieve and understand more efficiently (DES 2015). Wineburg & Martin (2004) said that without the ability to understand the language of historical texts (which at primary level includes historical narratives, primary source documents (e.g., letters, speeches, legal texts), historical maps and visuals, oral histories, historical fiction, and government/legal documents, all of which feature specific vocabulary, tone, and structure that help students understand and critically engage with past events in relation to the present), students are unlikely to learn to read critically or develop the ability to respond to what they are reading. Furthermore, Brozo (2017) declares that students need to be sensitised to disciplinary text genres which will help them to read more like a disciplinary insider and develop the necessary practices for comprehension appropriate to the various content domains. However, despite this burgeoning area of research, (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean 2016; Spires *et al*. 2018) proclaim, that educational research in this field has merely described DL at the expert level but has fallen short of establishing an

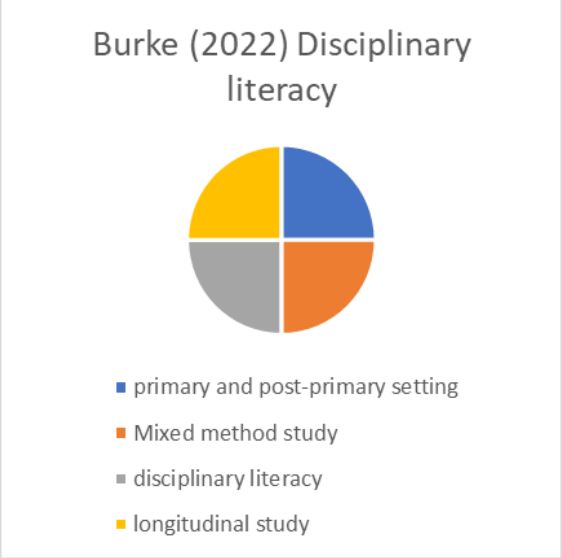
operationalised conception of DL in the school curricular context. In essence, it seems that there is much discourse, research and rationale around this key area but there is a much slower pace of transference in to actual classroom practice. This may be on the cusp of change however, with the compulsory 2023 whole-school closure for all primary schools in Ireland which saw disciplinary literacy on the agenda of all schools as set out by the DES and PDST through a nationwide webinar. Therefore, this study, complementary to the recommendations put forward by Alvermann & Wright 2021; Bennett 2011; Masuda 2014; Rainey 2017, seeks to fulfil the need for more envisionments in disciplinary literacy in actual school contexts. These envisionments shall be presented in Chapters 5 through the voices of teachers and key educational stakeholders in the Irish primary context, pinpointed to the area of DL, incorporating the exploration of the central role of picturebooks as a mode of teaching and learning for DL. Building on the work of Burke (2024) which uncovered insights into the fact that post-primary teachers are less likely to think that students are well-prepared for the literacy demands of secondary school, this study sought to heighten the aspect of DL, traditionally a second a third level concept and how this may serve to bridge the gap which second level teachers are experiencing.

1.2.2 Looking forward: Why DL AND picturebooks?

The 22nd European Conference on Literacy, Dublin 2022, was dominated by disciplinary literacy. It is unquestionably a burgeoning area of research, firmly top listed on the agenda of literacy/educational researchers right across the globe. Key investigators are currently conducting and have successfully directed an array of studies with a primary focus on disciplinary literacy in primary settings. The topics explored in this field amongst key researchers can be viewed in

Appendix 8. This study like that of Burke (2024); Burke & Welsh (2018), sought to explore disciplinary literacy in the Irish context with the acknowledgement of similar studies abroad (See Appendix 8). Against the backdrop of Ireland's latest research by key researchers in this particular field, Dr Patrick Burke (2024; 2022; 2018), and his work on disciplinary literacy in primary and post-primary schools, this study sought to build on and add to this knowledge base using a different lens and alternative angle, illustrated in the chart below. This work also builds on the foundational work of Dr Anne Dolan through her publication *You, me and diversity: Picturebooks for teaching development and intercultural education* (Dolan 2014) as well as her continuous drive to educate and foster awareness within initial teacher education, in her efforts to position picturebooks centrally within the Irish primary context.





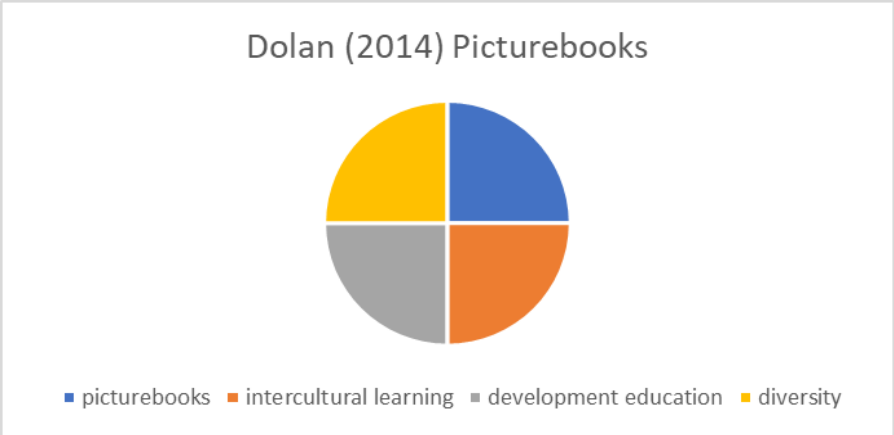


Figure 1: Building on the research: Burke (2022) and Dolan (2014)

Whilst researchers in the field of literacy and DL are acknowledging picturebooks as a resource for the teaching of DL, the central role as set forth through this study, is unique. For example, Burke (2022), within his doctoral work, created a padlet of suggested non-fiction books, (Burke 2022), including a range of picturebooks which have been divided up into subject areas. So too, one study undertaken in Oxford University by Matthew Tobin created a resource Padlet (Tobin 2022), which has a section dedicated to high-quality picturebooks for cross-curricular planning. Additionally, Roche (Roche 2024), whose padlet outlines useful resources for picturebook enthusiasts, shows the extent to which these resources can be used for teaching and learning. Similarly, Dolan (2014) in her appendices offers a robust selection of picturebooks to promote respect, understanding, action and perspective, amongst other areas, highlighting the link between picturebooks and critical thinking as well as the development of dispositions, similar to those set out in the Aistear framework and further woven through the PCF. This study sought to offer practitioners the opportunity to explore such resources in-depth, through a disciplinary literacy lens in order to decipher if, and how such resources can be used to enhance teaching and learning

across the curriculum. As this research occurred at the cusp of curricular reform in Ireland, it allowed for the bringing of new meaning within the context of the PLC and PCF.

Furthermore, Burke (2018) highlights a recurring theme in the development of literacy curricula in Ireland: while curricular documents often emphasise the integration of literacy with other subjects and advocate for a holistic approach to language learning, this vision frequently fails to manifest in classroom practice. Historical and contemporary curricula have consistently promoted the idea that literacy should be woven into all aspects of learning, yet teachers often struggle to implement these ideals due to lack of clear guidance, resources, or professional development. As a result, literacy is often taught in isolation, rather than being integrated across the curriculum as intended. Burke (2018) details how, despite the ambitious goals of the 1971 and 1999 curricula, which emphasised language as a tool for learning across subjects, the practical implementation in classrooms has been inconsistent. Teachers have reported difficulties in applying these integrated approaches, partly due to inadequate support and the pressures of time constraints. Similarly, recent curricular reforms, such as the *Primary Language Curriculum* of 2015, continue to stress the importance of cross-curricular literacy development. However, there is concern that without specific directives and sustained professional development, these reforms may not lead to meaningful changes in classroom practice. It is at this point that this research piece serves to add to the research base in an effort to find ways to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

1.2.3 Reflecting on the here and now

Centered in the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) is the concept of 'critical thinking and book talk' (Roche 2014) and the use of picturebooks in the classroom. Gilliland, cited in Walsh

2017, says that ‘rich storytelling is at the epicentre of all effective learning environments’ and children’s literature is ‘a most powerful learning tool in the development of language’ (Gilliland, cited in Walsh 2017, pp.87-88). Since the introduction of *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Gleeson & Courtney 2009) picturebooks have slowly made their way in to Irish primary classrooms with an explicit emphasis on the teaching of comprehension strategies. Revitalised by the PLC (NCCA 2019) and sprung forth with emerging publications such as PDST’s *Children’s Books for Wellbeing* (2020) which promotes the use of picturebooks for the teaching of S.P.H.E, and PDST’s STEM Picturebooks publication (2023), picturebooks continue to gain momentum as key tools for teaching and learning. Furthermore, the emergence of key educational influencers in the Irish primary literacy domain has seen picturebooks being catapulted to the forefront of discourse amongst practitioners in this public online platform. Interestingly, picturebooks were the second leading key topic (after DL) which dominated *The 22nd European Conference on Literacy* 2022, indicatingthat the importance of using picturebooks to teach advanced topics and critical thinking across the disciplines is a growing ideology and expanding area of research. (See Appendix 9 for an outline of the topics presented in the area of picturebooks). Uniquely, this study sought to marry the concepts of DL and picturebooks in an exploration of the capacity of teacher planning and preparation for teaching and learning through a series of phases of professional discourse, deciphering just how these ideologies may transfer into actual classroom practice, bridging the gap as aforementioned by Spires *et al.* (2018).

Continuing the ‘reflecting on the here and now’ approach, the next section of the introduction presents four key documents which have served to influence and underpin the research presented herein.

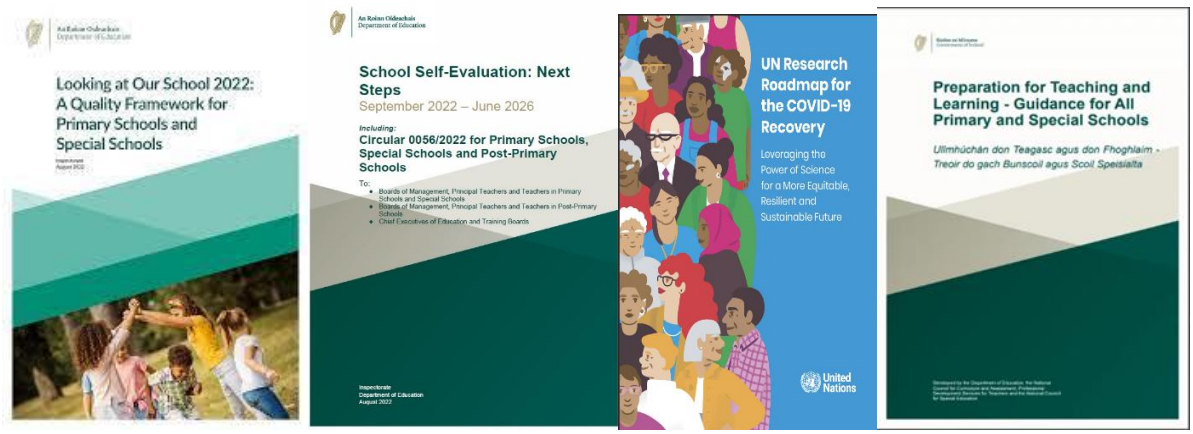


Figure 2: Reflecting on the here and now: Four key documents

1.2.4 Reflecting on the here and now: *Looking at Our School* (LAOS)

This study was conducted amid the publication of *Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools*, (DES 2022) a framework that supports a shared awareness of what effective and highly effective learning, teaching, leadership and management procedures look like in the Irish school system. The document, which is addressed in Chapter Three, succeeds the 2016 publication of the same name and outlines a cohesive set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools: (i) learning and teaching (ii) leadership and management. These dimensions are the most important areas of the work of a school. Each dimension is structured using four domains. The framework presents four domains within the dimension of learning and teaching: (i) learner outcomes, (ii) learner experiences, (iii) teachers' individual practice, (iv) teachers' collective / collaborative practice. Similarly, the other dimension, leadership and management, comprises four domains which are also interlinked: (i) leading learning and teaching (ii) managing the organisation, (iii) leading school development, (iv)

developing leadership capacity. This key document is intended for teachers and school leaders to use in employing the most effective and appealing learning and teaching approaches and in improving the quality of leadership and management in their schools (DES 2022, p.5). Therefore, its importance within this research, in its focus amongst the aforementioned dimensions seemed both timely and significant. As the document is expected to be used by schools to strengthen their commitment with the six-step school self-evaluation (SSE) process, it became a fundamental tool through which this research could be steered and conducted as educators continue to come to grips with and began to apply the document to their own school settings. Reflective of the vision held within the *LAOS* framework (DES 2022) and centred within this research, was using the framework to facilitate reflective practice and to inform the design of continuing professional learning for teachers and school leaders through a professional learning community model. Furthermore, three of the ten key principles which underpin the *LAOS frameowrk, (*DES 2022), formed the backbone of this research as it shared similar objectives and core beliefs held therein. See Appendix 10.

The *LAOS framework* (DES 2022) set forth a vision that teachers would come together and liaise collegially and professionally, similarly to the professional learning community model employed within this research. In the same way, and using the *LAOS* framework (DES 2022) document as a guiding force, this study sought to engage key stakeholders in collective and collaborative discourse in order to value and engage in professional learning and professional collaborative work so as to devise learning opportunities for pupils across and beyond the curriculum and collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable practices which would contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise (DES 2022, p. 25). In essence, *LAOS framework,* enabled this research to 'look at our schools' through a teacher-

researcher lens, amongst practitioners in authentic school settings across Ireland, essentially bringing the document to life in a purposeful and focused way.

1.2.5 Reflecting on the here and now: UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery

> 'Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less'
>
> (Marie Curie 1904)

According to the *DES Chief Inspector's Report, September 2016- December 2020*, (DES 2022), the COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably impacted the education system in significant ways. Therefore, the fact that this research took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic cannot be overlooked. The pandemic transported teaching and learning to an online platform almost overnight, causing urgent yet authentic evaluations of current practice and an exploration of alternative approaches. A sense of innovation and creativity arrived unexpectedly, amidst the stress and chaos of online teaching during times of global uncertainty. Such revolution echoes the work of Mehigan *et al.* (2013) who spoke of ways to create multiple pathways to powerful literacy in challenging times. Responding to dynamic and complex challenges in an interdependent world requires early and ongoing evidence about what is working, for whom, and in which contexts (United Nations 2020). When the United Nations reflected on the Covid-19 pandemic, they created a *Research Roadmap for worldwide Recovery*. In it they stated that when opportunities for learning are purposefully built into the design of policies and programs, they can help decision-makers accelerate progress and adapt strategies where needed. To this end, they spoke of *rapid learning systems* which support quick, iterative cycles of knowledge generation and implementation and adaptation in decision-making. In Ireland, curricular reform and the dissemination of curricular knowledge was greatly impacted by the pandemic and so a system such as the rapid learning

systems model may be an opportunity to increase the effectiveness and success of the implementation of the new Irish primary curricula. The UN denotes that such interventions are continuously evaluated to produce insights into what works in which contexts and to identify the impact of research itself, such that continuous improvements can be made in a timely manner. This is reflective of the current *School Self Evaluation* (SSE) system, which operates in the Irish primary education system, arguably the former is a more stringent, rigorous and universal approach. Furthermore, the UN in their *Research Roadmap for worldwide Recovery* (United Nations 2020) depicts that the *Rapid learning system* encourages interdisciplinary collaborations. It is this type of collaboration across the disciplines within the primary school curriculum which is the focus of this study, hence where the point of connection lies. Finally, based on existing research, *rapid learning systems* should be characterised by meaningful partnerships between researchers and knowledge users; enabled by a culture of continuous learning and improvement; progressive in developing and championing new metrics and models that incentivise impact-oriented research (United Nations 2020). This model mirrors the professional learning community (PLC) prototype employed through this piece of research encouraging professional development amongst practitioners in an effort to accelerate and bridge the gap between research based best practice and actual classroom practice.

1.2.6 Reflecting on the here and now: DES School Self-Evaluation Next Steps September 2022-June 2026

‘Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.’

(Helen Keller 1925)

The penultimate document which has impacted on this study, detailed further in the literature review, is the DES publication of *School Self-Evaluation Next Steps September 2022 - June 2026* (DES 2022*)*. This publication sees three levels of support for schools which enables them to further

develop their SSE processes, including managing data effectively and efficiently. While Level 1 lists the supports for SSE and level 2 details the role of SSE and inspection; it is level 3 which concerns and connects with this study. See Table 1.

Collaboration with and between schools
• Collaboration among schools: It is intended to promote and support collaboration among schools in relation to SSE, taking account of the learnings from models of collaboration.

Table 1: School Self Evaluation Level 3 (DES 2022, p.15)

The collaboration with and between schools played a key role in this study. It is precisely this type of evaluation of learning and collaboration among schools which this study adopted, through its in-depth analysis of a particular aspect of teaching and learning in the primary classroom, that being, disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks. By engaging in using a PLC model in the context of SSE, the study sought to strengthen teacher voice in the transfer of policy into practice by enabling teachers to become leaders of their own learning, an underpinning principle of the PCF. The recommendations for the application of such a model are outlined in Chapter 6.

1.2.7 Reflecting on the here and now: Preparation for Teaching and Learning: Guidance for all Primary and Special Schools

‘Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.’

(Alexander Graham Bell 1876)

The final document which impacted on this study, which shall also feature in the literature review, is the NCCA’s *Preparation for Teaching and Learning: Guidance for all Primary and Special Schools* (NCCA 2021). The document aims to make planning and preparation more purposeful, useful and practical for teachers and school leaders in all school settings. The document outlines a

series of six questions to assist teachers in reflecting on their preparation for T&L, with question two seen as pertinent to this research: Q2. Are the preparatory activities I undertake useful, purposeful and practical supports for teaching and learning? Through the lens of DL, this question has been posed through the various phases of data collected in this project to ascertain whether picturebooks may be a useful, purposeful and practical means of supporting the teaching and learning of DL.

1.3: Central aims and embedded objectives of the study

The central aim of this research was to explore the capacity of teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning with a central focus on disciplinary literacy, exploring and using picturebooks as key texts. The main objectives of this study were;

- To hear the voices of practitioners in a variety of school settings in relation to teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning, DL and the place for picturebooks across the primary setting.
- To locate our understanding of disciplinary literacy within current national and international educational research, policy and practice and how this translates into planning and practice.
- To recognise and explore the value of high quality picturebooks in teacher planning, observing and working with teachers to develop the skills necessary to develop this within their school.
- To explore the place of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) and other curricular documents (*Primary Curriculum Framework*, NCCA 2023) in the integration of literacy across the disciplines in a teacher-friendly, child-centered manner.
- To investigate the possible role of disciplinary literacy within TPPTL and the use of picturebooks to support disciplinary literacy learning in Irish primary schools.
- To use a professional learning community model to gather practitioners together in a productive setting to engage in in-depth discussion and professional development around the key areas of this research.
- To hear the voices of librarians and how their role within the community and primary school may assist teachers in their TPPTL and in the use of picture books for disciplinary literacy.
- To evaluate the concept of DL and the use of picturebooks in the classroom amidst curricular reform in Ireland.

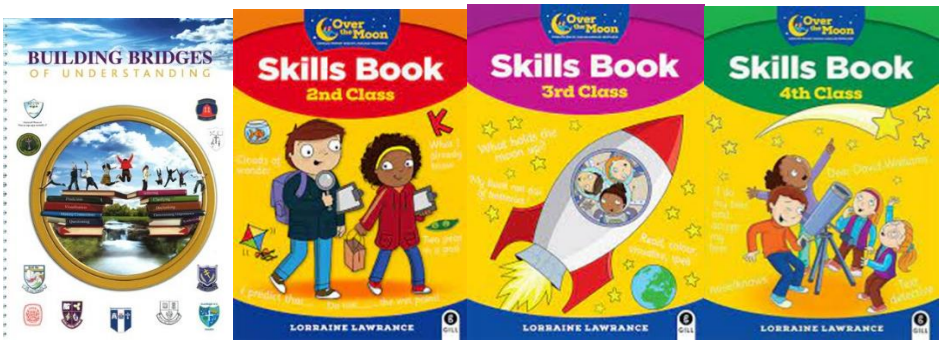
1.4 Motivation: The Path to the Research Question

For the past two decades, I have centred my studies at the intersection of literacy pedagogy, practice and policy in an Irish primary school setting. Reflective of Morrow and Gambrell's (2018) 'knowledge and heart' ideology, I have been a decision maker who stands firm in the belief that with knowledge and heart, evidence-based best practices can be selected and adapted to meet the needs of each student within a community of learners where it is a joy to teach. Explicit teacher modelling (Direct Instruction (DI) as per the approach developed by Siegfried Engelmann and Wesley C. Becker that was first implemented in the 1960s, (see Engelmann *et al*. 1988) and the *Gradual release of responsibility* (GRR) coined by Pearson and Gallagher (1983), has been the predominant teaching methodologies at the core of my work to date. The Gradual Release of Responsibility model, as outlined by Pearson and Gallagher (1983), is an instructional framework where teachers initially provide direct instruction and modelling, then gradually shift the responsibility for learning to students through guided practice, independent practice, and application, ultimately fostering student autonomy and deeper understanding. Awareness of the effectiveness of these methodologies arose initially from my observation of teaching literacy in The Gambia, West Africa in 2006, asserting the research of Mehigan (2005; 2004) and utilising the visuals from picturebooks to breakdown language barriers. Following this, research which I conducted as part of a Master's in Education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick from 2007-2009 focused on the teaching of reading comprehension, which again centred on visuals and was culminated in my involvement in a two-year research project funded by the Department of Education, resulting in a whole-school approach to the teaching of comprehension. This programme, collectively devised by Professor Ann Courtney of the University of Hartford, Connecticut, Dr Martin Gleeson, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and nine teacher-

researchers myself included, saw the teaching of comprehension in schools across Ireland completely overhauled. Drawing on the most up-to-date research relating to effective comprehension instruction, its primary focus is the teaching of comprehension through the use of picture books, with the ultimate aim of enabling children to become self-regulated strategic readers. This body of work resulted in the nationally acclaimed programme, *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Courtney & Gleeson 2009) which has, in turn, been a springboard into this research.

The aforementioned work subsequently led me to build up a knowledge and expertise in using picture books both in literacy lessons, in small group settings, in support groups as well as in whole school professional development sessions through my role as a school literacy leader. This extensive professional development in literacy and leadership was further shaped through my involvement in the formulation of a primary language programme, *Over the Moon* (Gill Education 2019; 2020). It was during this time that I dedicated a three-year term to the formulation of a language programme for primary school pupils together with the creation of explicit teacher planning frameworks which are fully mapped to the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019). This project afforded me time to delve into the *Primary Language Curriculum* in an in-depth manner, seeking ways to make intrinsic links between curriculum and classroom practice. At the heart *Over the Moon* is a carefully chosen selection of picturebooks which tie in with a given genre and theme each month in a cross curricular integrated manner. I designed (in collaboration with a school librarian in the UK), a set of explicit teacher modelling notes to accompany these picturebooks to enable teachers to deliver a standard in scaffolding and modelling to pupils, complementary to the Teacher's toolkit materials supplied alongside the *Primary Language Curriculum*. At the cusp of this publication, I engaged in a series of conversations with a colleague,

former Head of literacy at one of Ireland's leading initial teacher education colleges, which centered around disciplinary literacy and the place for it in the Irish curriculum. I recall his words with such clarity as they echoed in my ear, creating somewhat of a 'lightbulb moment'- *"I predict that disciplinary literacy will be the next big thing!*". And so, the question bubbled over, how can teacher planning across the disciplines be explored? And is there a place for picture books within this planning?



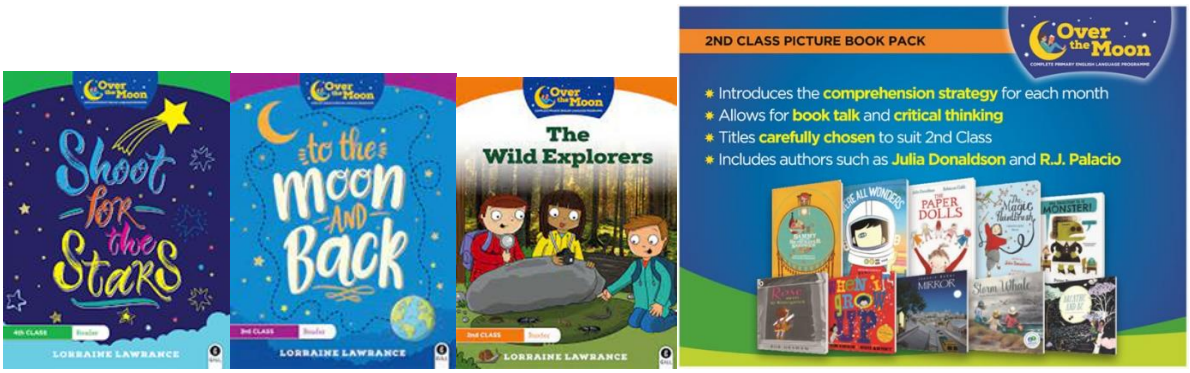


Figure 3: The role of picturebooks in the researchers previous work: *Building Bridges, Over the Moon, Cosán na Gealaí*

I acted as series editor of *Cosán na Gealaí* (Gill Education 2021-2023), to fulfil my vision of a complete language programme which saw a transfer of skills across the language of English to Gaeilge, in a programme which is reflective and complementary to its English counterpart, *Over the Moon*. Both programmes are centred around a selection of ten carefully chosen picturebooks, one per month which were thematically chosen to feed into the other components of the language programme, something which has not been seen, structurally, in Irish classrooms and in published programmes, in such a manner before. Amidst the formulation of these publications, I began to see the capacity for using picturebooks right across the curriculum and wondered just how great that capacity may be. With the first mention of disciplinary literacy at the primary level landing into the publication of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019, p. 46), the question as to how disciplinary literacy may transpire into classroom practice, finally, seemed clear. And so, the research question presented herein was born.

In the face of current curricular reform (*Draft Curriculum Framework* 2020, *Curriculum Framework* 2023, *Primary Language Curriculum* 2019), I have considered where the gaps may lie in achieving the vision of a disciplinary literate classroom as set out by the NCCA and the transfer of such a vision into practice. Through the data collection phases detailed in Chapter 4, the voices of key educational stakeholders; librarians, practitioners and school leaders have been brought to the forefront. Furthermore, this research poises how tightening up 'the overcrowded curriculum', utilising professional development and assigning centre stage to the voices of

practitioners working on the ground, may contribute to the effective realisation of what the PLC and subsequent *Primary Curriculum Framework* has set forth to achieve.

1.5 Originality and relevance of the research

At the centre of this research is the recognition that picturebooks could play a more central role in teaching and learning across the curriculum, particularly through a disciplinary literacy lens. Few recent studies carried out in relation to disciplinary literacy recognise fully the role that picturebooks may play in the planning and preparation for teaching and learning (Shanahan and Shanahan 2014; Siebert *et al*. 2016, Spires *et al*. 2012). However, a study by Dawson *et al.* (2021), similar to the stance held by Dolan (2014) and Gilliland (cited in Walsh 2017), highlights the significant role that picture books can play in children's language acquisition. Some educationalists/researchers may argue that it may be more beneficial to invest in research that concentrates on the scope for using picture books within the *Primary Language Curriculum* as it stands. However, having studied the curriculum document in-depth while also acknowledging the gap in curricular linkage, this research is located within the current paradigm of overall curricular change. Furthermore, I, personally, have a longstanding desire to explore the meaningful integration of literacy across the disciplines through the building blocks of good teaching and learning: planning. Therefore, at the centre of this research was an investigation into the development of teacher planning for disciplinary literacy using picturebooks, working with and alongside teachers in the process. To inform my own macro level understanding of the position, status and role of disciplinary literacy within the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES 2023), I connected with PDST, INTO and NCCA bodies at a primary level of data collection using

questionnaires and interviews propelling the first phase of this research. This understanding then informed subsequent phases of the research which are detailed in Chapter Four.

Disciplinary literacy, as previously mentioned, involves the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills specific to a given subject (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008). This study, however goes one step further in its efforts to establish the point of connection between the development of these important skills and the channel through which it is and could be taught in Irish primary schools. In a recent review of literature relating to disciplinary literacy, Burke and Welsh (2018) reported that the disciplinary literacy approach requires literacy teaching to fulfil the needs of a particular discipline, complementing and enhancing the modes of thinking and communicating that are characteristic within that discipline (Buehl 2023; Moje 2008; Shanahan and Shanahan 2008). By using a literacy-based skillset, practitioners can, for example, assist pupils to add background knowledge to a scientific inquiry or provide authentic primary and secondary sources in an historical investigation. However, if disciplinary literacy is to take place within the primary classroom, it will need to be planned for carefully. Afterall, the key foundation for good teaching and learning is purposive teacher planning (Yinger 1979; 1980). Planning, as set out in the DES *Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools*, sees value in the visible, invisible and recorded preparation conducted by practitioners to meet the needs of the children in their care. This study sought to investigate the development of teacher planning in relation to the burgeoning area of disciplinary literacy considering picturebooks as key resources within this planning. When the aims and objectives of current and new curricula are recognised and understood, the need for functional teacher planning will be an essential component for the effective delivery of a disciplinary approach. This is the gap which this research has sought to address.

From initial research, it seemed that the presence of *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* 2011- 2020 (NCCA 2011), with its increase in the time allocation and centrality of these core subjects had led to a dilution of other curricular areas. However the *New Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy 2024-2033* (NCCA 2024), sees a reduction in the time allocation for literacy, making DL even more important to meet the demands of the new PCF. With international best practice looking toward the emerging effect and implications that disciplinary literacy at primary level may offer (Burke & Welsh 2018; Shanahan 2017; 2012; 2008), significant consideration had to be given to the practical implementation of this endeavour. The knowledge and experiences of PDST advisors and NCCA personnel was further explored through semi-structured interview to provide a nuanced account of how the new curriculum is being presented to teachers as a pivot towards disciplinary learning emerges. While the literature on the effects of disciplinary literacy using picturebooks as central texts is limited, it is argued that in coming years, and, as seen by the dominance of these topics at international conference level, with the revision of other curricular areas and the full roll out of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) and *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023), the topic will be of popular consideration by Irish schools. Questionably, whether the information provided by researchers translates into actual teacher planning and classroom practice is something which this study addresses. It seems that while the awareness of best practice in literacy has dramatically increased in recent years, the understanding of *how* to plan effectively for it has not developed simultaneously (Levin 2013; Gersten & Dimino McNamara 2003). Advisors for the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) have advocated for the use of picturebooks in schools in order to achieve a dialogic classroom (Courtney and Gleeson 2009, Roche 2014, *Primary Language Curriculum Support Material for Teachers*, NCCA 2019). This

study considered the possibilities for placing picturebooks at the centre of teaching and learning in the move towards disciplinary literacy practices in Irish primary schools.

1.6 Considerations of the study

There were a number of considerations made before, during and after this research was conducted.

1. Caution: 'Old head, young shoulders': Burke and Welsh (2018) note that teaching literacy from a disciplinary perspective would present a number of challenges for the Irish primary school context. If disciplinary literacy was to be a more prominent feature in the primary curriculum, the professional development needs of teachers would warrant careful consideration. Launching a predominantly second and third level concept into primary curricula requires in-depth discourse, modelling and planning. This concern was addressed through the use of a professional learning community model used within the case study methodology adopted by this study.

2. The need for pedagogical content knowledge: Disciplinary literacy places demands on practitioner pedagogical content knowledge (Carney and Indrisano 2013; Love 2010). Therefore, preparation for disciplinary literacy requires the establishment of deep and meaningful connections amongst the discipline and related literacy practices (Fang 2013; 2012). Primary school teachers are required to teach multiple subjects. Traditionally the transition between subjects has not required teachers to think or teach in a disciplinary literacy way. This consideration embodied through the national survey and professional learning communities encouraged practitioners to engage in discussion to establish such deep and meaningful connections, a factor which this study ensued.

3. Fiction Vs non-fiction texts: Data from *The* 2014 *National Assessment of English Reading and Mathematics* (Shiel *et al.* 2015) revealed that teachers use informational texts considerably less frequently than narrative texts. Picturebooks by their nature are predominantly fictional. Therefore, this factor required much consideration by the researcher, achieved partly through an in-depth picturebook research review together with interactions with the curriculum-makers, librarians and teacher bodies in Ireland. This research fully recognises that a broad range of texts, in different formats and modalities, would be necessary for use across the curriculum, its position in this context is to decipher how picturebooks may be used as an effective means for teaching disciplinary literacy.

4. Cross-curricular planning Vs Disciplinary literacy: Traditionally, cross curricular planning has a regular heading in teacher's planning documents. Teachers have always strived to connect curricular content whether it be thematically or loosely linked (*Curriculum na Bunscoile* 1999, Planning documents). The transition towards disciplinary literacy across the curriculum would carry a number of potential advantages. Burke and Welsh (2018) note that disciplinary literacy, by its very nature requires intrinsic links between literacy and the different subject areas represented in the curriculum. Literacy, however must not become a mere add-on which can be universally applied to any content (Piercy and Piercy 2011, p.72). Planning and preparation for a disciplinary literacy approach to teaching should come first in order to ensure that the 'intrinsic links' are substantial, well-considered and worthwhile. A disciplinary approach with its focus on important critical thinking and literacy skills also fosters an inquiry-based classroom culture. This consideration was captured by this research in the teacher discussions presented by a cohort of Irish practitioners and a 'teasing out' of the differences between cross curricular planning and

disciplinary literacy. Further evidence of this discrepancy was considered in the national survey sent to primary teachers nationwide as part of this study.

5. Disciplinary literacy and EAL students: Moje (2008) states that linking disciplinary knowledge and literacy empowers young people to read, write and think critically. Furthermore, the application of literacy in authentic contexts for authentic purposes has been shown to motivate learners. But how does this operate in diverse classrooms? Mehigan & Wilson (2020) call on practitioners to develop ways to engage literacy learners in diverse settings. It must be considered that an explicit focus on language in the disciplines would aid the growing number of English language learners in Irish schools (Fang 2023). Given the influx of wartime Ukranian refugees of late to Irish shores and indeed the rapidly changing landscape in interculturalism worldwide, it seems that Irish schools are becoming increasingly multicultural and adaptable and therefore the need for more explicit teaching and modelling has never been more necessary. This consideration was explored through the careful choosing of and discourse around multicultural picturebooks and wordless picturebooks in the picturebook padlet (Lawrance 2024) creation which transpired from this study.

6. 'Time is of the essence.' (*The Pacific Railroad Act* 1862). The availability and provision of dedicated teacher planning time slots in schools is a key consideration in a study of this nature. This factor, therefore was a central focus in this study through the discourse afforded to TP through the various phases of the research. By comparison, in the United Kingdom, the *National Education Union* reports that teachers are provided weekly planning slots within their school day which is relieved by another member of staff. This is called PPA time- planning, preparation and assessment

and constitutes a minimum of ten per cent of their timetabled teaching time. Some will have more than ten per cent, and the union supports PPA time of 20 per cent (NEU 2023).

7. *Looking at our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (NCCA 2022), states that excellence in teaching is the most powerful influence on pupil achievement. It acknowledges career-long professional development as central to the teacher's work and firmly situates reflection and collaboration at its heart. The framework states that improving the quality of pupils' learning should be the main driver of teacher learning. These statements require, at their heart, purposeful and informed teacher planning which necessitates time-a key consideration explored in this research through dialogue and discourse with practitioners and key stakeholders in education.

8. 'Money makes the world go round' (Liza Minnelli 1972). A further consideration in this study was the provision of funding for books in Irish Schools. Burke (2018) detailed a grim discovery when conducting research into Irish libraries and a decrease in funding for both schools and libraries since 2008. Following the establishment of the *Robert Dunbar Memorial Libraries* in 2017, a book-gifting programme, it was immediately flooded with 300 applications from schools across the country. With this in mind, this study endeavoured to address this consideration through exploring the different ways in which libraries and the role of the librarian may facilitate the development of disciplinary literacy planning in schools. This consideration was further enhanced through the deliberation by practitioners in the PLCs on the spending of the *School Library Book Grant* which saw 20 million euro in funding, resulting in a one off grant of 21 euro per pupils reach Irish schools nationwide in 2023. Further to this, the recent move by the DES to pay for pupils school books was deliberated as the emerging "textbook debate" unfolds.

1.7 Concluding comments

This chapter has introduced the research, discussing the rationale and motivation for conducting the study. It channelled the reader to 'reflect on the here and now' through its introduction to four key documents which have underpinned the research and through highlighting the popularity of the research topics of DL and picturebooks in a research focused domain. It further announced the title of the study and its embedded questions as well as outlining the considerations of the study. The chapter set the stage for the case study led research presented herein, which was conducted in the context of the emerging *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023), highlighting that there is evidence pointing toward a disciplinary literacy outlook with the merging and reclassification of curricular subjects at primary level. Concurrently, the chapter illuminated the fact that the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) represents the debut appearance of disciplinary literacy as a mode for teaching and learning in Irish primary classrooms. It also situates picture books in its Teacher Toolkit. This points towards the timely nature of this research study and the need for its deliberation by Irish educators in this field.

Chapter Two will proceed to outline the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study as well as the positionality of the researcher. Chapter Three will progress to review the literature in the areas of curricular reform, teacher planning, disciplinary literacy and picturebooks. Chapter Four speaks of case study, the chosen methodology for the research and also serves to illustrate the research design. Chapter Five presents and discusses the findings of the study. The final chapter, Chapter Six, details the conclusions and recommendations of the research, paving the way for future research in the area of DL and PBs.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK; POSITIONALITY

‘A conceptual framework is a 'frame that works' to put those concepts in practice’

(Hughes 2016, Tweet)

Image 2: The Butterfly by Patricia Polacco

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section offers a conceptual and theoretical framework for the research overarched by the concept of metacognition and situated against the theoretical backdrop of Vygotsky's *Theory of language development* (1962) and *Zone of proximal development* (1978) and within the domains of Hirsch's cultural literacies (1983) and Street's academic literacies (Street 2010; 2001; 1999; 1984) further calling on the Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* (1979) to add enriched definition to the structure of the study. The second section of this chapter outlines my ontological, epistemological and paradigmatic positioning which frames this study and its design.

SECTION 1

2.1.2 Introduction to the theoretical and conceptual framework

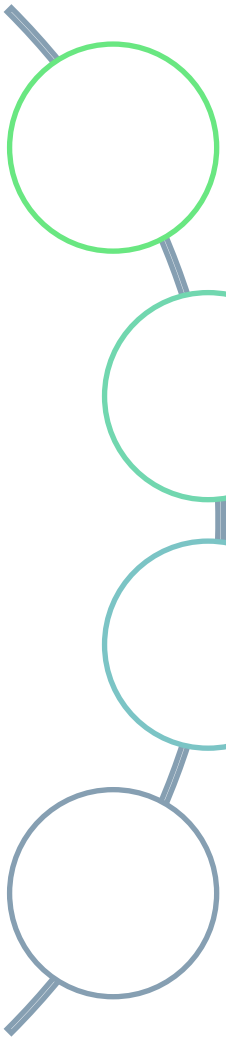
Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are often interlinked. A theoretical framework provides the theoretical foundation for a research study, guiding the research process from conceptualisation to interpretation of results. It provides the foundational structure and guiding principles that inform the study and outlines the key concepts, variables, relationships, and assumptions underpinning the research (Merriam 2009). Theoretical frameworks help researchers situate their work within established theories or bodies of knowledge, providing a lens through which to interpret and analyse data (Lederman and Lederman 2015). The theoretical framework for this study draws on the concepts from a quadrant of researchers, as aforementioned, identifying key elements of each to create a roadmap for this particular research. By acknowledging the key researchers which shape

the study and through detailing their work momentarily, the chapter shall continue by using the conceptual framework phrasing which as Marshall and Rossman (2016) describe, serve to provide a rationale for the study. Furthermore, Crawford (2019 p. 35) says that the CF (conceptual framework) clarifies the context of the study for the reader, not only allowing the researcher to justify and explain the study to others but also to check their own understanding of the need for the study and how the study was conceived. Crawford (2019) also states how the CF helps to decipher what knowledge the study will add to the educational landscape regarding the topic being researched and how the elements of the study design align with the problem identified for the study. In presenting the conceptual framework, I lay the foundations of this study. Adopting the approach of Ravitch and Riggan (2017), similar to Marshall and Rossman (2016), the conceptual framework offers an argument for the study and that argument has two parts: firstly, the argument launches the importance of and intended audience for the study, and secondly, the argument establishes alignment among research questions and data collection analysis as well as the use of rigorous procedures to conduct the study. Furthermore, the CF presented herein assumes the vision of Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) in the close assessment of how the studies variables are related, how the study participants are characterised (explanation) and how data collection instruments are selected (generation) (See Appendix 11). These combined factors, illuminated by the four key investigators in the field of research (Vygotsky, Hirsch, Street, Bronfenbrenner), served to lay the blueprint for this study.

This simplistic overview of the purposes of the conceptual framework serves to summarise for the reader and the researcher the key features of the research. Having detailed these purposes, the chapter shall now proceed to present broad framework of metacognitionand the four-part cluster of theories and concepts employed to frame this study. Metacognition, the awareness and

regulation of one's cognitive processes, plays a critical role in enhancing learning by enabling learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their understanding (Hacker *et al*. 1998). In the context of disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in primary education, metacognitive strategies can help students navigate and interpret subject-specific texts, fostering a deeper engagement with content and promoting the transfer of literacy skills across various academic disciplines.

Metacognition aligns with several key concepts and theories in educational psychology. Vygotsky's theory of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) emphasises social interaction and scaffolding, where metacognition allows learners to self-regulate and reflect on their progress as they move from assisted learning to independent mastery. Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy involves the acquisition of background knowledge, with metacognition helping students actively engage with and internalise this knowledge, improving their ability to connect and apply new information. Metacognition aligns with Brian Street's concept of academic literacies, which views literacy as not just a set of neutral skills but as embedded in power structures and disciplinary contexts. Within this framework, metacognitive awareness enables learners to navigate and critically engage with the varying literacy practices required across academic disciplines. Finally, Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* situates metacognition within the broader social environment, recognising how interactions within the microsystem (e.g., teacher-librarian relationships) and the meso- and exosystems (e.g., educational policies, curriculum design) shape the development of self-regulation and reflective learning in students.



Vygotsky's Theory of Language Development (1962); Zone of Proximal Development (1978)

Emphasises the social nature of learning, where picture books act as a tool for scaffolding literacy skills and develop the language associated with disciplinary literacy, progressing from simple to more complex literacy tasks within their ZPD.

Hirsch's Cultural Literacies (1983)

Picture books serve as a gateway to cultural knowledge, fostering a shared set of references that are essential for understanding disciplinary content. The Core Knowledge Sequence, rooted in Hirsch's theory, outlines the specific cultural knowledge students should acquire, ensuring a coherent progression of knowledge through the primary years. Picture books support this by introducing key concepts that align with the CKS across different subjects.

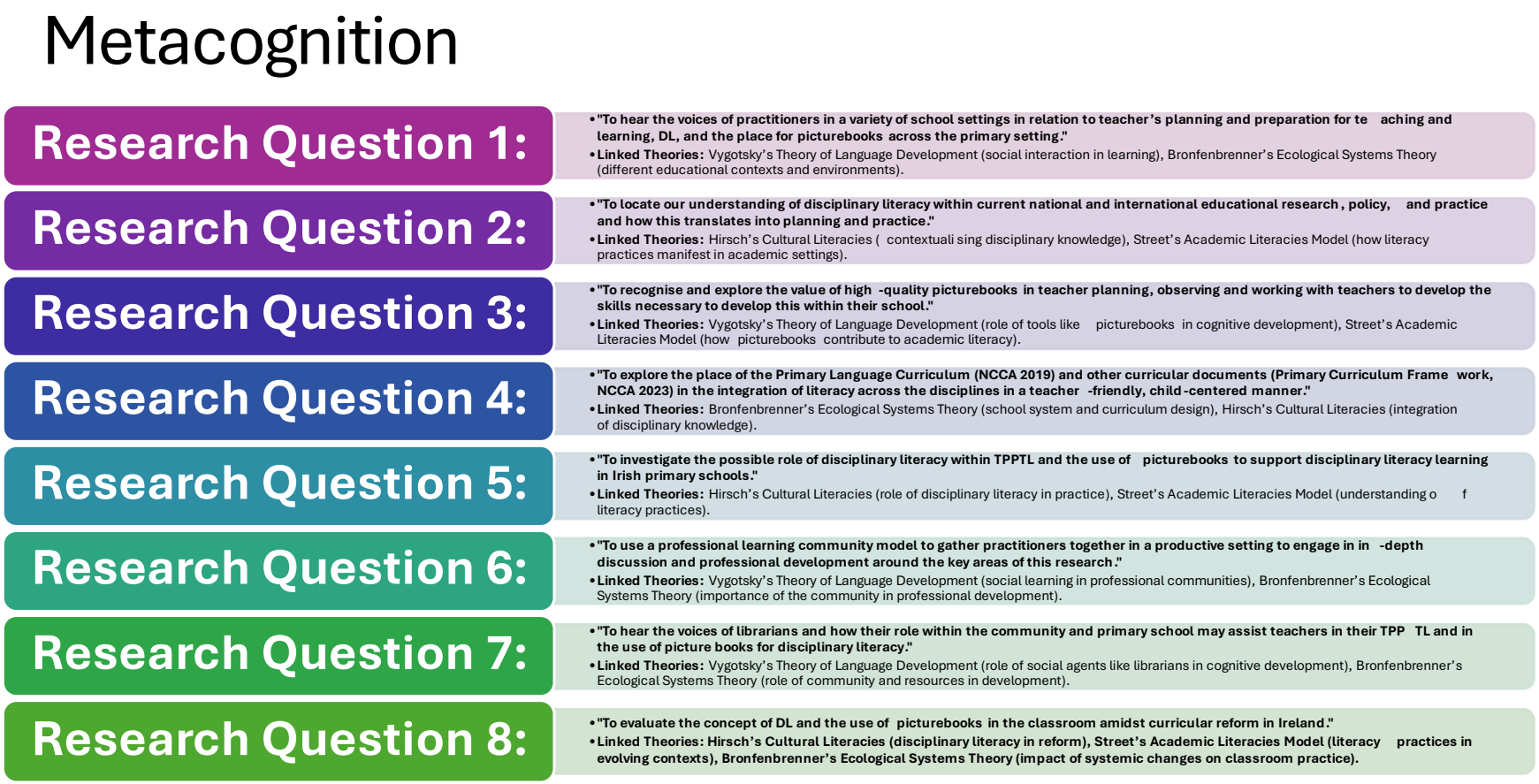
Street's Academic Literacies (1986)

Picture books provide an accessible entry point to discipline-specific literacy practices, helping students understand the diverse ways language is used in different subjects (e.g., scientific language vs. historical narrative). This promotes adaptable literacy skills.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979)

Focuses on the micro, meso, and exo systems. In the micro system, teachers influence students' immediate engagement with picture books. The meso system highlights collaboration between teachers and librarians to support literacy practices, while the exo system considers the impact of policy decisions made by policymakers on the inclusion of picture books and disciplinary literacy in curriculum development and literacy strategies.

Figure 5: Four-part conceptual framework underpinning the research and how this relates to the research questions



2.2 Four-part conceptual framework: Part one

(i) Vygotsky's Theory of Language Development and the Zone of Proximal Development

'Language is man's finest tool'

(Vygotsky 1978)

The first part of the framework for this research is situated under Vygotsky's *Theory of language* as a thinking tool (Vygotsky 2012). Lev Vygotsky (1836-1934) was a Russian Soviet psychologist. He is best known for his work on psychological development in children and creating the framework known as cultural-historical activity theory. McLeod (2022) outlines how Vygotsky's *Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development* stresses the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky 1978), as he ascertained that community plays a central role in the process of 'making meaning'. Vygotsky viewed language as a social device for communication purposes which centred around social learning and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978). The ZPD is a measure of a child's possibility to learn and the actual learning that can take place. To help learners achieve independence, Vygotsky outlined scaffolding as a tool for growth. As disciplinary literacy is primarily a second and third level concept within the education system, (Spires *et al*. 2016; Hillman 2014; Gillis 2014; Fang and Coatoam 2013; Fang 2012; Shanahan 2008), careful consideration is essential when developing a DL approach for teaching and learning that is stage and age appropriate for younger minds at primary level. Therefore, Vygotsky's ZPD and the role of scaffolding by the practitioner will serve to play a key role in the dissemination of DL within the reformed Irish primary curricula.

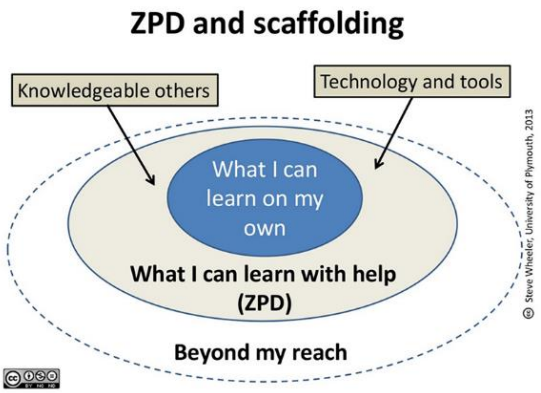


Figure 6: Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development 1934

In Vygotsky's philosophy, dissimilar to that of Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1936), language plays a key role within the theory of human cognitive development. This research examines the language required to teach DL and the role that picturebooks, through their language of text and illustration, can play in the effective delivery and acquisition of language. As René van de veer (2020 p.4), specialist in Vygotsky's sociohistorical psychology states:

> Vygotsky believed that academic concepts presuppose everyday concepts and build on them, but that they at the same time fundamentally alter them once acquired. He speculated that the introduction of networks of interconnected academic concepts at school would alter the child's whole mode of thinking. In other words, in Vygotsky's view, education leads intellectual development. Instruction in school changes children's cognitive development in fundamental ways and we must expect to find different cognitive abilities depending on the child's degree or type of schooling.
>
> (René van de veer 2020, p.4)

The academic concept of DL requires explicit instruction, embedding and interconnectedness as well as a state of metacognition within the child in order for, as Vygotsky's supposes, cognitive development in this sphere to take place. This research draws awareness to the fact that disciplinary literacy is traditionally and predominantly a second and third level concept,therefore, the ZPD was important to keep in mind as this concept unfolded and was explored by educationalists, in order to ensure that the pace and pitch of such a higher order concept like DL, is considered in a

developmentally appropriate manner. Critiques of Vygotsky would argue that ZPD is unclear in that it does not account for a precise picture of a child's learning needs, a child's present capability level or a child's motivational influences (Chaiklin 2003, pp. 42-46). There is a supposition that he disregards the role of the individual, but regards the collective with a further argument that his theory does not seem to apply to all social and cultural groups (Lui & Matthews 2005, p. 392). Taking this into consideration, the core elements of Vygotsky's theory mirror the position held within this research: language is an essential tool for communication. This study illuminates the language of disciplinary literacy, founded in picturebooks, as a form of communication which practitioners and students can identify, engage with and make sense of, across various disciplines. Language and scaffolding play a critical role in cognitive development and social interactions help children develop their ability to use language (Vygotsky 2012). The role of language and scaffolding is fundamental when using picturebooks in the classroom. So too, the emerging role of disciplinary literacy at primary level requires explicit language parameters and scaffolding, in order to be effectively used and understood.

Beneath the layer of Vygotskian influence, this research is situated within the realms of cultural and academic literacies. These concepts will be addressed at this juncture, explicitly detailing how these concepts directly map onto this research. First, I will briefly show the point of connection between education and literacy and indeed its role right across the curriculum which cultural and academic literacies support.

2.3 Defining literacy and education

Education, derived from the Latin term '*educatum*' is the act of teaching or training. Craft (2017) noted that there are two different Latin roots of the English word "education." They are *educare,* which means to train or to mould, and *educere,* meaning to lead out. Although the two meanings are quite diverse, they are both represented in the word "education." Literacy, a late nineteenth century word, coined from 'illiterate' was first used in the seventeenth century by Horace Walpole (1788). Literacy is defined by the Oxford English dictionary as the ability to read and write (Oxford English Dictionary 2023). Literacy theorist, Brian Street, explains that literacy is best understood as 'particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing' (Street 2001, p.11). Interestingly, and significant to the positioning of this research, the second definition of 'literacy' in the Oxford English dictionary is 'competence or knowledge in a specified area' (Oxford English Dictionary 2023). This pinpoints the essence of this research in its efforts to explore how language (through the use of picturebooks), echoing Vygotsky's ideologies previously outlaid, can be used as a tool to enhance pupils' competence or knowledge of disciplinary literacy. The research presented herein is situated within the conceptual framework which hosts cultural literacies; using the *Core Knowledge Sequence* as a platform for the exploration of content specific curricular planning, mirroring the exploration of picturebooks as a specific mode of curricular planning within this research. Following this, and to situate the study within academic literacies, the role of academic reading in emergent academic and professional student identities as well as *The Academic Literacies Model: Theory and Applications,* is discussed and direct links made to this study.

2.4 Four-part conceptual framework: Part two

(ii) Cultural literacies and the importance of background knowledge

E. D. Hirsch, Jr., the founder and chairman of the Core Knowledge Foundation (est. 1986 in U.S.A.) became involved in educational reform as a consequence of doing research on written composition when he observed that a student's ability to comprehend a passage was determined in part by the relative readability of the text, but more so by the student's background knowledge (Hirsch 2020; 2019; 2009; 2007; 2002). This research led Hirsch to develop his concept of cultural literacy - the idea that reading comprehension requires not just conventional decoding skills but also extensive background knowledge (Hirsch 1983). This knowledge, he states, derives from both life experience and selected topic led information. This ideology reflects the M.Ed. research which I conducted in 2009, focussing on reading comprehension pertaining to prior knowledge, taking a similar model to that of Hirsch's cultural literacy model. In this current research, building on the M.Ed. work, I explore the second part of Hirsh's concept of cultural literacy.. I collaborated with practitioners and key educational stakeholders to discuss selected text-piece picturebooks and examined ways in which they can be taught in an explicit interdisciplinary manner with the view to enhancing students metacognitive awareness of their learning through texts across the curriculum through a DL lens.

The results of Hirsh's continuing work in the educational field are presented in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, the blueprint for a coherent, cumulative, and content-specific curriculum in preschool through eighth grade. The specificity of the approach is the component which differs greatly from Irish curricula and one which was explored through the use of specifically chosen text pieces-picturebooks- in this study. The most recent edition of the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, released in 2023, includes the work of subject-matter experts and educator focus groups, taking

consideration of national standards and current trends in cognitive science. It declares that over 10,000 schools in the U.S.A. have now adopted the CKS as its core curricula.

2.4.1 The Core Knowledge Sequence

The *Core Knowledge Sequence* is distinguished by its specificity. While other standards, similar to the Irish learning outcome- based curricula, provide general guidelines concerning what students should be able to do at a particular stage, they typically offer little help to teachers in detailing specific content or skills (Young 2018; Reid 2012; Thijs & Van Den Akker 2009). The comparison to the Irish curriculum can be viewed in terms of its broad and unstructured design, offering the teacher greater autonomy and agency, but a wide and perhaps, shapeless framework from which to build their own content. By comparison, the CKS provides a solid foundation on which to build instruction. Additionally, because the Sequence provides a coherent plan that builds year by year, it helps eliminate the many repetitions and gaps in instruction that often evolve from vague curricular guidelines (Cerny 2010; Hall 1999). Educational standards typically describe what students should be able to do, but not what students should know. Hirsh would argue that instead of spending hours researching and planning what to teach, teachers are free to think more creatively about *how* to teach by using a more content-specific model. Through such a model, practitioners know what children have learned in previous grades and what they will need in succeeding grades. In this way, they can avoid useless repetition. Subsequently, practitioners are less likely to be confronted by big gaps in what students have learned. This argument from Hirsch correlates with my core belief as a practitioner, that teacher planning, spiralling into learner experience and learner outcome, would be more effective and purposeful if it was tiered, content-specific and less repetitive. The ‘tightening-up’ of the curriculum as seen through the reconfiguration of subjects

(See Figure 12) and the change from objective based learning to learning outcomes based is evidence of a move in the direction of redefining the planning and preparation of teaching and learning in Irish schools-the specificity of what is taught however, remains to be deliberated.

In the U.S.A., Hirsh worked for over thirty years developing the idea around how to educate children using a common, coherent and sequenced curricula (Hirsh 2020; 2019; 2009; 2007; 2002). Explaining in *Why Knowledge Matters* (Hirsch 2019) describes how only a well-rounded, knowledge-specific curriculum can impart needed knowledge to all children and overcome inequality of opportunity. This premise is reflective of this current research in its exploration for ways in which a knowledge specific curriculum, namely a disciplinary approach to T & L with a focus on picturebooks as key resources, may operate in an Irish school setting. This design would extend the current and reformed learning outcome-based curricula (*Primary Language Curriculum* 2019, *Draft Primary Framework* 2020, *Primary Framework* 2023) to go a step further to provide teachers with a more content- specific curricula. Whether this goes against the ideology of the teacher as 'agentic', remains to be uncovered. This study argues that there is a middle ground between teacher agency and content-specific curricula, which is addressed through Hirsch's CKS lens.

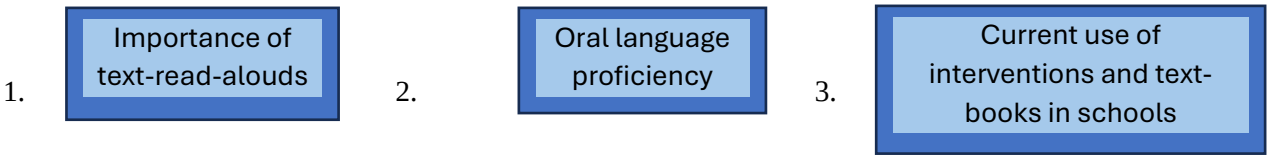
2.4.2 CKS today and its critiques

Robert Pondiscio, who writes and speaks extensively on education and education reform in the U.S., detailed in 2023, the results of the long term study conducted by University of Virginia researchers which saw the robust and beneficial effects on reading achievement among students in schools that teach E.D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge Sequence. Pondiscio (2023) insists that due to the findings of the longitudinal study on Hirsch's CKS, that Hirsch has been right all along about

what it takes to build reading comprehension (Pondiscio 2023). For more than four decades, Hirsch maintained that background knowledge was the fundamental feature in overcoming literacy difficulties in students, highlighting how writers and speakers make assumptions about what readers and listeners know and when they are incorrect about this, confusion quickly creeps in until all meaning is lost. Pandiscio (2023) declares that if one wants children to be literate and to participate fully in society, one must ensure that they all have access to the broad body of knowledge that the literate take for granted, supporting the ideology of Hirsch. Similarly, University of Virginia cognitive scientist Dan Willingham, a co-author of the study, said that teaching content *is* [my emphasis] teaching reading (Willingham 2015) - what has been more difficult to prove is that a specific curricular intervention aimed at systematically building students background knowledge can raise reading achievement, until this study (Murrah & Evans 2023). This point is particularly of interest to the premise of my study as it permeates a vision of what disciplinary literacy is. What the new study suggests is that not only is Hirsch's theory solid, so is his prescription. The six-year randomised controlled trial followed over 2300 students of the core knowledge charter schools. The gains made in literacy attainment were large enough to eliminate altogether the achievement gap associated with income. As Hirsch outlined many years ago, language comprehension is a slow growing plant (Hirsch 2019). This is correlated through the results of the 2023 longitudinal study (Murrah & Evans 2023). Reading comprehension is not a transferable skill that can be learned, practiced and mastered in the absence of domain or topic knowledge - the student must know at least a little bit about the subject they are reading about to make sense of it. Interestingly, the core knowledge sequence has now been codified in a language arts curriculum (Core Knowledge Foundation 2024), signifying the impact of the model and the possible application to this study and future studies in this field.

Despite this, Feinberg (1999) completely disregards the work of Hirsh, detailing how his assumptions (and lack of accurate data collected) instil insufficient pressures on teachers and schools to promote uniformity. Furthermore, he argues that Hirsch creates, through his CKS an ideology that the majority of educators are educational descendants of progressive educators and that most teaching spaces are dominated by the project method and other progressive innovations. Feinburg (1999) further stipulates that Hirsch underestimates the importance of pedagogy arguing that Hirsch's view of education emphasises the teacher talking to students, rather than listening to them. All of these points are arguments against using the work of Hirsch to build a base around. However, despite teacher agency being at the forefront of curricular reform in Ireland (NCCA 2023), a significant issue persists. Schools are granted autonomy to create their own subject policies. Yes, robust continuous professional development (CPD), is available through various education centres nationwide. This is at a teacher's own discretion to participate in, leading to inconsistencies in knowledge and pedagogical delivery. Nonetheless, the majority of schools still rely on prescribed materials from educational publishers for their core curricular planning, teaching, and learning. This reliance is highlighted by the Irish government's 2023 budget, which allocated €54 million, or 96 euros per pupil, for the purchase of textbooks (Irish Times March 2023). Let us suppose that there was a core knowledge sequence which accompanied the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (2023), what would that look like? And how could picturebooks be used as a central component in that sequence with a disciplinary literacy lens?

2.4.3 Connection with CKS and this research



1. Central to this study are texts and the exploration of picture books as a core text; selected to be used across subject areas in an effort to consolidate and systematically and explicitly teach disciplinary literacy. Hirsch (2019; 2009) acknowledges the importance of text read-alouds, not specifically picturebooks, which may be viewed as an oversight of the framework. Nonetheless, he says that (nonfiction) read-alouds should be selected on the basis of the history, science, music and visual art topics identified in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, with emphasis on history and science read-alouds. This aligns with the concept of disciplinary literacy, where education intersects with literacy. My study on using picturebooks for disciplinary literacy can be viewed through this CKS lens, as it explores how these carefully chosen texts can enhance subject-specific learning and literacy. Hirsh recommends that daily read- alouds focus on a single topic over a sustained period of time - about two weeks-rather than intermingling read-alouds on a variety of subjects. He advises that careful consideration should be given to the order in which nonfiction read-alouds are presented to ensure that knowledge about a topic builds in a progressive and coherent way (Hirsch 2019; 2009). Following a read-aloud, children should participate in rich, structured conversations with an adult in response to the written text that has been read aloud. In this way, they can begin to orally practice comparing, analysing, and synthesising ideas in written text in a similar way as they will be expected to do as

independent readers in the later grades (Hirsch 2019; 2009). It is here that the point of intersection buds with this study. As will be discussed further on in the review, this rich, structured conversation in response to written text is a fundamental component of the success of DL at primary level.

2. Furthermore, and central to this research, echoed in the CKS, is the knowledge that the ability to read and write written language is highly correlated with students' oral language proficiency and the ability to understand a text read aloud is a prerequisite for making sense of the same text in printed form. Echoes of Mary Roche's *Critical Thinking and Book Talk* (CT & BT) (2014), adopted by the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019), ring true here. Roche outlines how CT & BT is an approach to literacy which emphasises some of the 'neglected aspects of literacy instruction' which include 'the development of oral language, critical thinking, love of reading, and the development of the ability to respond to literature in an authentic fashion through dialogue and discussion' (Roche 2014, p. 3). This is reflective of and echoes the 2023 version of the CKS model which places a key emphasis on teacher read - alouds. By listening to and engaging with written text read aloud, children can experience the intricacies of written language without expending cognitive energy on decoding. As outlined in the NCCA's publication; *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education* (NCCA 2012) by participating in rich, structured conversations with an adult following the read aloud, children are able to orally practice comparing, analysing, and synthesising ideas in written text in much the same way as they will be expected to do as independent readers in later grades. The decided advantage of this approach is that children are building these competencies in the very early grades,

instead of waiting for their own reading skills to evolve (NCCA 2012). This approach is similar to the *Building Bridges of Understanding* programme (Courtney & Gleeson 2009) used in many Irish primary school classrooms as a model for comprehension strategy instruction using picture books as central texts. The model is discussed in more detail further on in this review. My research extends this mode of thought when it questions the capacity for using picture books to help pupils build their knowledge and awareness of disciplinary literacy.

3. In Ireland, while various reading approaches such as Guided Reading[2], Reading Recovery[3] and Literacy Lift Off/Power Hour[4], are increasingly including nonfiction selections within the language arts block, textbook publishers are paying greater attention to reading in the content areas. This is evident through the many individual subject-based text books supplied by Irish educational publishers which the vast majority of Irish primary schools adopt as core material to work with on a daily basis. (See Section 4 of the literature review for further detail). This segmented approach adopted by schools typically fails to grasp the importance of developing a coherent approach to building knowledge within grades and across class levels which goes against the CKS model. Realisation of this shortfall possibly arose in response to the awareness that primary schools were increasingly and predominantly using narrative texts (Duke 2000; Palmer & Stewart, 2003; Pappas, 1993). This resulted in a severe lack of non - fiction materials (Duke 2000; Palmer & Stewart

2003) which has subsequently seen non - fiction trade books reach the doors of primary classrooms in an effort to combat this issue, which supports that children need examples of both fiction and non-fiction texts to gain skill at navigating both genres (Yopp & Yopp 2000). The research presented herein argues, however, that a random approach to content area reading fails to recognise how domain knowledge builds either within a grade or cumulatively across class levels. Incorporating nonfiction into language arts in this way is a missed opportunity and a waste of precious instructional time. Similarly, this study argues that the current random approach to the content and delivery of text selections in Irish primary schools is a concerning trend which needs to be addressed. This study explores the possibilities of including a content specific approach through the use of carefully selected picture books used in an explicitly interdisciplinary instructional manner.

2.4.4 Limitations of the CKS

It is noteworthy however, that the scale through which the *CKS* has been adopted in the U.S., given its longstanding record, was quite minimal and the reasons for this need further exploration. Of the 87,498 elementary schools in the U.S., there were just 770 schools reported to have adopted the *CKS* as their primary curriculum model (Core Knowledge Foundation 2015). This however saw a substantial increase in the most recent 2023 edition which states that 10,000 schools in the U.S are now employing the model. Reviewers, (Miller 2022; Kohn 2004; 1999; Kozol 2012; 2006; Meier 2004; 2003; Darling – Hammond 2015; 2012; Chall 2002), argue that some unease arose initially when practitioners began to portray Core Knowledge as an either/or proposition, i.e., if you were using Core Knowledge, you were focused only on content, not skills (Core Knowledge Foundation 2015). Hirsh would argue to the contrary however, as he states that as successful Core

Knowledge schools have always known, Core Knowledge is more accurately described as a both/ and proposition: effective Core Knowledge teachers know that both content and skills are essential; they embed the teaching of critical skills within the content they share with their students (Core Knowledge Sequence 2010, p. iii). The skill objectives are most effectively targeted when they are anchored to the content in the context of a domain of knowledge. This is a crucial statement and one which is important to this research as a core tenant of this project- that the teaching of critical skills is a fundamental component of education.

The preceding paragraphs have detailed the premise of Hirsch's cultural literacy and how it meets with this research. The *CKS* has been detailed and reflections on Irish curricula delivered. The focus will now turn to academic literacies to further situate the body of this research.

2.5 Four-part conceptual framework: Part three

(iii) Academic literacies

Academic reading is distinct from everyday reading. It is complex, focussed, challenging and discipline-specific (Abd Majid *et al*. 2005; Sengupta 2002). Academic literacies are defined by many in different ways (Lillis 2014; 2003; Lillis and Scott 2007; Lea and Street 2006; Street 1999). Lea and Street (2006) in their paper on *The Academic Literacies Model: Theory and Applications*, outline that the term academic literacies was originally developed with regard to the study of literacies in higher education and university. However, they note that the concept also applies to K–12 education (or pre-school to sixth class in terms of Irish primary schools). Street (2010) declares that academic literacies perspective treats reading and writing as social practices that vary with context, culture, and genre (Street 1984; 1995). In addition, an academic literacies perspective

also examines literacies not directly associated with subjects and disciplines, but with broader institutional discourses and genres. This is pertinent to the research at hand as it explores the relationship between subjects, disciplines, discourses and genres. For example, through my research, I have extended the concept of disciplinary literacy (which is typically associated with higher levels of education) to a primary setting. By using picturebooks, I am not just teaching literacy within a specific subject but am engaging students with broader forms of literacy that include narrative structures, visual literacy, and the genre of picturebooks. Furthermore, my research explores how picturebooks, as a genre, can be a medium through which young students engage with and understand different subjects and disciplines. By teaching disciplinary literacy through picture books, practitioners are helping students navigate the discourses associated with different disciplines (such as science, history, or mathematics) in a way that is accessible and engaging for their developmental level. Lastly, as picturebooks often reflect broader societal and cultural discourses, by using them in teaching, students engage with these discourses at an early age. This prepares them to understand and critically engage with institutional discourses as they progress through their education.

Lea and Street (1998) further attest that from the student point of view, a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch their writing styles and genres between one setting and another, to display a repertoire of literacy practices appropriate to each setting, and to manipulate the social meanings and identities that each evoke (Lea & Street 1998, p.158). This is quite in - depth thinking for young minds, something which requires purposeful planning and nurturing by informed practitioners. This idea of purposeful planning is a predominant feature of my research, through its exploration of academic literacies across the primary school subjects and how pupils may, with guidance, be able to move between disciplines, in a child-friendly manner,

armed with literacy specific knowledge. This mirrors the direction given by Professor Timothy Shannahan (U.S.A.) in 2012, when he was invited by the NCCA in Ireland to write a guide on using disciplinary literacy in the Irish primary classroom setting (NCCA 2012).

Johns (1997) declares that in order to understand the nature of literacy, one must know how knowledge is represented in different disciplines and contexts. This is integral for academic development and the expectation by discipline specific experts to read and immerse themselves in the culture of the discipline (Hermida 2009). Johns (1997, p.2) declares that it is essential to become familiar with the strategies needed for understanding and organising text and become aware of the social contexts for which texts are produced and read. I would argue that the age at which this familiarisation should explicitly occur is yet to be made clear. Academic literacy, at its core, is the concept of understanding a range of academic vocabulary in context. However, it goes much further than that, as many educationalists have discovered. Weideman (2007, p. xi-xii) succinctly defines academic literacy, as seen in Table 2 below, and this study aligns with Weideman by showing that by incorporating picture books into disciplinary literacy at the primary level, practitioners can help students to begin to develop the skills necessary to understand academic vocabulary, interpret text structure, and recognise various genres, all in an accessible and age-appropriate way. By engaging with these texts, students can also learn to interpret visual information, make distinctions between fact and opinion, and understand the communicative functions of language, laying the groundwork for more advanced academic literacy

1. Understand a range of academic vocabulary in context;
2. Interpret the use of metaphor and idiom in academic usage, perceive connotation, word play and ambiguity;
3. Understand relations between different parts of a text, be aware of the logical development of an academic text, via introductions to conclusions, and know how to use language that serves to make the different parts of a text hang together;
4. Interpret different kinds of text type (genre), and have a sensitivity for the meaning that they convey, and the audience that they are aimed at;
5. Interpret, use and produce information presented in graphic or visual format;
6. Make distinctions between essential and non-essential information, fact and opinion, propositions and arguments; distinguish between cause and effect, classify, categorise and handle data that make comparisons;
7. See sequence and order, do simple numerical estimations and computations that are relevant to academic information, that allow comparisons to be made, and can be applied for the purposes of an argument;
8. Know what counts as evidence for an argument, extrapolate from information by making inferences, and apply the information or its implications to other cases than the one at hand;
9. Understand the communicative function of various ways of expression in academic language (such as defining, providing examples, arguing); and
10. Make meaning (e.g. of an academic text) beyond the level of the sentence.

Table 2: Weidmann's Definition of Academic literacies (Weidmann 2007, p. xi-xii)

It is clear from Weideman's extensive definition, that in order to be proficient in academic literacies, there are many factors at play for success in this regard, namely, high quality teaching and learning and high expectation level of students. Taking point 1, to understand a range of vocabulary in context- this echoes the premise of disciplinary literacy in how readers are expected to read a particular text through the lens of that discipline i.e. a historical text is read wearing the historians hat. This requires acquisition of a specific vocabulary set, as is the case for examining texts across the disciplines. Taking points 5 and 10 which detail interpreting texts in visual format and making meaning beyond the sentence level, the capacity for using picture books, amongst other text types, complements this approach. If academic literacies is what is expected of students as they progress through education and on into the workforce, then, it is without question, that a

lot of groundwork needs to be done in both primary and secondary schooling in order to achieve these goals. The focus of this research was to investigate ways in which the academic literacy abilities outlined above may be incorporated through the lens of interdisciplinary instruction using picture books as central texts. Johns (1997, p.78) recommends a pedagogical approach which would see teachers and learners working collaboratively by examining the interactions of texts, roles and contexts. That is precisely what this study sought to explore through its interview, questionnaire and professional learning community model with key educational participants which is detailed in Chapter five.

As Dewey (1963) outlines, the problem is something which perplexes and challenges the mind so that it makes belief uncertain. Academic literacies situate disciplinary literacy predominantly in second and third level education. The problem is that disciplinary literacy is now mentioned in the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) with no clear guidance on how this should operate in a primary classroom setting. Cultural literacy refers to the ability to understand and participate fluently in a given culture. With more than 500,000 non-Irish nationals from 200 different nations now living in Ireland (Central Statistics Office), how is this reflected in teacher planning and what resources might teachers use to bring meaning and purpose to disciplinary literacy in primary schools? These are some of the problem statements which I generated from my literature review which in turn helped to refine the exact purpose of this study (See Chapter Three, Section 3.8). Merriam (1997) asserts that our observations in the field, the questions posed, the documents attended to, as well as the aspects we overlook- all of these are shaped by the theoretical or conceptual framework guiding the study This realisation became integral to my research design, prompting a crucial question: how could my study contribute to expanding the knowledge base? Contemplating this question heightened the scrutiny applied to

each 'case,' reinforcing the quality of components within. As I gleaned authentic and personal perspectives from practitioners and key educational stakeholders in Ireland, this consideration became instrumental in ensuring the study's depth and relevance.

2.5.1 Academic literacies as a model for pedagogy

Lillis and Scott (2007) declare that whilst there is fluidity and even confusion surrounding the use of the term academic literacies, they see it as a field of enquiry with a specific epistemological and ideological stance towards the study of academic communication. The word communication, according to Peters (2012) in his publication *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication,* is descended from the Latin noun '*communication*', which meant a sharing or imparting. From the root communis (common, public), it is linked to the Latin '*munus'* meaning duty or gift. This ideology is significant to this research, as it is the researchers core belief that the duty of the practitioner is the gifting of knowledge through effective and explicit communication, again echoing Vygotsky's belief that language is man's *(sic)* finest tool.

Lillis (2003) and Lea (2004) have suggested that the academic literacies model needs to be developed as a design frame with a focus on pedagogy. Pedagogy, in terms of education, is the art or practice of teaching. It is the theory or principles of education; a method of teaching based on such a theory (Oxford English Dictionary). Academic literacies therefore, is a model which pedagogy can be based upon and one which this research is firmly based upon. Furthermore, Lea and Street (2006) illustrate the relative value of an academic literacies model in emphasising the importance of teachers being explicit in showing students the shifts in genre and mode. This explicit teacher model, as previously acknowledged, is a core feature in this research and one which I as a practitioner, and indeed a long-term teacher-researcher, has founded almost two

decades of practice upon and seen considerable potential within, with this research highlighting that hypothesis.

2.5.2 Academic literacy at primary level

Johns (1997) argues that there is more to the teaching of academic literacy than simply mastering the style and conventions of a particular discipline. There is a need to educate teachers 'to realise that there is no single unified literacy skill that can be taught once to students in their subject area who will then become fluent writers in their subject areas' (Johns 1997, p. x) Where then does academic literacies feature in the primary school setting?

Maguire *et al.* (2020) in their paper entitled: *Reading to Be: The role of academic reading in emergent academic and professional student identities*, discuss the fact that despite the widespread acknowledgement of the importance of academic reading, much research tends to focus on academic writing. The role of academic writing in the growth of academic and professional identities is largely accepted. In contrast, the role of academic reading has been less apparent in the literature, and when considered, it tends to be conceptualised as a basic skill. In their paper, Maguire *et al.* (2020) explore the role of reading in emergent academic identities in undergraduates. They reflect on research with Nursing and Midwifery students that highlight the role of reading in the development of 'writing capital' (Maguire 2020, p.5). Drawing on this and wider evidence they explore how, through academic reading, students begin to recognise, and then partake in the scholarly conversations that construct knowledge within disciplines. This is the point of connection with the research presented herein. These scholarly conversations under the hat of the primary school child, facilitated through a disciplinary literacy lens need to be made explicit and clear guidance given to practitioners as to how this should be taught.

Critically, Maguire *et al.* (2020) argue that academic reading, like academic writing, is a complex and constant process that involves many transitions, rather than a skill that can, and should, be mastered early on. Furthermore, they contend that educators need to consider how and where academic reading is addressed within academic programmes. This is a point which this research investigates, through the use of interview, questionnaires and a professional learning community model (discussed in Chapter Five). Moreover, Maguire *et al.* (2020) suggest ways to make room for it within curricula and engage students in conversations about the nature of scholarship within their disciplines. These are the conversations which are imperative for educationalists to engage in in Irish primary school settings in order to bring such research-based best practices into actual classroom practices.

One final conceptual framework is necessary to complete the structure upon which this study is founded. The point of connection between this research and Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* shall now be outlined.

2.6 Four-part conceptual framework: Part four

(iv) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Reflective of Vygotsky's *Theory of sociocultural development*, outlined in the first of this four-part cluster, Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested that the environment of the child is a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. In his framework coined, *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory*, he organised a series of systems, arranging them in order of how much of an impact they have on a child. Bronfenbrenner divided the individual's

environment into five different systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Because the five systems are interrelated, the influence of one system on a child's development depends on its relationship with the others. External systems affecting the family are categorized as meso-, exo-, and chronosystem models (Bronfenbrenner 1986). For the purpose of this study, emphasis is placed on the exosystem through the position of governmental agencies and key stakeholders in education and the mesosystem and microsystem with a focus on school, practitioners and to a lesser extent but a *foci* nonetheless, librarians. The reason that these systems are of interest to this study is that there is a direct impact on the child at each level. This impact is out of the child's control. Policy makers devise a curricula which is bestowed upon children. Teachers are tasked with planning, preparing, and delivering lessons to students; however, they have limited autonomy over the content and instructional methods prescribed for their teaching. Librarians, unlike policy makers and practitioners have an indirect impact on the literacy profile of students, with this study deciphering how that impact may be enhanced. While the other systems within Bronfenbrenner's framework also impact the child, for the purpose of this study the three aforementioned systems (exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem) are drawn upon to conceptualise the research.

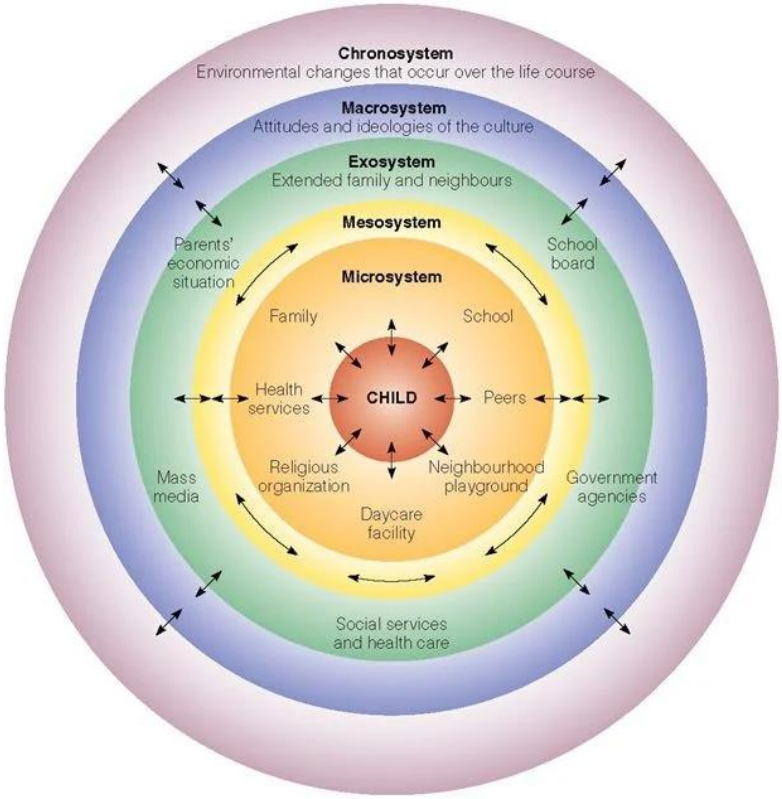


Figure 7: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) research on the influence of external environments on the functioning of families as contexts of human development is a contemplation of this research. With disciplinary literacy predominantly situated within the second and third level systems, the effect of transitioning this approach to the primary level needs addressing. A consideration which further contextualises Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory within the timeframe of this research is the patterning of environmental events and the effect on the child. My research took place amid and in the direct aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. The psychological, educational and emotional effects on children are stark (Hoofman 2021; Imran *et al*. 2020; Liu *et al*. 2020; Van Lancker 2020). The exploration of picturebooks as a child-centred resource, was a careful

consideration of this research. Therefore this research itself has an impact on the child through its possible application by future practitioners and researchers.

2.7 Concluding comment on Section 1

This concludes section one of this chapter. Section One has delivered the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study, drawing on Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner and cultural and academic literacies. This conceptual and theoretical framework highlights how Vygotsky's language theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasise the importance of context, language and interaction in learning, which relates directly to using picture books as a tool for teaching disciplinary literacy. By incorporating cultural and academic literacies models, picturebooks can serve to scaffold students' understanding of subject-specific language and concepts, making disciplinary literacy more accessible within the classroom environment. The chapter shall now proceed to Section Two which shall outline my positionality within this research.

SECTION 2

2.8 Positionality within this research

Following on from the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study, the second section of this chapter outlines the philosophical and theoretical perspectives statement, ontological and epistemological perspectives and situates my paradigmatic positioning. In doing so, the interpretive framework is brought to the fore. The interpretive framework not only anchors the entire study, but through its model, serves as the overflowing arch that moulds and shapes the entire research endeavour, providing a comprehensive lens through which the tapestry of

subjective meanings and contextual nuances of the research is explored and understood (Moisander & Valtonen 2006). The interpretivist paradigm led me to choose qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, open-ended surveys, and the use of professional learning communities (PLCs). These methods allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and facilitated a dynamic, interactive process where knowledge was co-constructed. The flexible, open-ended nature of these methods aligns with the interpretivist belief in understanding reality through personal meaning-making rather than imposing rigid categories or predetermined answers.

2.9 Philosophical and Theoretical perspectives statement

Theory and philosophy are perpetually linked; philosophy shapes how one sees the world, theory affects how one purposefully interacts with that world. Together, philosophy and theory offer a foundation for the way a piece of research is carried out. A theoretical perspective is a series of hypotheses about reality which enlighten the questions we ask and the kinds of answers we arrive at consequently (Colline & Stockton 2018). Fundamentally, a theoretical perspective can be seen as a lens through which we look, serving to focus or perhaps distort what we see. Section One has portrayed the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. By drawing on Vygotsky's *Theory of language* and by using both Street's academic and Hirsch's cultural literacies models, I have shaped the research within a unique set of theories and concepts. This framework is further conceptualised through Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* (exosystem, mesosystem and microsysterm) which focuses on the influence of a series of interconnected environmental systems and their impact on the individual, as discussed previously. This quadrant of theoretical and conceptual frames serve to align the research design and its findings and to complement the

literature review. This quadrant is the theoretical and conceptual lens which positions this research. Thus, the quadrant of theories and concepts feature and ripple throughout this thesis.

2.10 Defining my philosophical worldview

As a teacher educator my philosophical worldview encompasses various dimensions, reflecting my beliefs about knowledge, teaching, learning, and the purpose of education. Rapley (2018) emphasises that a crucial element of doctoral research is the creation and recognition of a philosophical worldview. Her study '*Seeing the Light'*, highlights the need for researchers to critically engage with their assumptions about knowledge, existence, and the nature of what can be known. Bhattacharya (2007) supports this, noting that understanding the relationship between researcher and researched is essential for aligning data analysis, methodological models, and research paradigms. As a reflective educational practitioner (Plack & Greenberg 2005; Copeland *et al.* 1993; Adler 1991), defining my own philosophical worldview and its theoretical foundations was a vital task. This perspective, influenced by constructivism, guides my approach to teaching and curriculum design, focusing on the active, contextualised construction of knowledge.

Constructivism: I believe that knowledge is constructed by learners as they engage with the world around them, not merely transmitted from teacher to student. I view learning as an active, contextualised process of building understanding, with the teacher guiding and facilitating rather than directing.

This philosophical view has and continues to evolve over time as I reflect on my practice and engage with new ideas and challenges in education. This serves to guide and shape my approach to teaching, curriculum design, and interaction with educators. My philosophical worldview, shaped by constructivism, aligns with my study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It recognises knowledge and meaning as socially and contextually constructed (Collins & Stockton 2018; John-Steiner & Mahn 1996) and highlights the interconnectedness of individuals and their environments. This view incorporates Vygotsky's theory of language development, Street's academic literacies model, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and Hirsch's cultural literacies model, emphasising the socially constructed nature of literacy (Pistorio 2010; Cullen 2007; Brufee 1986). The study's focus on the relationship between disciplinary literacy and picturebooks, reflects this theoretical grounding and supports an interpretivist approach, which aligns with my view of education as a dynamic, context-dependent process.

2.11 Linking my ontology and epistemology explicitly to this study and its methodology

Constructivism is closely associated with the interpretivist paradigm, both of which emphasise the subjective nature of reality. My research, which involved qualitative methods, reflects the constructivist belief that meaning is co-constructed through interactions between participants and the researcher. Thus, constructivism is a natural fit for a study that seeks to explore subjective experiences and multiple truths.

Interviews with Key Educational Stakeholders: The interviews conducted with key stakeholders, including curriculum specialists, provided valuable insights into the broader educational landscape and the potential role of picture books in disciplinary literacy. Stakeholders' perspectives on

curriculum goals, literacy initiatives, and the integration of literature into teaching practices are directly linked to the rationale and context for this case study.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with Teachers: The professional learning communities with teachers served as a platform for collaborative inquiry and professional development focused on disciplinary literacy. These interactions allowed teachers to share their experiences, insights, and challenges related to using picture books in the classroom, providing rich qualitative data that informs this study's findings and recommendations.

Nationwide Survey to Teachers: The nationwide survey further links to the case study methodology by allowing me to gather quantitative data on teachers' perceptions, practices, and attitudes regarding disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books. Through the analysis of survey responses I was enabled to identify trends, patterns, and variations across different contexts, providing empirical evidence to support this study's conclusions.

Focus Groups and Open-ended Questionnaires with Librarians: Engaging with librarians through focus groups and open-ended questionnaires provided valuable perspectives on the selection, promotion, and utilisation of picture books as resources for disciplinary literacy. The librarians' insights into collaboration opportunities with classroom teachers, illustrates the broader ecosystem of support for integrating literature into educational practice.

My research design effectively captured diverse perspectives, generated comprehensive data, and contributed to a deeper understanding of the topic (See Chapter 4).

I believe that phenomena can be understood through appropriate methods of inquiry, such as the ones employed in this study (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, surveys, professional learning communities). By positioning myself as a relativist (See Figure 8, 1.5, Moon and Blackman 2014. p.28), I approached this research with the assumption that the phenomena under investigation (disciplinary literacy, picture books in primary classrooms) have inherent properties and characteristics that can be observed, described, and understood objectively. Therefore, my choice of research methods, such as interviews, questionnaires, and surveys, aligns with relativism by seeking to gather empirical data that reflects the reality of educational stakeholders (e.g., teachers, librarians). Furthermore, the emphasis on understanding the research topic through direct engagement with practitioners and educational stakeholders aligns with my belief in the validity of their perspectives as accurate reflections of reality.

Following this, I aimed to ascertain my epistemological perspective which, again using Moon and Blackman's chart, saw me placed at 2.2 Constructivism: supposing that meaning is created from interplay between subject and object. It is my understanding as a researcher that the meaning of this study is created through the interplay between the participants, who formed the basis of this study, and the topic at hand (disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks). As a constructivist, I believe that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals through their experiences and interactions with the world. This perspective influenced my choice of research method, favouring qualitative approaches that allow for rich exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences. I therefore prioritised methods such as interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires that enable participants to share their unique interpretations and understandings of disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in primary classrooms.

Furthermore, as a constructivist researcher, I prioritised fostering collaborative relationships with my research participants and actively involving them in the research process. This involved engaging in ongoing dialogue to deepen understanding and interpretation through the professional learning community model. Constructivism encourages researchers to reflect on their own subjectivity and how it shapes the research process. My epistemological perspective lead me to engage in reflexivity, acknowledging and critically examining my own assumptions, biases, and perspectives throughout the research process. Finally, my constructivist epistemology informs the implications of my research for practice. My research findings highlight the significance of fostering active engagement, collaborative learning, and meaningful experiences in promoting disciplinary literacy through the use of picture books in primary classrooms.

And so my epistemological perspective of constructivism shaped various aspects of this research, including methodological choices, data analysis approaches, participant engagement strategies, reflexivity, and implications for practice. By embracing constructivist principles, I conducted research that honours the complexity and diversity of human experiences whilst contributing to a deeper understanding of disciplinary literacy and educational practice.

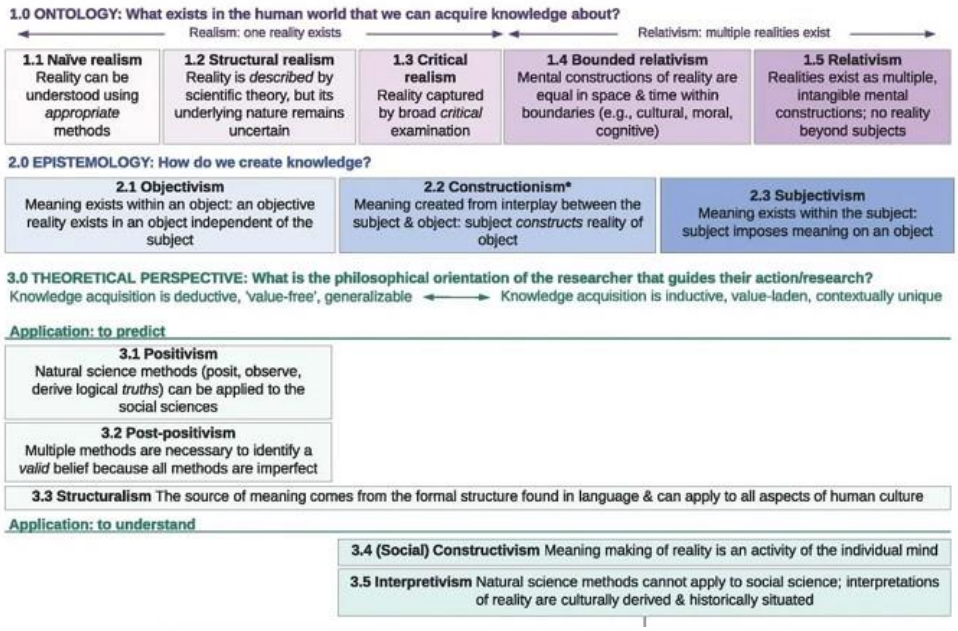


Figure 8: Moon and Blackman 2014, p.28

Returning to Punch and Oancea's (2014) third question, the methodological question-how can the inquirer go about finding out what can be known and what methods can be used for studying reality? In the research design of this study, (detailed in Chapter 4, Section 2), I dutifully researched the various methods that could be used for studying the research in question. The methodological approach involves the strategy and rationale employed to construct a particular type of knowledge. It addresses the question of how we can obtain the desired understandings and knowledge? (Mertens 2019). However, it is essential to distinguish this methodological issue from the question of methods, as they differ significantly. The former represents a general approach used to conduct research, such as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, and should be grounded in the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspectives (Cohen *et al*. 2018). The latter, on the other hand, refers to the specific tools utilised to collect data, such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, questionnaires, and observations (Cohen *et al*. 2018). For the purpose of

this study, the methodological approach arose once the goals, aims and objectives of the research were solidified. The approach which aligned with the scope of the research was the clearest tool to use in order to answer the research question. This concurs with Kivunja & Kuyini (2017, p. 28) in their assertion that the methodology articulates the logic and flow of the systematic processes followed in conducting a research project, so as to gain knowledge about a research problem.

This constructivist epistemological perspective influenced my methodological approach in several key ways:

1. Focus on understanding and interpretation: As a constructivist, I prioritised my understanding and interpreting the subjective experiences and perspectives of the research participants. My methodological approach emphasises qualitative methods that allow for in-depth exploration of meaning, context, and individual perspectives in relation to disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in the primary classroom. This aligns with my belief that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals within social and cultural contexts.

2. Collaborative and participatory methods: Constructivism emphasises the importance of collaborative and participatory research methods that involve participants in the co-construction of knowledge. My methodological approach included techniques such as interviews, focus groups and professional learning communities, which enabled the participants to contribute their perspectives and shape the research process.

3. Reflexivity and positionality: As a constructivist researcher, I was aware of the influence of my own subjectivity and positionality on the research process. My methodological

approach involved reflexivity, acknowledging and critically examining my own assumptions, biases, and perspectives throughout the research process.

Overall, my constructivist epistemological perspective shaped my methodological approach by emphasising qualitative methods, participatory research practices and reflexivity. This approach aligned with my belief that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals within social and cultural contexts, and further reflects my commitment to understanding the subjective experiences and perspectives of participants.

2.12 Axiological positionality

Having referred to the two dominant educational research paradigms, stating thereafter my ontological and epistemological perspectives, I will now open up the boundaries of convention in order to examine my positionality as a researcher. To do this requires deep self-reflection and honesty, qualities which turn a good researcher into a great researcher (Franks 2016; Bell 1998). Axiology shall be drawn upon at this point, taking Aldawood (2017) framework, outlined in Figure 9 below, as a guiding force. Axiology pertains to the examination of value judgments, specifically focusing on evaluating the role of the researcher's own values throughout all stages of the research process (Mertens 2019).

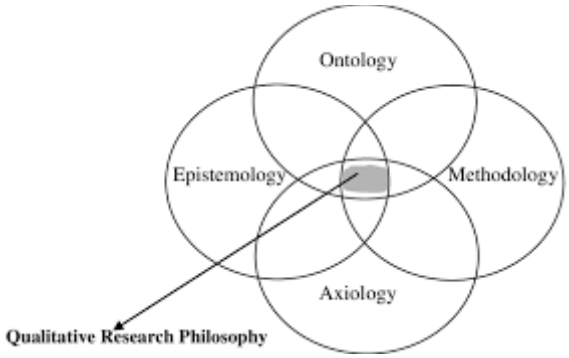


Figure 9: Axiological positioning, Aldawood 2017

My axiological positionality encompassed various elements, including personal experiences, cultural background, and individual perspectives, all of which inevitably influenced the research process. Recognising the subjective nature of interpretation and analysis, I actively engaged in reflexivity, acknowledging the potential impact of my own biases and preconceptions on the study. By transparently addressing my role within the research process, I aimed to enhance the validity and reliability of its findings, as well as contribute to the broader discourse on the influence of positionality in shaping the research landscape.

Positionality holds a pivotal role in shaping the contours of this research, as my identity as a primary school teacher is intricately woven into the fabric of the study. The significant overlap between my role as a primary school teacher and that of many participants introduced a shared professional lens that influenced perceptions of the curriculum and the translation of policy into classroom practice. As a mentor, my expertise in this domain potentially impacted how I approached and interpreted the findings. Moreover, my involvement in the *Building Bridges of Understanding* research team, which advocates for the use of picturebooks, aligns with a key aspect of this study, and so may have influenced my interpretation of particular findings. Additionally, having authored a programme centred on picturebooks (*Over the Moon*), and having employed them as a vital teaching tool during my time in The Gambia, West Africa, I hold a deep-seated commitment to centralising picturebooks within the primary school curriculum. By openly acknowledging these aspects of my positionality, I aimed to heighten awareness of potential biases, ensuring a rigorous research process that scrutinised the influence of my background and experiences on the study's outcomes.

2.13 Concluding comment on Chapter 2

This chapter has positioned this study within cultural and academic literacies against the backdrop of Vygotsky's *Theory of language development* and structured within Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory*, illuminating the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystems as key factors guiding this research.

The theoretical and conceptual framework for this study is woven from the four aforementioned models. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a comprehensive lens for examining the multifaceted interactions between individuals and their immediate and broader environments. Vygotsky's *Theory of language development* contributes insights into the role of language in cognitive development and learning, especially within social contexts. Street's academic literacies framework allows for an exploration of the diverse ways in which individuals engage with and navigate academic discourse which is foundational to the success of disciplinary literacy. Hirsch's cultural literacies perspective adds depth by emphasising the significance of cultural knowledge in education which picturebooks can add weight to. Together, these theoretical perspectives form a robust foundation, guiding the study's exploration of disciplinary literacy and the integration of picture books in the Irish primary classroom context. The interconnectedness of these theories creates a framework that not only facilitates a nuanced understanding of the research questions but also informs the design of the study, the interpretation of findings, and the potential implications for educational practice and policy.

The second section of this chapter outlined my philosophical and theoretical perspectives, ontological and epistemological perspectives and situated my paradigmatic positioning for this study. Constructivism has been highlighted as my worldview while interpretivism has been

pinpointed as my paradigmatic positioning. My ontological perspective saw relativism outlined, whilst my epistemological perspective drew on constructionism.

Having outlined the conceptual and theoretical framework as well as the positionality for this research, the thesis will now move to introduce the literature *foci*. Curricular reform, teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning, disciplinary literacy and picture books will be the themes discussed in the review here forward. The quadrant of theories and concepts, outlined in this chapter, shall ripple through the remainder of the thesis.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

‘When we read great literature, something changes in us that stays changed. Literature remembered becomes material to think with.’

(Donald Hall 1928)

Image 3: Mirror by Jeannie Baker

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature in the areas of curricular reform, teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning, disciplinary literacy and picturebooks, pertaining to the primary classroom setting, predominantly in the Irish context. Quadratic in nature, the review fundamentally examines how aspects of curricular reform, teacher planning, disciplinary literacy and picturebooks connect to form the basis for and rationale toward the research question. This review targets curricular reform as a foundation upon which this study is based. Reform, after all, is the reason and opportunity for change (Martin Luthar-King Jr); in this instance it is the change in how teacher practice, learner experience and learner outcome will evolve and develop over time as the new Irish primary curriculum unfolds. The review proceeds to examine the area of teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning (TPPTL), dissecting its heritage and change over time before focussing on the analysis and application to this research of Government of Ireland's publications, *Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools* (2021) and *Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning* (2016). Teacher's professional development as well as the role of the librarian, shall feature as a key component in the review of TPPTL. Following on from this, the review concentrates on disciplinary literacy (DL) and what this looks like in the primary classroom setting. The arrival of DL to Irish policy is addressed and how the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) and *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) may be utilised as a launch pad for primary schools to fulfil the vision of this approach. Finally, the review turns its attention to picturebooks and their use in the preparation for teaching and learning both within their own right and in an interdisciplinary manner.

3.1.2 The literature review context

Situated within a period of educational reformation, both in Ireland and across the globe, this research explores cutting edge, highly contemporary educational issues. With the introduction and dissemination into Irish primary classrooms of key research documents, policies and curricula such as; the DES's *Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning* (DES 2021), the DES's, *Looking at Our School 2022: A quality framework for primary schools and special schools* (DES 2022) (which supersedes the 2016 version of the same name), the OECD's *21st-century readers: Developing Literacy skills in a Digital world* (2021), the NCCA's *Primary Language Curriculum*, 2019, their *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, (NCCA 2020) and *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023), The Teaching Council's *Cosán Framework for Teacher's Learning* (Teaching Council 2016), The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *The Learning Framework for 2030* (OECD 2015), *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020*, (NCCA 2011), teacher practice and pedagogical transformation has been under persistent revival over the past two decades. With its evolution poses questions necessitating further research. The research presented herein responds to the *Looking at Our Schools* (DES, 2022) framework which calls on practitioners to reflect on their preparation for teaching and learning. This project analyses the components of the *PLC* (NCCA, 2019) and the Primary *Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) under the area of disciplinary literacy and subject reconfiguration. Furthermore, this project addresses the place for picturebooks across the curriculum and across all standards in the primary school setting.

While there have been studies on disciplinary literacy, teacher planning and the use of picture books in the primary classroom on an individual basis (Shanahan 2019; Burke 2018, Savage 2015; Courtney & Gleeson 2009, Quay *et al*. 2022, Roche 2010; Dolan 2014, Strouse

2018, Callow 2018, Papen *et al*. 2021, Campbell 2021), there have been no specific studies on all three collectively or distinctly, thus making this research unique and ground-breaking. Arguably, there are many researchers who have alluded to using picture books across the curriculum (Oberman 2023; Ciecierski 2017, Daly *et al.*2015; Mantzicopoulos 2011; Tiedt 2000; Sharp1984), however not in a disciplinary literacy specific way as poised in this study (Zhang *et al*. 2023; Onesti 2022; Op 't Eynde *et al*. 2022; Forsyth 2022; Splinter *et al*. 2022; Acer & Gozen, 2020; Small *et al*. 2021; Quast *et al*. 2019; Heuvel-Panhuizen *et al*, 2016). Even more interesting is the premise that many of these studies appear to be growing in momentum over the past few years, highlighting the fact that this is a burgeoning area of research. Fascinatingly, but not dealt with predominantly in this study, although featuring in the findings and recommendations of this study, is the increasing sense that picturebooks may play a key role in the teaching and learning of both EAL students and in cultural identity (Gunn *et al.* 2022; Lado 2022; Chiu 2020; Tomé Fernandes 2019; Larragueta 2018; Zhou 2017; So 2016; Dolan 2014). Not only this, picturebooks are gaining increased momentum in the teaching and learning for children with additional needs (Sigmon 2016; Ostroskey *et al.* 2015; Blum *et al.* 2010; Zambo 2007) as well as taking their place in the secondary school setting (Clarke 2022; Penridge 2021; Mathis 2020; Premont 2017; 2019; Unsworth 2015; Carr 2001; Giorgis 1999) which is testament to their quality and effectiveness as a tool for teaching and learning.

3.2 Situating the national and international context of the research

As outlined in Chapter 1 and Appendices 8 and 9, the topics of DL and picturebooks are gaining increased attention at education conferences worldwide. These trends in education are further gaining momentum in Ireland, through the works of key leaders in the field of DL such as Dr Anne

Dolan of MIC and Dr Patrick Burke of DCU and through the voices of key literacy advocates, Dr Treasa Bowe and Clara Maria Fiorentini, through their influential social media platforms. This is culminated by the work of PDST/Oide, in its recent webinar (2023) which has been disseminated through a compulsory half-day closure basis to all Irish primary schools nationwide, entitled *Webinar 7: The PLC and Disciplinary Literacy*. This webinar encourages teachers to explore disciplinary literacy, as one of the key aspects of Section 6 of the *Primary Language Curriculum-The Curriculum in Practice* (NCCA 2019 pp.34-50). The webinar provides teachers with an opportunity to explore what disciplinary literacy may look like in practice, through classroom footage, interviews with teachers, students and researchers. The PDST go beyond to offer teachers an e-bulletin on DL, a glance card for implementing DL in the classroom and exemplars of planning for DL in History and Art whilst also providing teachers with a template for their own DL planning. This is evidence of the key role that policy makers have placed on DL, which is now being rolled out to primary schools nationwide through the PDST. Notably the approach to DL, as seen in Figure 10 below, is reflective of Pearson and Gallagher's gradual release of responsibility model, which is detailed as one of my own core values, spurring this research. Even more pertinant, one of the videos which showcases a classroom approach to DL through the use of a picturebook acting as a springboard into the lesson is portrayed. This is further evidence of the possible path, including picturebooks, that DL is about to take in this Irish educational landscape.

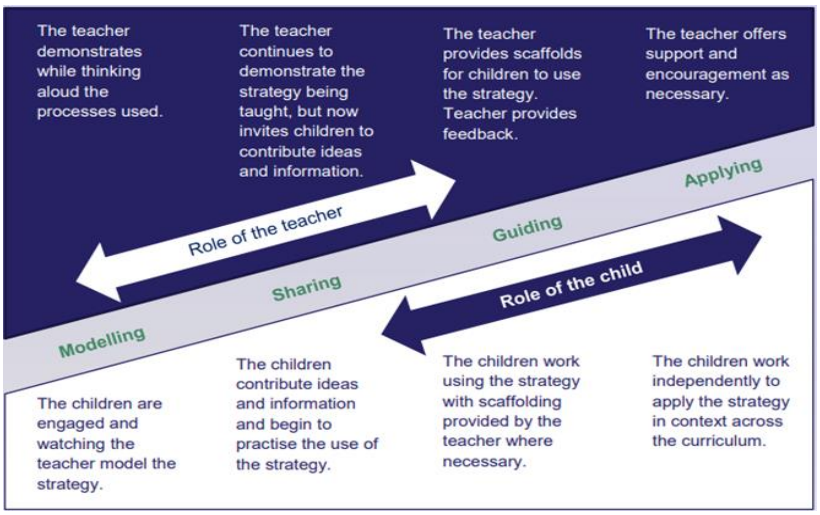


Figure 10: Applying Literacy Skills across the Curriculum, PDST, 2023

On an international basis, Shanahan and Shanahan have been building momentum in portraying the value of DL in elementary classrooms in the U.S.A. for over a decade now, in addition to key researchers in the DL field such as Jacy Ippolito, Christina L. Dobbs, Megin Charner-Laird, Katherine Mortimore, ReLeah Lent and Marsha Voigt, Patrick Burke, to name a few. Haland (2017) details use of the disciplinary literacy approach in the Norwegian classroom while Davison and Ollerhead (2018) highlight the need for a more disciplinary literate approach to the teaching of science in Australian classrooms. Pavon and Perez (2018) bring foreign languages to the fore in their pursuit of a call for enhancing disciplinary literacies of schooling and whole-school language projects in Spain. So too, there has been a surge in the number of researchers focussing on the potential of picturebooks as a key resource for teaching and learning (Sun *et al.* 2022, Vaughan 2022; Wei *et al.* 2020; Roche 2014; Dolan 2014; Edwards-Groves & Davidson 2017; Gamble 2013). Furthermore, as detailed in Chapter 1, in the breakdown of conference topics at *The 22nd European Conference on Literacy*, Dublin, 2022, picturebooks are leading the way internationally in the primary education sphere, positioning themselves more centrally in classrooms than ever before.

3.3 the literature review themes

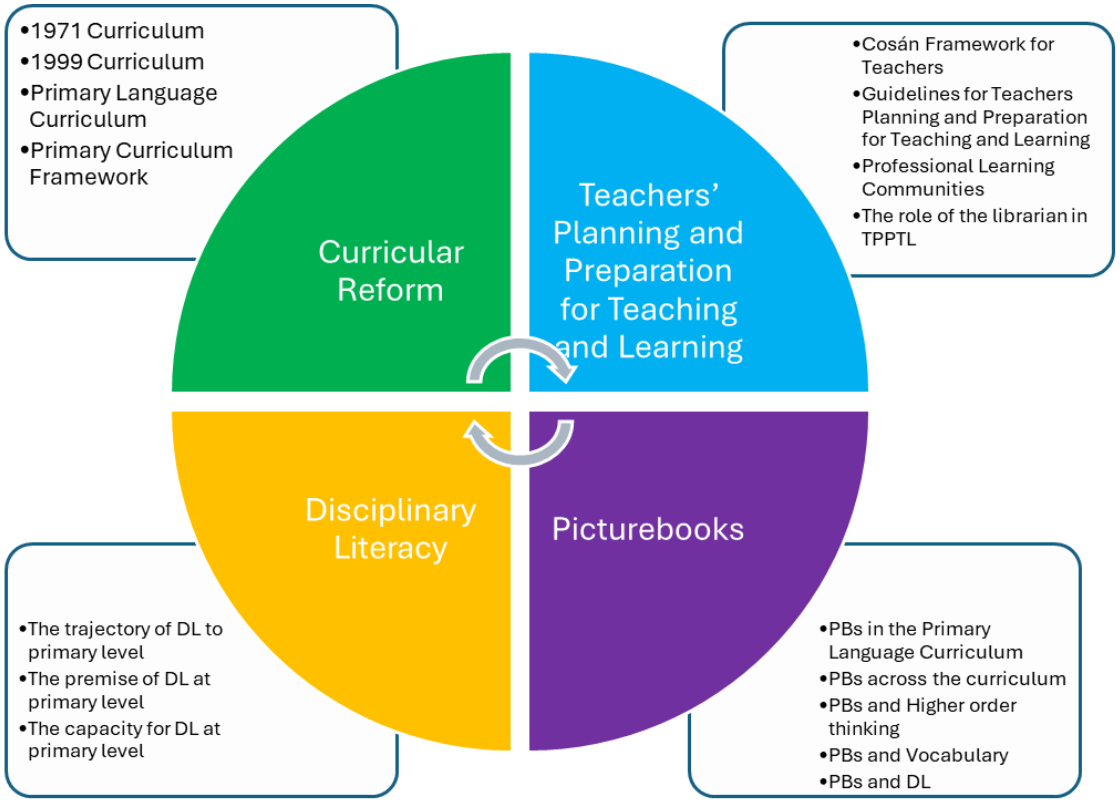


Figure 11: Literature Review themes

(i) Curricular reform

Times change, but schools often continue to teach fish grabbing, horse clubbing, and tiger scaring techniques. The sabre tooth curriculum, coined by New-Fist Hammer-Maker, (prehistoric era), cited in Benjamin 1939 under pseudonym Peddiwell, is a curriculum parable which depicts three subjects in the stone age curriculum: grabbing fish from shallow ponds, clubbing woolly horses which come to drink from the ponds and scaring away sabre tooth tigers with fire. The job of an educator is a difficult one and one major obstacle is determining what to teach. Curriculum helps guide educators so that they in turn can guide students. The sabre tooth curriculum explains how and why teachers need curriculum. Stover (2015) depicts how the saber-tooth curriculum demonstrates the development of curriculum through the sharing of curriculum with all students- creating an equal distribution of information, adjusting to change and questioning what the curriculum should include. This is a factor considered in this research project through the exploration of content to teach across the disciplines. This is reflective of E.D. Hirsch's CKS model as outlined in the conceptual framework chapter. A consideration for this research and indeed for educationalists working with young minds is reflected in the saber-tooth curriculum when it describes how children were playing without purpose, doing similar tasks as adults in order to protect them from boredom. This led to the identification that these children were able and ready to learn certain information. It was thought that because the children were taught earlier, they would, in theory, have a stronger, more successful future. Evidence of learning was shown by students carrying out actions displaying the importance of active learning:

> …you will have to admit that times have changed. Couldn't you please try these more up-to-date activities? Maybe they have some educational value, after all." The wise old men were indignant. Their smiles faded. "If you had any education yourself," they said severely, "you would know that the essence of true education is timelessness. It is something that endures through changing conditions like a solid rock standing squarely and firmly in the

> middle of a raging torrent. You must know that there are some eternal verities, and the saber-tooth curriculum is one of them!
>
> (Peddiwell 1939, p.20)

As Irish primary teachers are driven into a cycle of reflection, revaluation and reconfiguration, Peddiwell (1939) called on educators to question and reflect upon the real changes in teaching and learning and indeed curriculum design and implementation over the discourse of time. The saber-tooth curriculum still exists now because the educational system teaches students how to do particular tasks on their own and educators encourage them do the things in order to help them to exercise their minds as well as their skills. However, as the layers of this study unfold, one must begin to consider how enjoining in traditional ways and ancient systems of education may embody people's resistance to change and hesitancy to embrace innovation, even if it is the only way for survival and what the age calls for. Or, does society continue to prepare children for adulthood by engaging them in tasks that adults do or perceive to need to be able to do? And so, I ask, what did disciplinary literacy look like at the beginning? How have curricula evolved over time and what is its true purpose? What has the trajectory been for the topics of DL and PB? And subsequently, where and how is DL and picturebooks used in Irish classrooms and what is the pedagogy and practice behind their use? Is there potential to marry these facets to make a new-age curriculum?

(ii) Teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning (TPPTL)

Clark and Lampert (1986) declare that teacher planning is a major determinant of what is taught in schools. Teachers and classrooms cannot function effectively without some kind of planning (Yinger 1980). Teacher planning has been traditionally viewed as the paperwork of the teacher. However, its foundations lie much deeper than that. For the individual classroom teacher, their planning depicts the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in their classroom from week

to week. There are however items which can be written and planned for and items which are unplanned and unaccounted for which still form the basis for quality teaching and learning experiences. Bale (2016) cautions that policy-makers should avoid attempting to standardise teacher planning. In Placek's (1984) multi-case study in teacher planning, it was noted that teachers had primarily adopted informal planning habits that typically focused on daily activities, not coherent efforts to match objectives with content. Therefore, it is noted that classrooms and teachers are adaptable, taking 'teaching moments' as they arise in order to strengthen the learning for the child. Nevertheless, planning and paperwork is a requirement with primary practitioners expected to maintain weekly, fortnightly, monthly and yearly accounts of their work, depending on the policy of their particular school and the requirements of DES Inspectorate. The recent DES guidelines, entitled *Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools* (DE 2021) steers away from the loaded paperwork approach to a triadic style which incorporates the visible, invisible and recorded preparation of the teacher. 'Preparation' is a word that is now circulated in the Irish education system in addition to 'planning'. Preparation can constitute a number of meanings in terms of preparing for a lesson, preparing resources, preparing assessments and individual profiles of work etc. Preparation also constitutes teacher's learning and professional development which are essential prerequisites to effective TPPTL. This review seeks to further contextualise the position of present-day teacher-planning and preparation requirements and expectations as per the Irish education system.

(iii) Disciplinary literacy

According to Ippolito *et al.* (2019), disciplinary literacy has *been* there, however, '***now*** [my emphasis] we have the disciplinary literacy language…the support of administrators and state

leaders…we have an audience that's eager to learn and be involved' (Ippolito *et al.* 2019 p. xv-xvi). Disciplinary literacy came to the fore in 2008 when Timothy and Cynthia Shanahan published their *Harvard Educational Review* article '*Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents'*. It called on educators to pause and reframe current teacher practice and pedagogical approaches in order to improve learner experience and essentially learner outcome. This is reflective of what is being proposed in Ireland currently in the midst of primary school curricular reform. The mentality of every teacher is a teacher of reading (George Sampson 1922), sought to be replaced with a new mantra. This mantra was centred around the literacy processes, asking teachers to 'teach the thinking' and to be a mentor of *how* to read [my emphasis], write and communicate like historians, scientists, artists and authors. Essentially, the birth of disciplinary literacy (explained in detail in subsequent sections of the review) has seen a recent wave of change in stance in how literacy is taught across different subject areas.

(iv) Picturebooks

The use of picturebooks has seen a radical increase in focus since the introduction of the *Building Bridges of Understanding* programme to Irish primary classrooms (Courtney & Gleeson 2009). Recommended by the *PDST*, the past decade has seen a roll out of professional development for teachers in the use of picturebooks to teach comprehension strategies across the primary schools of Ireland. More so than that, it has brought picturebooks into Irish classrooms right up through the class standards. Whereas before, picturebooks would have been predominantly used in the junior classes (Roche, 2014; Mendoza *et al*. 2001; Moss, 1978), this revived ideology saw them used in a collaborative manner right up to sixth class. The place of picture books as key texts was further enhanced through the publication of Roche's *Developing Children's Critical Thinking*

Through Picture books (2014) which saw its arrival into the *Support Material for Teachers in the Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019). And so, the appreciation and love for picturebooks in Irish classrooms has been firmly rooted. How they can be maximised across subject areas begs to be answered, with this research illuminating a distinct pedagogy which warrants trial.

Having introduced the literature *foci*, the review will now dicuss each theme in more detail, consistently drawing each component back to the research presented herein.

3.4 Theme 1: Curricular reform

Conceptual framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory- The Exosystem- Key Stakeholders in education and their influence on the child

Cuban (1990) remarked in his publication *Reforming, again and again and again*:

> Like storms on the ocean: The surface is agitated and turbulent, while the ocean floor is calm and serene (if a bit murky). Policy churns dramatically, creating the appearance of major changes...while deep below the surface, life goes on largely uninterrupted.
>
> (Cuban 1990, p.6)

Ireland is in the midst of a period of curricular reform. The cutting-edge curriculum of 1999 is now twenty five years old, and in those years the world has changed beyond compare. The NCCA initiated two reviews of the *1999 Primary School Curriculum*. The first phase of review, published in 2005, focused on the experiences of principals, teachers, parents and children with English; Visual Arts; and Mathematics. The second phase of review, published in 2008, focused on the experiences of principals, teachers, parents and children with Irish / Gaeilge; Science; and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Findings from the reviews have informed the development of the *PLC* (NCCA 2019) and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2023). The NCCA, as it embarked upon curricular reform sought to answer two key questions:

1. What is the purpose of a primary education for tomorrow's children?
2. What priorities, structure and components within a curriculum can support this?

In a thorough investigation, the NCCA drew upon an extensive body of research, networked closely with 43 schools, deliberating with education partners and engaging in an extensive public consultation process (NCCA 2020). Halted by the Covid-19 pandemic, The *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) moved to the stage of consultation amongst school leaders and teachers in 2021. This document depicts how previously singular subjects are now grouped together in a scaled back framework (See figure 12 below). The redeveloped curriculum is now presented in six broad curriculum areas (NCCA 2023), which are outlined in Figure 12. These are: 1. Language 2. Mathematics, Science and Technology Education (STEM) 3. Wellbeing 4. Arts Education 5. Social and Environmental Education 6. Religious, Ethical, Multi-cultural beliefs and Values Education.

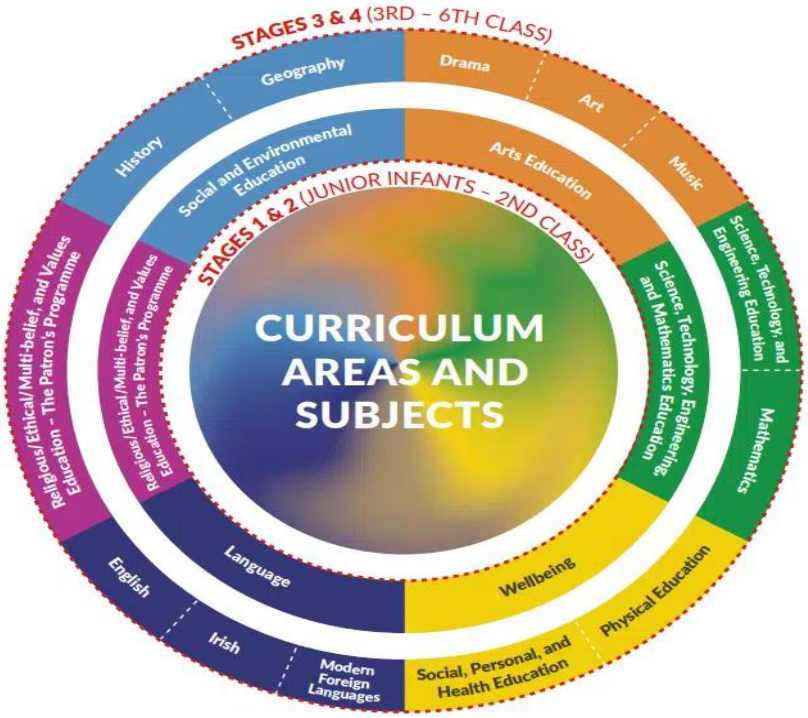


Figure 12: The Primary Curriculum Framework Subject Areas, NCCA 2023

Notwithstanding curricular reform in Ireland, it is noteworthy to observe how subject reorganisation has been formulated and implemented in other countries. UNESCO (2015) highlighted integration of learning content as the strategy used by most of the Asian countries surveyed to decongest the curriculum. Examples quoted were Cambodia, China, Laos, the Philippines and Korea. It is of note that some of these countries have since resorted to scaling back content, e.g., by up to 20% in China and Singapore (NCCA 2010). In curricula which are arranged by subjects (rather than areas), the learning content is presented in comparatively narrow 'domains' (e.g. history and geography), whereas organisation by areas inclines to present content in wider, more conceptually related 'domains of experience'. Rationales for using broad areas to organise the curriculum have included:

- curriculum integration to optimise learning;
- attaching new importance to cross-curricular competences;
- and a need to simplify the curriculum and its assessment (NCCA 2010).

3.4.1 Launching of the Primary Curriculum Framework

The following table outlines the trajectory for the introduction of new *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023):

2020 – 2022: Publication of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and consultation
Early 2023: Publication of the Primary Curriculum Framework
2023 – 2026: Development of curriculum specifications supported by ongoing consultation and work with school leaders, teachers, children and parents
2026: Completion of the curriculum specifications by the NCCA

Table 3: Primary Curriculum Framework trajectory

The launching of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* on 9 March 2023, marked a significant milestone in the history of Irish education. This reform effort aligns with the globalising trends that have shaped curriculum policies over the last three decades (Priestley & Biesta 2013; Sinnema & Aitken 2013), showcasing Ireland's response to worldwide influences and challenges. The primary curriculum framework in Ireland reflects international practices by emphasising 21st-century key competencies, promoting curriculum integration, and placing a stronger focus on teacher and student agency. Significant to this study, curriculum integration in the new primary curriculum framework (NCCA 2020) encourages connections between subjects, moving away from traditional content-centric learning. This interdisciplinary approach fosters problem-solving skills and calls for greater autonomy for schools and teachers. The new framework offers opportunities for integrated learning experiences by combining key competencies across subjects or organising learning under thematic units that encompass multiple subjects within a curriculum area. Similar interdisciplinary elements can be observed in other parts of the world. For instance, the Finnish Basic Education level incorporates multidisciplinary learning modules to establish real-world experiential connections, while British Columbia's Curriculum in Canada encourages teachers to develop thematic units that transcend traditional subject boundaries. However, successful implementation of such curriculum models on a school level requires increased

collaboration among teachers and departments, ultimately necessitating greater autonomy for schools and educators.

The NCCA insist that the new curriculum is underpinned by the concept of teachers and school leaders as 'curriculum makers' (Priestley *et al*. 2015a). Particular to this study, the NCCA has dictated that while detailed planning on resources, structures and processes is yet to take place, the NCCA envisages the completion of the development of all curriculum area specifications by summer 2024 after which they will be presented to the Minister for Education and Skills for approval. A timeline for schools' work in implementing the redeveloped curriculum will be set out by the DES thereafter. It is the 'planning on resources, structures and processes' which is a central part of this current research as it seeks to gain initial thoughts and ideas from practitioners about how and what these resources, structures and processes may be and how disciplinary literacy and picture books will feature in that agenda.

3.4.2 A response from the 1999 curriculum- a drowning in curriculum overload

Conceptual framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory- The Exosystem- Key Stakeholders in education and their influence on the teacher and the child.

In 2010 the NCCA published a two-phase document *Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools An overview of national and international experiences* (NCCA 2005; 2008a). In this paper, it was reported by teachers that time and the scale and size of the curriculum were some of the greatest challenges in implementing the 1999 curriculum. Published twenty-five years ago, *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, was a cutting-edge curriculum informed by extensive research of its time. It was published after a decade-long process of development and deliberation and has since been the

focus of research, review and evaluation (*Draft Curriculum Framework Introduction*, NCCA 2020). However, practitioners across Ireland declared that they had insufficient time to fully implement curriculum subjects or to address all of the objectives within each of these subjects (NCCA 2005; 2008a). With twenty-three books, a number of teacher guideline documents as well as various resource and information packs to complement and assist the implementation of the curriculum, the nation soon saw its educators 'overwhelmed both by the volume of documentation and the perceived pressure of external expectations. This sense of intensification, widely reported in international research into the contemporary teaching experience, is generally reported as the overcrowded curriculum.' (NCCA 2010, p.5). The question begs, what impact this has on teacher practice and in turn learner outcome and learner experience as emphasised in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as outlined in the conceptual framework chapter.

Interestingly, the formulation of the 1999 curriculum saw fourteen specialist subject committees involved in the process of its development. Sugrue (2004) has described the sheer size of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999, p.200) as a direct output of the process of developing it:

> One of the consequences of the committee structure has been a proliferation of documentation as part of the revised curriculum – 23 texts in all. This results in a significant and unnecessary amount of repetition and redundancy, and this is particularly the case in relation to assessment. Each set of guidelines deals with this issue with some relatively minor variations tailored to the specifics of the subject matter being discussed, but repetition is no substitute for a more in-depth treatment of an element of the curriculum that is accepted as critically important.
>
> (DES 1999, p.200)

In an NCCA evaluation (2010) it was reported that the evidence for integration in practice is slim and there is not much indication from system planners to ensure that the curriculum be seen as integrated by teachers was a priority of the in-service process (Murchan *et al.* 2005, p.77). The issue here is that the strands of the 1999 curriculum were not discrete areas of learning. They overlap and interact to form a holistic learning experience for the child (DES 1999 p.42). The

NCCA's two-phase review illustrated the struggle teachers faced to see and implement it as such (NCCA 2005; 2008a). Beyond the curriculum introduction (book) and the uniformity of design across curriculum content and guidelines (books), there is little evidence of curriculum integration in theory, yet it is repeatedly advocated in practice. This is a pertinant statement, yet it is repeatedly advocated in practice. So too, the *Draft Primary Framework* (NCCA 2020) suggests to, once again, address curriculum integration through the revisioning of its subjects.

3.4.3 Hirsch's response to alleviating curriculum overload

As outlined in the conceptual framework in Chapter Two, E.D. Hirsch's cultural literacy model has had a significant influence on education in the United States, particularly in shaping curriculum design and educational policy. His ideas, outlined in his seminal work *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, have sparked debates and initiatives in various educational domains. Hirsch's emphasis on a common core of knowledge that all students should possess has influenced curriculum development efforts. Some educational initiatives, such as the *Core Knowledge Foundation*, have been directly inspired by Hirsch's work. These programmes advocate for a content-rich curriculum that introduces students to a wide range of topics, with the goal of providing a solid foundation of cultural literacy. Hirsch's ideas have also influenced the development of educational standards at the state and national levels. Advocates for content-based standards argue that a focus on core knowledge is essential for ensuring that all students have equitable access to a high-quality education. Hirsch's work has contributed to discussions about what knowledge should be prioritised in curriculum standards and assessments, a debate worth considering as Irish curricula is reformed and teacher agency placed centrally. Interesting to this

study and the capacity for PBs and DL, Hirsch's emphasis on background knowledge as a crucial component of reading comprehension has influenced approaches to language and literacy instruction. Proponents of his ideas argue that building students' cultural literacy can improve their reading comprehension skills by providing them with the background knowledge necessary to understand complex texts across various subjects. Hirsch's work has sparked debates within the education community about the purpose and content of education. Critics argue that his focus on a canon of knowledge may neglect the diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds of students, leading to calls for a more inclusive and culturally responsive curriculum. However, proponents of Hirsch's model contend that a common core of knowledge is essential for fostering social cohesion and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically. As outlined in the recommendations chapter Six, a model similar to that of Hirsch's is worth pursuing on an Irish platform.

3.4.4 The Irish context-responding or at sea?

The 1999 Curriculum Reviews (NCCA 2005, 2008) have shown that primary teachers in Ireland battle to implement the curriculum within the school day, week, year which has stayed the same length, despite the increased specification of curriculum content (NCCA 2005; 2008a). It is noteworthy that primary schools in Ireland have one of the shortest school years when compared with our counterparts in other countries (INCA 2008). Does this impact on practitioners ability to effectively cover all content? There is a strong sense from the literature (Majoni 2017, Kilkelly 2013, NCCA 2010, OECD 2020) that curriculum overload is triggered by important subjects competing for space with one another and also competing with what some consider to be less important subjects (Cambridge Primary Review 2009a). The OECD, in their *Curriculum*

Overload, a Way forward (2020) say that student and teacher well-being should be of primary importance in curriculum design, especially when it comes to curriculum overload, because well-being enhances learning, and vice versa. An overloaded curriculum can put pressure on teachers to teach all the material, potentially risking a 'mile-wide, inch-deep' content coverage. In light of this attestation by OECD, this study considers how these pressures play into the new vision of disciplinary literacy in the primary context and indeed how disciplinary literacy may help to combat time issues and repetition across the curriculum by refining content. Needless to say, this requires intensive upskilling in DL for practitioners as well as time for planning and preparing for quality lesson delivery. This point shall be discussed further in Section Two of this literature review which focusses on teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning.

3.4.5 Wellbeing and the curriculum

Central to the importance of the OECD perspective, as outlined above, is the emphasis placed on well-being. Indeed, teacher and pupil well-being is a core belief modelled in this research and is very much an overarching aim of this entire study to uncover how TPPTL can be used to explore disciplinary literacy through picturebooks in a child-friendly and teacher-friendly manner. Wellbeing is crucial in the new *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) in Ireland because it underpins the holistic development of children, ensuring that they thrive both emotionally and academically. *The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework of Practice* (DES 2018) highlight this by emphasising the need for a supportive learning environment that nurtures students' emotional and mental health, thereby making wellbeing the cornerstone of the curriculum. My research, using picturebooks for disciplinary literacy, supports this approach by demonstrating

how engaging and meaningful texts can foster emotional intelligence and resilience, integral components of a comprehensive wellbeing strategy.

3.4.6 Factors contributing to curriculum overload

The Collins English dictionary (online) defines ‘to educate’ by stating ‘to educate people means to teach them better ways of doing something or a better way of living’. But what does this mean? To develop the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to become a critically engaged, reflexive citizen, what must be done? Practitioners, in their efforts to make sense of curriculum sometimes focus on the transmission of facts and information, rather than the development of knowledge and understanding (OECD 2009). This practice has a cyclical impact in overloading both teachers and students. In INCA (2003), Le Metais suggested that revised curricula in England, the Netherlands and Wales were perceived as ‘overloaded’. Some other countries and regions in which crowding of the curriculum has also emerged as an issue include Ontario, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines (NCCA 2010). These similar issues seem to occur and reoccur, again echoing the voice of concern of Cuban (1990), as aforementioned.

In Ireland, the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES 1999) and its lengthy implementation is noted as a primary factor contributing to curriculum overload in Ireland. Subject hierarchy and timeframe together with the presentation of subjects and timetabling further impacted this issue. The challenge imposed upon practitioners to navigate the volume of curriculum documents that were made available to support teacher planning were overpowering. The impact of assessment requirements along with the expanding Curriculum Guidelines for Teachers/schools and additional support material NCCA documents to primary schools since 1999, added to the disarray. Teachers

have described a lack of time and opportunity for meaningful teacher planning and communication with parents as a primary concern arising from this state of overwhelm. If research informs this, then the question begs, why does it continue to happen? With curricular reform heavily underway in Ireland, delayed by the reforming and reprinting of the *Primary Language Curriculum*; further impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, spiralled forth by the quick implementation of the *Wellbeing Framework,* amidst the onset of a series of compulsory DES webinars signing off on the PLC, introducing the new *Maths Curriculum* (NCCA 2023) along with the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (2023), it is no wonder that 90% of teachers and school leaders surveyed reported a feeling of overwhelm and overburden in the INTO's research report on *Teacher Workload* (INTO 2023). Echoes of the hurried schools hurried classrooms manifestation, detailed momentarily, appear to be ringing through once again.

Reflecting Bronfenbrenner's theory once more, let us flip the coin on the policy makers in order to visualise from the perspective of the teacher and the child and the impact that curriculum can have on these peoples. Quay *et al*. (2022) highlights that teaching is sometimes experienced as a conundrum, mainly due to the aim of teaching being to influence someone else's learning, guiding students in a way which encourages learning in directions informed by curriculum and by learning outcomes. Quay *et al*. (2022) poises the question; how does a person move/influence another person? Here Quay *et al.* (2022) highlight the ethical nature of such a question, encouraging teachers to pause to 're-engage with the question as to what constitutes good education' (Biesta 2009, p. 36). In their Australian based study which take's John Dewey's lead by illuminating the importance of 'being', as a verb, to education, Quay *et al*. (2022) endeavour to increase teachers' attentiveness to how being a student characterises and constrains education, and the way teachers work. This again reflects the Bronfenbrenner's microsystem and the impact of

school decisions and curricular planning and implementation has on children. This study sought to identify picturebooks and disciplinary literacy as a means of approaching planning and curriculum making through a child-centred approach, cognisant of the impact it may have within the child's micro and exo systems.

3.4.7 Hurried schools and hurried classrooms

Practitioners across the globe will not deny that classrooms are busy places and dynamic environments (Wragg 2011; Doyle 1990; Feiman-Nemser *et al*. 1985). Ireland has the most overcrowded primary classrooms in the EU, with more than 335,000 pupils in classes of 25 or more, according to the latest DES figures for the 2019/20 school year. The OECD state that the EU average for primary class sizes is 20, but more than 60% of pupils in Irish primary schools are in classrooms of 25 or more. When does this pace lose its productivity and become a stressor, impacting the teacher and child as it does? Alongside the implementation of an extensive curriculum, schools saw a huge increase in initiatives and programmes for schools which has culminated in a 'hurried schools and hurried classrooms' scenario in many Irish primary settings (NCCA 2010). In research conducted on the subject by The NCCA, the following review was recorded:

> When I taught in the regular classroom, I felt like I was rushing the children through the curriculum, just to get through everything. I would have liked to have taught things in more depth. The curriculum as it is now, is a mile wide and an inch deep.
>
> (NCCA 2010, p.24)

This 'mile wide and inch deep' metaphor has become a staple mindset across many school settings (Ireland *et al*. 2020; McTighe *et al*. 2020; Tan *et al*. 2019). Schools and classrooms traditionally were controlled environments consisting of rote learning, extensive scribing and round robin reading (Serroukh 2022; Sanden 2018; Mehta *et al.* 2019). By stark contrast, modern classrooms

are interactive, student-led, collaborative places, conducive to self-directed learning, inquiry based learning and a playful approach to learning (NCCA, UNICEF, UNESCO). This welcome shift brings with it the need for enhanced teacher planning, heightened teacher energy and varied lesson delivery; necessitating an onerous task of understanding and implementing a curriculum and a universal design for learning (UDL) targeted at individual needs. With this level of chaos, comes the requirement for effective curriculum delivery from the key stakeholders in education. Reflectively, the implementation of the 1999 Curriculum saw two days of face-to-face seminar presentations provided for each subject, followed by one additional planning day based in school. A commissioned evaluation of the PCSP (Murchan *et al.* 2005), noted that while the quality of the in-service provided was regarded by teachers as satisfactory, the seminars themselves, were quite rushed, with little time for the type of critical reflection known to enhance teacher learning (Murchan *et al*. 2005, p.7).

Fast-forward twenty years to 2019, the implementation of the PLC, which saw a similar format for introduction by PDST personnel. Professional development was provided specifically for the new curriculum however predominantly through the format of a series of webinars in place of face-to-face seminars. This roll-out, however, was exasperated by the upheaval caused by the review of the publication, leading to frustration and confusion amongst practitioners on the ground trying to make sense of and implement a changing curriculum framework. The review of the PLC which resulted in the progression continua being removed from the printed document, left teachers in limbo, many of whom had reviewed their school policy before the changes were set out, catapulting many others into a state of catch up, again reminiscent of the hurried schools and hurried classrooms. A further issue which has dampened the implementation of the PLC has been the knock-on effect of Covid-19 which saw a pause in SSE and its requisites, leading to a sense of

hurriedness a year later (2021) in a bid to bring it further along the process of embedment in schools who may not have had sufficient time to study the document sufficiently. While schools and classrooms indeed remain chaotic places to be in, the manner of the roll out of curriculum is a worrying consideration in what this hurry is all about, as teachers grapple with understanding and making meaning of reformed and evolving curricula.

3.4.8 Time as a factor in successful curriculum delivery

Investigating the breakdown in subjects and time allocation of the 1999 curriculum, shows that fifty-two percent of total teaching time (10.5 of 20 hours weekly) was afforded to Language and Mathematics. That left eight subjects (History, Geography, Science, Physical Education, Visual Arts, Music, Drama and Social, Personal and Health Education) competing for the outstanding 48% of teaching time (9.5 hours weekly). It is noteworthy that this remaining 9.5 hours weekly for eight subjects is inclusive of the two hours accorded for discretionary curriculum time. Removing these two hours sees just 7.5 weekly hours provided for eight subjects, weekly. Conceivably, it is no wonder that teachers have identified lack of time as their greatest curriculum challenge. Additionally, the issue of where subjects are placed in the school day can send a powerful message about the value teachers place on different subjects, with literacy and numeracy generally the focus of the beginning of the school day (NCCA 2010). How will the breakdown of the new curriculum look in comparison? Will the same issues be repeated?

While there is some indication of countries scaling back the curriculum (e.g. the Netherlands, Japan, Singapore) in response to the overload issue, there is additional evidence of international reorganising of the curriculum to make the content more manageable (NCCA 2010).

Observers of these practices have noted that such renaming of components of the curriculum does not necessarily make the curriculum more manageable in practice (Cambridge Primary Review 2009c, cited in NCCA 2010). Such findings will be imperative to the success of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* and indeed the PLC, as it embarks upon its voyage into the hands and classrooms of practitioners. It would be fallible for teachers to try to make the new curricula 'fit' the old or current ways. In order for this to 'work', this roll out needs to be carefully considered, providing teachers with the time and space to study the documents, reflect upon their own practice and make confident decisions about how this reform will look in their school setting. This will require strong school management teams, assistance from Oide as well as a 'buy in' from all teachers.

3.4.9 Scaling back content

Another imperative issue worth noting is the necessity to scale back content, reducing the hurried schools, hurried classrooms scenario; replacing it with a more measured approach. Curriculum, undoubtedly, provides a strong foundation for teaching and learning and as society continues to change and evolve so too do our classroom cultures. *Growing Up in Ireland* (2022) was Ireland's national longitudinal study of children, illustrates how children are evolving in their social, economic and cultural environments and how these swiftly changing environments, particularly in recent years, have impacted on children's lives. These fresh insights together with a growing body of research inform us of how children learn best (*Draft Curriculum Framework Introduction* 2020). And so, looking toward the third decade of the twenty-first century, it seems timely to reflect upon the education system and how it can learn from its past endeavours.

Conceptual framework: Hirsch's Core Knowledge Sequence (CKS)

Pertinantly and timely, the Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2023) sets forth that:

> while subjects are not specifically defined in the curriculum areas of Wellbeing, Social and Environmental Education, and Arts Education for stages 1 and 2, the learning outcomes will provide important foundations towards more subject-based learning.
>
> (NCCA 2023, p.16)

This brings us back to the conceptual framework of Hirsch's CKS model which leads us to query the effectiveness of such autonomy being given to schools and how the lack of structure and sequence may lead to confusion and lack of productivity. The framework goes on to say that in the case of stages 3 and 4 (3rd to 6th class), there will be opportunities for creating stronger links across subjects and for minimising duplication within the area. Further clarity is necessary for how this will transfer into practice, with my study investigating possibilities for such. Intensive professional development and strong leadership will be essential factors if this ideology is to manifest. The new curriculum will be presented in five documents—one per curriculum area. This is a welcome changed from the twenty five documents which formed the 1999 infamous curriculum box. Interestingly and of note to this research, the framework outlines that in stages 3 and 4, (3rd to 6th class) each area will include more subject-based learning outcomes presented alongside the outcomes for stages 1 and 2. This approach to presentation will create real opportunities to show where integration across strands, subjects and curriculum areas, can occur throughout the primary school experience. This, in turn, can support planning at the level of the curriculum area rather than subject level (NCCA 2020), possibly answering the call to scale back curricular content.

3.4.10 Curricular reform- history repeating itself?

Conceptual framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory- The Exosystem- Key Stakeholders in education and their influence on the teacher and the child.

The NCCA, in its *Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools An overview of national and international experiences,* noted that approximately mid-way in the phased implementation of subjects in the 1999 curriculum, the sense of 'overload' was such that, with the agreement of the partners, the then Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey TD, announced a one-year pause, recognising the need for a period of consolidation … There will be no in-service seminars for new subjects during this school year (DES Circular M26/03). In the words of one primary school teacher:

> I am sick of all these ideas being thrown at me. I am still trying to cope with understanding the new curriculum and the huge shift in emphasis in teaching methods – this, coupled with new subjects being added each year, plus changing classes.
>
> (De Paor 2007, p.150, cited in NCCA 2010)

It is clear then; as it is now, that teachers are feeling intense pressure to fulfil the goals set out in curricular documents, much to the hindrance of pupils. With the introduction of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (DES 2018-2023) and the shift in focus in schools to that of Wellbeing as a core subject, there is a significant nationwide effort to break the cycle of teacher burnout. To implement this policy every school and centre for education is required by 2023, to use the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development cycle. What will be imperative to the successful implementation of this policy, will be the realisation that wellbeing of the teacher plays just as an important role as the wellbeing of the children. Further on in this review and in subsequent chapters, I will detail how this study sought to impact positively on the wellbeing of both students and teachers through the use of carefully selected picture books and structured teacher planning. As change sweeps through school systems, it is imperative that educationalists grasp this opportunity to cultivate within their school communities positive mindsets toward curricular reform.

3.4.11 Political pushing and its impact on class teachers

Conceptual framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory- The Exosystem- Key Stakeholders in education and their influence on the teacher and the child.

Curricular Strata	
Supra	Transnational discourses about education
Macro	National level policy intentions
Meso	Policy guidance, facilitation
Micro	School level curricular practices
Nano	Classrooms interactions

Table 4: Curricula Strata -Adapted from Thijs & van den Akker 2009)

Measures of curriculum control are cyclical in nature and are highly responsive to social change, economic needs, or the prevailing political culture (See Table 4). The NCCA reports an unprecedented level of activity in legislative and policy development in recent years regarding children's primary education (NCCA 2010). The sheer breadth of change required is often a feature of the political process in which governments attempt to represent the views of multiple interest groups concerning the form and content of the curriculum (NCCA 2010). The question begs what are the political views that have influenced the new Irish curriculum? The *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (2011-2020) saw the political impact of accountability and industry with the aim of making Irish citizens more employable. The area of diversity and inclusion has seen a political pushing on curricular policy development globally. The bringing of Wellbeing to the fore as a core subject reflects the increase in society of childhood anxiety and the adverse effects of the post-Covid-19 pandemic. There are many areas that politically drive policy change, further research on how this shaped the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) is yet to be seen.

In the UK, the *Cambridge Primary Review* (2009) has drawn attention to the negative impact of decades of continuous, unrelenting, piecemeal reform. This political pushing together with the rate and pace of change expected of schools has contributed enormously to overload, as previously detailed. Similarly, a case study of Northern Ireland's curriculum review has shown that teachers felt overwhelmed by the demand to respond to too much change too quickly (Gallagher 2009). It is the culmination of this overload that has led in part to the formulation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) which sees some of the issues aforementioned being addressed.

In England, there is much the same narrative around curricular reform as discoursed here in the Irish context. The NCCA, in their curriculum overload paper, describes how the Cambridge Review of the English primary education system saw 'a broad, balanced and rich curriculum as overcrowded and unmanageable' (Cambridge Primary Review 2009, p.3). The Review contended that as practitioners strove to attain high standards in 'the basics' there was inadequate time for exploring, thinking, problem-solving or reflecting and the time for subjects such as Drama, Music, Art, History and Geography was often weakened. UNESCO (2003) accredited the 'overload movement' to increases in the size of a new/revised curriculum and the restricted time provided for fully implementing it. For example, in the Philippines, an overcrowded curriculum was blamed for low levels of achievement among students and delays in the development of critical competences. Ippolito *et al.* (2019) continue to look at research, policy and practice which specifically connects to the new focus on disciplinary literacy in the *International Literacy Association's* (ILA) *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals* 2017. It is clear that the issue of curriculum overload is widespread and is something that needs to be addressed if the new curriculum is to be a success.

3.4.12 Concluding comment

The preceding paragraphs have discoursed the trajectory of curricular reform in Ireland to date, its challenges, implications and ideologies debated. The review shall now move to the second theme, that of teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning.

3.5 Theme Two: Teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning

Conceptual framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory- The Mesosystem- Practitioners in education and their influence on the child. The vision and principles guiding the redevelopment of the primary curriculum place high-quality teaching and learning at the heart of that curriculum (NCCA 2020). Quality teaching and learning as set forth by LAOS framework (DES 2022) depicts a set of domains and standards which teachers can strive toward to enhance their T &L. Teacher planning and preparation is a key and essential aspect in achieving these standards and of effective curriculum delivery. Successful teacher planning requires teacher learning and professional development to be adept. There can, of course, be no curriculum development without the professional development (PD) of teachers (Stenhouse 1975). This is a core variable in the achievement of current curricular vision. As Benjamin Franklin put it, 'an investment in knowledge pays the best interest'. To this end, in 2006, the Teaching Council of Ireland commenced the construction of a comprehensive set of standards for teachers' learning, covering various stages, including initial teacher education and induction (Droichead). These standards were carefully designed to instil confidence, not only within the teaching profession, but also among the broader public, ensuring that teachers' learning maintains a high standard and remains adaptable to the changing educational needs of children (as seen in the results of

Children's School Lives Study (2019-2024).[5] The second stage (following Droichead) in the creation of this set of standards came with the publication of Cosán in 2016.

3.5.1 Cosán Framework for Teacher's Learning

Cosán, the national framework for teachers' learning, represents the next progressive phase in the endeavour to establish professional standards and thus enhance TPPTL. By selecting 'cosán' as the title for the framework, the Teaching Council stresses the fact that teachers' learning is an ongoing and continuous process (the name cosán being the Irish word for pathway). The idea set forth in the framework is that teaching is a complex craft that requires continuous improvement throughout a teacher's career. The Teaching Council aims to establish a coherent national framework for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure ongoing improvement in classroom practice and better outcomes for students. This commitment to CPD would be a requirement for teachers to renew their registration with the Council[6]. This is a major revelation and turning point in how professional development may be conducted into the future in the Irish education system. That said, the *Cosán* framework is designed to be flexible and acknowledges that professional learning is an integral part of a teacher's working life. It emphasises shared professional responsibility, collective professional confidence, and professionally-led regulation as fundamental values guiding the Council's work. The diagram below represents the

[5] Ireland's first in-depth study of primary schools contributing to the development of national policy, informed by the voices of children, their families, their teachers and school leaders which was commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and conducted by UCD School of Education. A landmark study, it explores the lived experiences of over 4000 children in 189 primary schools across Ireland from Spring 2019 – Spring 2024).

framework and highlights the relationship between CPD and students learning. The emphasis on collaboration is a feature which shall now be discoursed. Through this study, collaboration was afforded through the creation of a series of professional learning communities.

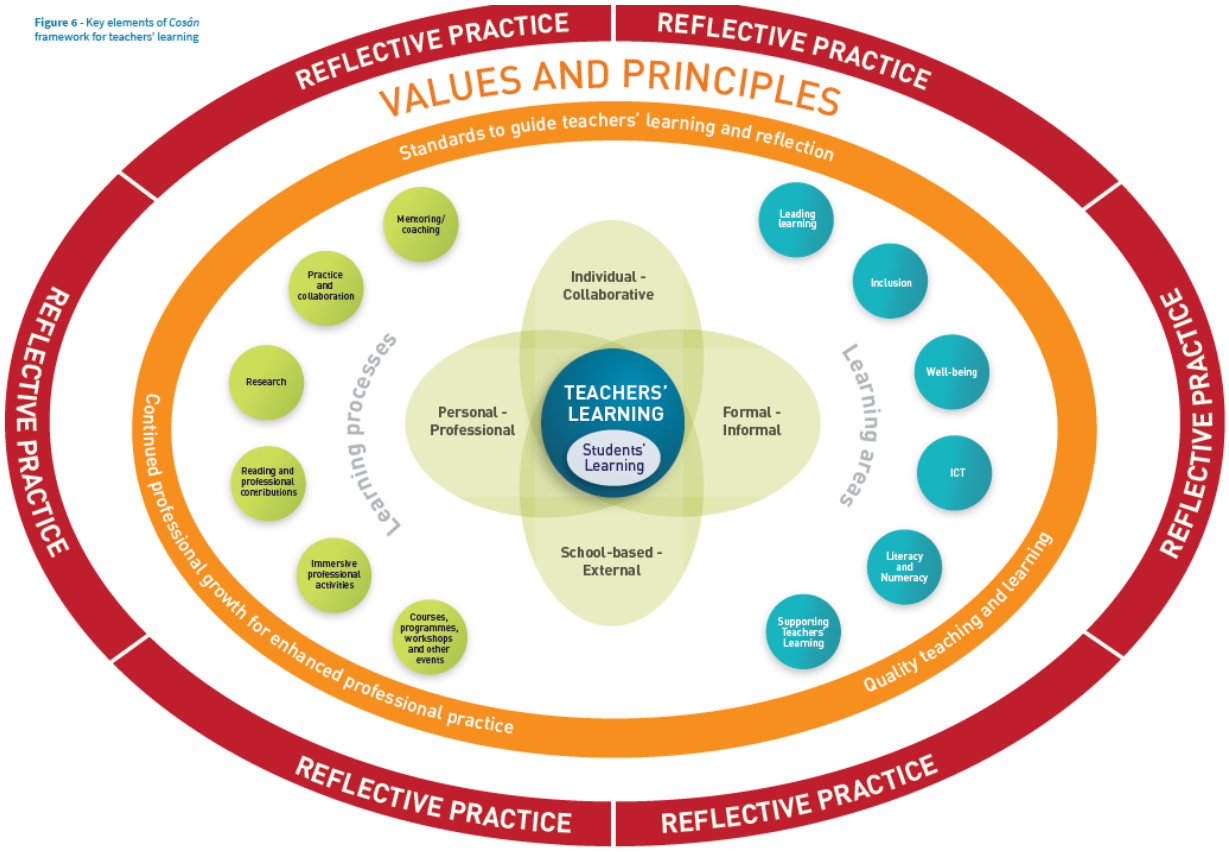


Figure 14: Key elements of Cosán Framework for Teacher's Learning 2016

3.5.2 Professional learning communities (PLCs)

> And yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect. We are striving to forge our union with purpose.
>
> (Gorman 2021)

Calkin and Ehrenworth (2016) declare that professional development should be 'the heartbeat of your school'. They argue that PD should be intense, collaborative, collegial, and practical and

should be focused on strengthening teachers' methods and spirits. This echoes the rapid learning systems described in the Introductory Chapter, a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Calkin and Ehrenworth (2016) go further to say that PD should be varied in form, flexible, and responsive, and, when done well, should establish lasting communities of practice. In Ireland, despite best efforts of PDST and NCCA and individual teacher professional development, there is a notable gap between policy and practice. This is due in part to an implementation gap (Supovitz & Weinbaum 2008), a disparity between educational purposes and the practices of schooling. According to Fullan (2014), there is a lack of engagement with educational principles, coupled with a learned helplessness, There is an attitude of 'just tell us what to do', a lack of clarity; or 'false clarity without change' and 'a losing sight of the big picture' (Fullan 2003, p. 24). This is all surmounted by the intensification of teacher workload (INTO 2023) and the lack of incentive for teachers to conduct PD. Graves (2002) said that just as a good writing conference gives a student more energy for writing, good professional development should give teachers more energy for teaching.

3.5.2.1 Defining the professional learning community

By using the term professional learning community, it signifies interest not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes (Roberts & Pruitt 2009). Speck & Stollenwerk (1999) asserted that shaping a learning community is the most pressing task of the building principal. They defined a school learning community as 'one that promotes and values learning as an ongoing, active collaborative process with dynamic dialogue by teachers, students, staff, principal, parents, and the school

community to improve the quality of learning and life within the school' (Speck & Stollenwerk 1999, p. 8). Similarly, Myers and Simpson (1998) characterised learning communities as 'cultural settings in which everyone learns, in which every individual is an integral part, and in which every participant is responsible for both the learning and the overall well-being of everyone else' (Meyers & Simpson 1998, p. 2). Building on this, Collay *et al.* (1998), cited in Haar & Foord, (2013), observed that individual and collective growth are esteemed features in a learning community, with the processes for attaining that growth being highly valued. Furthermore, Barth (1990) described a community of learners as 'a place where students and adults alike are engaged as active learners in matters of special importance to them and where everyone is thereby encouraging everyone else's learning' (Barth 1990, p. 9).

According to the *Glossary of Education Reform*, a professional learning community, or PLC, is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. The term is also applied to schools or teaching faculties that use small-group collaboration as a form of professional development. At the heart of the PLC, is the desire to achieve improved learning outcomes and learner experiences for pupils. A Professional Learning Community is an ongoing process in which teachers work collaboratively in repeated cycles of joint inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they teach (Dufour 2024; 2009). Woodland (2016) denotes how professional learning communities have emerged as one of the nation's most widely implemented strategies for improving instruction and pupil learning outcomes. PLCs serve as collaborative, networked communities, through which teachers look to renovate what is learned through systematic collective inquiry into practice in order to improve teaching quality and curricular outcomes across classrooms and schools. Schools in which PLCs are currently operating, allow

time for collaborative teaming which enables teachers from within and across class levels, and perhaps other networking schools, to jointly evaluate and find solutions to problems of practice linked to what and how students are learning through a constant cycle of improvement (Mullen 2009; McLaughlin & Talbert 2006; Newmann 1996). This innovative approach must be viewed by school organisations as 'time well spent'. Once PLCs are established nationwide, it is envisioned that the achievement of curricular vision for the promotion of children's literacy development within the context of twenty first century classrooms will be more tangible and achievable.

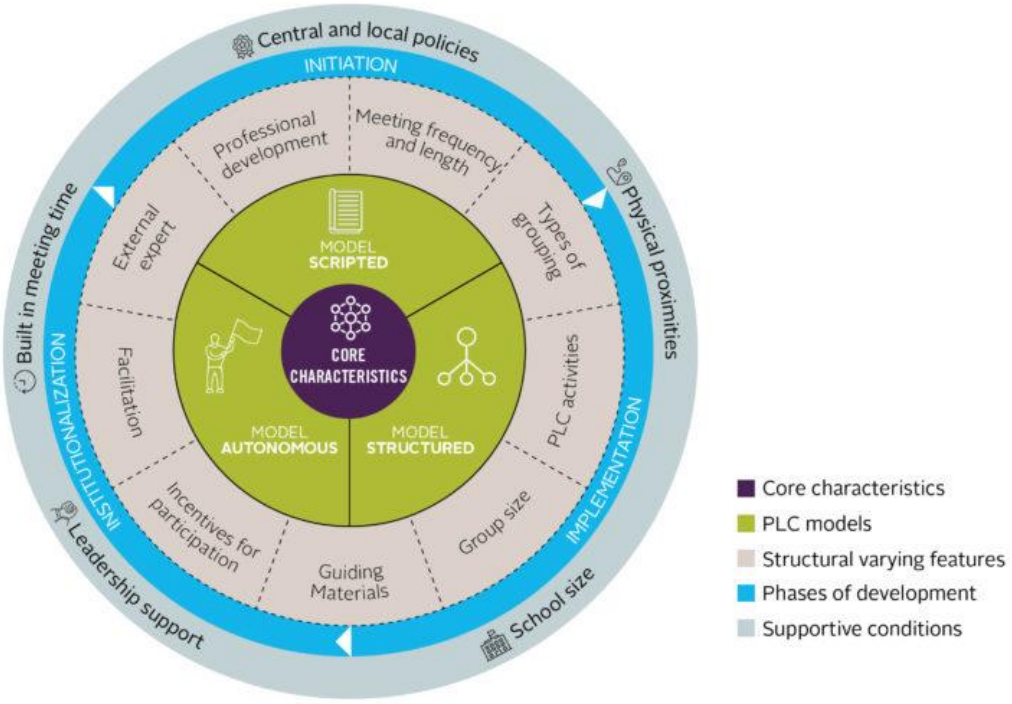


Figure 15: Framework of professional learning communities (Soars *et al.* 2020)

As shown in Figure 15, a professional learning community has the capacity to incorporate many facets, and in terms of educational purposes, it is a model which can promote change and opportunity for practicing teachers. Unlike a traditional staff meeting/Croke Park setup which is customary in Irish schools, a professional learning community often comprises a number of

schools within a cluster area, seeking to support and inform each other of teaching practice, planning, resources and indeed areas of success and difficulty within their respective school setting. The forum promotes a targeted agenda for a particular topic, complemented and backed by research-based best practice in that area. It is therefore professional development in a most authentic and productive setting. PLCs are innovative domains within which to engage in conversations which promote learning and improve teacher planning and practice. These forums host a space where shared practice, creativity and innovation, leadership and vision can be discoursed. Roberts (2010) outlines the five key components of an effective PLC (See Appendix 12) which were the foundation of the PLC's which comprised this study.

3.5.2.2 PLC's in SSE- the Irish context

Building professional learning communities requires a paradigm shift from the traditional vision of schools as bureaucracies to a vision of schools as communities (Roberts 2010). Emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, Irish schools are slowly 'coming back together', having been segregated for a two-year period. This has undoubtedly had a knock-on effect in how school teams have been able to function and progress. This is evident in the Department of Education's recent publication of *School Self-Evaluation: Next Steps September 2022 – June 2026*. The document acknowledges the ongoing impact that Covid-19 has had and continues to have on schools. In it, it states, that for school self-evaluation to be truly effective, schools need to own the process. This ownership will depend very much on leadership and staff collaboration. At the same time, the document acknowledges that schools are on different trajectories with different rates of success in the SSE process to date. Using a PLC model, through SSE, teachers can collaboratively create professional

knowledge, reflecting on and sharing their practice enabling them to challenge prior assumptions and create new meanings/targets. Most importantly, the publication states that such professional learning cultures need to be supported and sustained by high quality leadership of teaching and learning which delivers adequate levels of challenge and support to practitioners. Concurring with this, evidence from Burke and Lehane detail how 'sustained learning opportunities that prioritise professional collaboration can help realise curriculum integration' (Burke & Lehane 2023a, p.100). Such collaboration, the pair say 'can clarify teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards curriculum integration and allow them to develop a 'shared understanding' (Burke and Lehane 2023a, p.100). This shared understanding and expression of attitudes and beliefs toward DL and PBs was at the core of my research and the voices of educationalists in this regard can be viewed in Chapter 5.

3.5.3 Teacher planning 'on the ground', and, What should effective teacher planning look like?

Planning is a critical component of effective teaching (Harris 2013; Raizen 1998; Dick *et al.* 1989). Quality teacher planning focusses on the most important and essential learning needs of the class. Quality planning provides teachers with a road map of what students need to learn and how to achieve this effectively through appropriate methods (Stronge 2018; McBer 2001; Anderson 1991). Teachers are tasked with careful selection of learning objectives/learner outcomes appropriate to their class level. They must then design suitable learning activities to introduce, develop and consolidate this learning whilst also employing strategies to obtain feedback on student understanding. A successful lesson plan delivers and incorporates these key components seamlessly. However, the primary teacher is tasked with preparing several such plans for several subjects on a daily/fortnightly and monthly basis. The DES *Preparation for Teaching and*

Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools (2020) outlines that recorded preparation and reflection are a necessary aspect of planning which is complementary to the processes of invisible and visible preparation. The paper declares that recorded preparation is first and foremost for the teacher, and therefore should be useful, purposeful and practical. Interestingly, the document describes that while teachers plans will naturally display similarities with the work of colleagues, a teacher's recorded preparation should be personal and bespoke. It would be interesting to hear teachers responses to this in order to ascertain a more rounded view of this point. Recorded preparation refers directly to the curriculum. As Table 5 portrays, it should-

✓ identify selected learning outcomes which are guiding preparation.	✓ provide clarity on the focus of learning for children during a series of learning experiences
✓ draw on the pillars of preparation for teaching and learning	✓ outline what the focus of learning is
✓ detail the learning experiences that will be provided	✓ show how this learning will be demonstrated by the children

Table 5: Recorded preparation of the teacher *(*adapted from *Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools* (NCCA 2020)

It further states that the paperwork does not need to over elaborate on what may occur in the learning environment. School plans differ enormously from classroom to classroom, school to school, county to county. Recorded preparation evolves in response to emerging opportunities and needs of the children. It can include teacher's comments and revisions, as appropriate. The infamous ideology of the 'tea-stained' teaching notes comes to mind here. Recorded preparation and reflection is, at its core, a work in progress, which is practical and purposeful, evolving as learning progresses *(Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools*, NCCA 2020). Finally, the document, in its section five, provides a series of grids which act as a support tool for teachers to assist them in their preparation for teaching and learning.

It is envisioned that teachers will use this measure to support teaching and learning across all curricula. This is particularly pertinent to this study in order to discover how learning can take place in an interdisciplinary way. The series of grids show teachers what may be helpful to consider and what may be helpful to avoid, in their teaching preparation. Such considerations were pertinent to this study in the professional learning communities as we discoursed how The DES *Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools* may transfer from policy to practice.

Classroom practice versus paper work are often poles apart. A balance is often difficult to achieve and the open autonomy for individual schools to design their own planning measures and indeed the discrepancies between individual teacher planning, has both advantages and disadvantages, a disadvantage being the lack of structure and clarity in what is being taught across primary schools nationwide. Some practitioners may argue that the focus should be on classroom practice, not paper work and question what is the real purpose of paper work? Others may question the value of good planning and how planning influences their practice? In this period of curricular reform, it has never been more crucial to reflect on the teaching and planning and envision how this will look under a new set of curricula.

To assist teachers, in Ireland, CJ Fallon publishers have developed *The Primary Planning Tool*, a (fee-paying) platform to help teachers to plan across the curriculum with ease of access. The publishers declare that continuous student development is at the heart of all planning and *The Primary Planning Tool* facilitates the effortless creation of a whole-school plan to aid in this development. The platform provides teachers with the foundation to create detailed and actionable long-term plans, short-term plans and cuntais míosúla. *The Primary Planning Tool* advocates holistic planning and planning across subject areas, with its functions set up in such a way as to

ensure that there is no duplication of curriculum objectives across different class levels, similar to Hirsh's CKS model. Such a framework will prove useful as teachers attempt to redevelop their plans to reflect the new primary curriculum framework.. This isrelevant to this research as it strives to identify the gaps in teacher planning which may facilitate a more purposeful use of particular curricular efforts, namely disciplinary literacy. The NCCA *Curriculum Planning Tool* provides a free option of a similar planning tool for teachers to use to assist them in their planning. However, while many schools across Ireland have opted to use such tools, neither of these planning frameworks are compulsory as it is indeed up to each individual school to decide upon its own particular planning template that is suited to the needs of its school. Regardless of this fact, the tools that are used are not by enlarge, content specific and so, discrepancies from school to school arise in what material, text pieces, programmes and initiatives is being taught at each class level. This goes against the CKS as put forward by E.D. Hirsh in the conceptual framework which forms part of this study. Ultimately, teacher planning is individual to the teacher and to the school and so there is a wide range of planning frameworks and indeed content, teaching and learning occurring in schools nationwide. Perhaps a centralised database of suggested frameworks may combat the confusion and time wastage imposed on practitioners as they grapple with making sets of plans that are reflective of curricula and expected learning, yet are individual to their own school communities.

The Inspectorate's evaluation of *Irish in the Classroom* (DES 2007) reported substantial reliance on textbooks predominantly with regard to curriculum planning. The research observed that in half of the classes involved in the evaluation, teachers' planning was based on the content of the textbooks and in most classes, reading activities were based on the textbooks. The report also emphasised negative effects of the use of textbooks on teachers' practice signifying that

sometimes teachers did not reflect appropriately on the suitability of the content for the class and the pupils consequently, did not perform as well as expected and no provision was made for the specific learning needs of pupils (DES 2007, p.31). This is a stark finding and further evidence to support the need for allowing time for teachers to make sense of curricular documentation and the transfer into planning and indeed practice.

3.5.4 The role of the teacher as 'curriculum maker'

The agentic practitioner is in control of his or her own goals and actions and, as Bandura- psychologist and inventor of the term agentic states, should be self-organising, proactive, self-reflecting and self-regulated individuals (Bandura 2006). In this way, and as Reeve and Tseng (2011) outline, agentic teachers (and students) become proactive, intentional, and constructive in their contribution to the flow of the learning activity, enriching the learning experience rather than passively receiving it as a given. This greater autonomy afforded to the Irish primary school practitioner under the remit of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) positions teachers now, more than ever before, as agentic curriculum makers.

> Be sure and give teachers the time to explore and process what is important in terms of new learning, new approaches and a new philosophy…just as our students need to explore deeply rather than experience speedy surface coverage, our teachers deserve the same.
>
> (Steve McWilliams, principal, cited in Lent & Voigt 2019, p. 164)

It is clear that students are better equipped as effective learners when the adults in the school are actively, collaboratively and publicly learning too (Fahey *et al.* 2019). In this respect, and in order for the likes of disciplinary literacy to become a reality in classrooms, teachers need to first invest in their own professional learning and inquiry. This, in turn will allow educators to create and deliver authentic disciplinary literacy experiences for their students. Supportive measures will be a necessity if this is to come to fruition. See Appendix 13 for suggested supportive measures as

proposed by the NCCA. So too, and concurring with Burke & Lehane (Burke & Lehane 2023a, p. 99), 'a teacher's agency for curriculum integration is highly influenced by the availability of sufficient time and resources' (Burke & Lehane 2023a, p. 99). Discourse around this issue can be viewed in Chapter 5.

3.5.5 Challenges facing educators

The NCCA have presented eight overarching principles of teaching and learning that schools need to consider in pursuing the curriculum vision- transitions and continuity, relationships, pedagogy, partnerships, learning environments, inclusive education and diversity, engagement, assessment and progression (NCCA 2020). For the purpose of this review and this section on TPPTL, the researcher will hone in on one of these principles: pedagogy. The framework outlines that within pedagogy teachers in their planning should 'use appropriate and evidence-based pedagogical approaches and strategies to foster engagement, ownership and challenge while connecting with children's life experiences and their interests' (NCCA 2020, p.6). In terms of this study, with its focus on DL, Burke and Welsh (2018) note that teaching literacy from a disciplinary perspective would present a number of challenges for the Irish school context. If disciplinary literacy was to be a more prominent feature in the primary curriculum, the professional development needs of teachers would warrant careful consideration. Disciplinary literacy wields demands on practitioner pedagogical content knowledge (Carney and Indrisano 2013; Love 2009). Therefore, preparation for disciplinary literacy requires the establishment of deep and meaningful connections amongst the discipline and related literacy practices (Fang 2023; 2013). Correlating this, the NCCA (2020) have outlined seven key competencies designed 'to equip children with the essential knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values which enable them to adapt and deal with a range

of situations, challenges and contexts in support of broader learning goals' (NCCA 2020, pp.7-10). One of the challenges facing teachers is how does this transpire to planning and practice?

Figure 16: Primary Curriculum Framework: Key competencies (NCCA 2020)

If one were to look at the key competencies figure outlined above in Figure 16, through the lens of disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books, key links can be applied for usage at primary level. Such links can be explored in greater detail in Appendix 14. These sort of connections require in-depth teacher planning and reflection. By pulling apart a figure like that of the competencies outlined above; and framing it in a particular lens, one can strive to make meaningful connections and applications to teaching and learning in order to improve explicit learning outcomes. But, have teachers not always been planning across the curriculum and using picturebooks?

3.5.6 Teacher planning for cross-curricular integration

Conceptual framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory- The Mesosystem- Practitioners in education and their influence on the child.

> Teachers often feel that the breadth and depth of understanding required for the number of disciplines involved in primary education can be a significant barrier to their work with curriculum integration.
>
> (Burke & Lehane 2023a, p. 109)

Traditionally, cross curricular planning has a regular heading in teacher's planning documents. Teachers have always strived to connect curricular content whether it be thematically or loosely linked (Curriculum na Bunscoile 1999, Planning documents). The transition towards disciplinary literacy across the curriculum would carry a number of potential advantages. Burke and Welsh (2018) note that disciplinary literacy, by its very nature requires intrinsic links between literacy and the different subject areas represented in the curriculum. Literacy, however must not become a mere add-on which can be universally applied to any content. Planning and preparation for a disciplinary literacy approach to teaching should come first in order to ensure that the 'intrinsic links' are substantial, well-considered and worthwhile. A disciplinary approach with its focus on important critical thinking and literacy skills also fosters an inquiry-based classroom culture. Moje (2007, cited in Ortileb 2024) states that linking disciplinary knowledge and literacy empowers young people to read, write and think critically. Furthermore, the application of literacy in authentic contexts for authentic purposes has been shown to motivate learners. It could also be argued that an explicit focus on language in the disciplines would aid the growing number of English language learners in Irish schools (Fang *et al.* 2014). Building on this, Burke and Lehane (2023a, pp. 106-107) say that there are three key considerations for curriculum integration: 1.Purpose, 2. Knowledge, 3. Responsiveness. The authors recommend that any statements of curriculum integration for the Irish primary context should refer to these three considerations and this should support teachers with the why as well as the what of curriculum integration. So too, they outline the importance of all partners in education having a shared understanding of what

integration means. This point is imperative in the understanding of concepts such as DL and their role in achieving purposeful curriculum integration.

3.5.7 Teacher planning- what should it look like?

> The starting point for educational planning is not a consideration of the nature of knowledge and/or the culture to be transmitted or a statement of the ends to be achieved, whether these be economic or behavioural, but from a concern with the nature of the child and with his or her development as a human being.
>
> (Kelly 2009, p. 44).

The *Guidelines on the Preparation for Teaching and Learning* (DES 2020) outlines a shift in the way in which teacher planning has traditionally been viewed. It speaks about *Circular Letter 0045/2019* which supports the introduction of the PLC/CTB (Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile). In this circular, there contains important messages regarding the curriculum. It introduces the language of 'preparation for teaching and learning' rather than the more conventional language of 'planning for teaching'. This guidance endeavours to provide a renewed understanding of preparation for teaching and learning, which is aligned with the *Looking at our Schools – A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (2016; 2022). This is an important development. Furthermore, Kelly (2009) outlines above that it is imperative that practitioners consider their starting point in their planning, that being the children presenting in front of them. Such consideration needs to be central in the effectiveness of TPPTL.

Preparation for teaching and learning henceforth is seen by the DES as triadic in nature. It involves invisible, visible and recorded preparation which can take place at the same time as well as before, during and after teaching and learning (Figure 18). All three are harmonising and essential to support the delivery of appropriate learning experiences for all pupils. It is further

noted that while invisible and visible preparation may not be recorded, it is important to acknowledge that all three components are equally valued. It will be important for teachers to be able to verbalise the later components for both self-clarity and accountability.

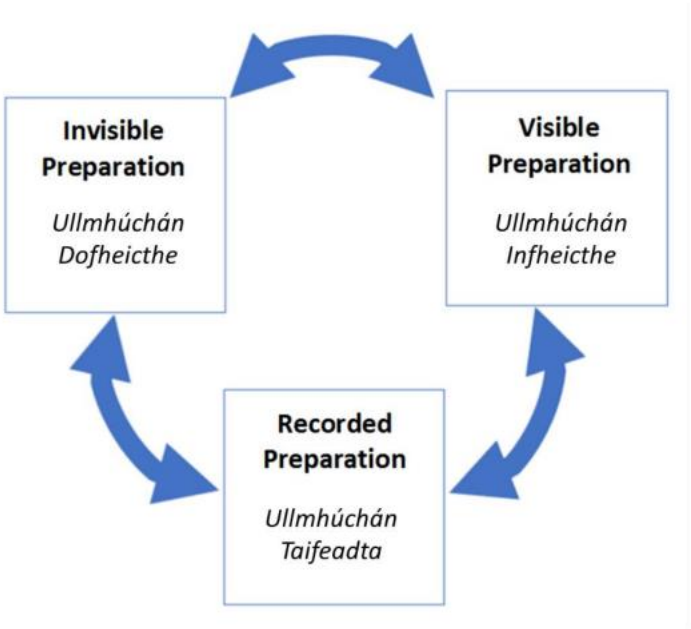


Figure 18: Types of Preparation for Teaching and Learning (NCCA 2020)

In Figure 19 below the key pillars for preparation for teaching and learning are displayed. The figure illustrates how teachers decisions about the teaching and learning that occur in their classrooms are shaped by key pillars which include: the teacher's knowledge of the children and their prior learning; their knowledge of the curriculum; and their knowledge of pedagogy. These pillars are of vast importance to this study as it will be important to factor in how teachers will use these pillars to guide their preparation for teaching and learning in order to effectively implement quality and purposeful learning experiences and thereby fulfilling learning outcomes right across the curriculum. This requires a shift towards metacognitive awareness on the teachers behalf,

through which teachers are aware of their professional decisions which will impact children's learning.

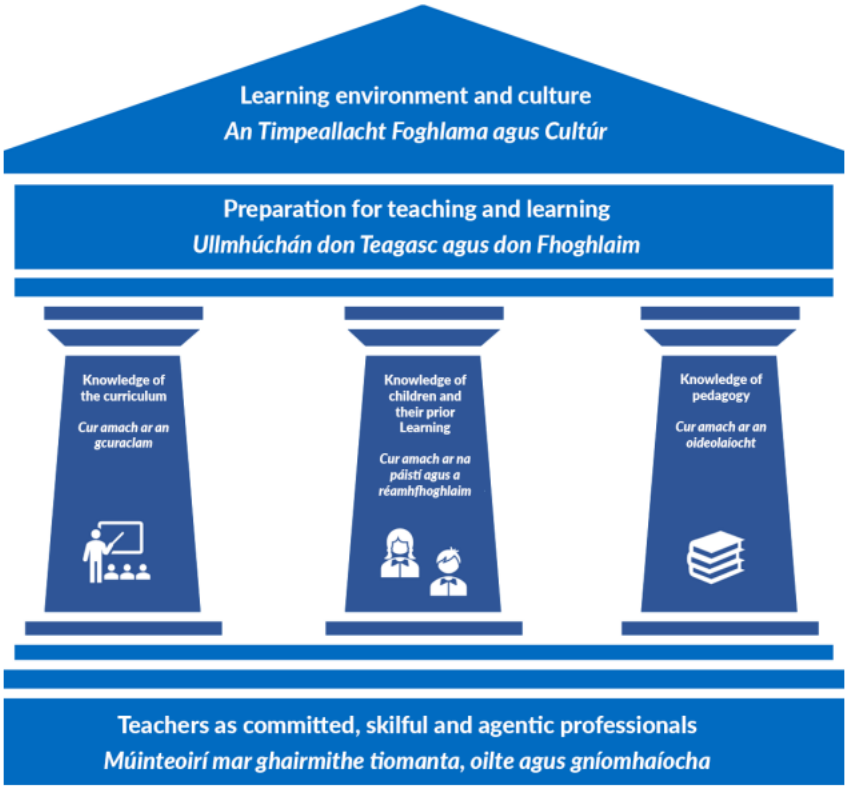


Figure 19: Pillars for the preparation for teaching and learning (NCCA 2020)

For the purpose of this study, the review looks more closely at two of the three pillars, namely, knowledge of the curriculum and knowledge of pedagogy and the cyclical nature of these in the planning and preparation for teaching and learning.

3.5.7.1 Knowledge of the curriculum

Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools (NCCA 2020) states that it is important for practitioners to take time to read and to become familiar with

the curriculum as this is a central step in a teacher's preparation for teaching and learning. Curriculum study includes a knowledge of the underpinning rationale and aims and the approaches to teaching and learning supported by the curriculum. The rationale and focus of each learning outcome, as well as the links that can be made across elements and strands or indeed across other curriculum areas is also a step in this knowledge acquisition. It is this transfer of skills and interdisciplinary type learning which is at the heart of this study. The document further acknowledges that as familiarisation deepens through increased engagement, teachers will begin to internalise this knowledge and develop an understanding of the curriculum through experience and reflection. Using this approach, teachers come to interpret curriculum learning outcomes in ways appropriate to their school contexts and the needs of their pupils. This study sought to investigate how this interpretation differs from school to school and the potential impact this has on curriculum implantation.

3.5.7.2 Knowledge of Pedagogy

According to the Oxford dictionary, pedagogy is defined as 'the art, occupation, or practice of teaching; the theory or principles of education; a method of teaching based on such a theory' (OED, 2024). Pedagogy shapes teachers' actions, words and decisions. It is not stationary; it develops and is deepened through reflection on practice, discussions with colleagues, and continuous professional development. This supposition raises many questions as an experienced practitioner. When does this reflection occur? Are staffroom discussions happening across the nation right in such a manner? How much are teachers engaging with professional development? An understanding of pedagogical approaches is undoubtedly important in creating appropriate and

engaging learning experiences, however one must question how this understanding differs from school to school depending on a number of variables. *Preparation for Teaching and Learning - Guidance for All Primary and Special Schools* (2020) says that teachers' knowledge of content is vital in order for teachers to exercise their agency and efficacy. This is what is necessary for reform. Teachers must be the enablers. They must be empowered to make decisions based on the assurance that they are upholding the key pillars aforementioned and feel confident in their preparation for the teaching and learning that occurs in their classrooms. How will this happen? Intensive professional development and guidance needs to be compulsory for this to become a reality. The reinstatement of curricular posts of responsibility, as advocated by the INTO, is also vital as schools need disciplinary leaders who work together and individually to upskill and lead their staff to this point of confidence. Only then can TPPTL be truly enhanced.

3.5.8 The role of the librarian in TPPTL

Librarians can play a crucial role in assisting teachers with the planning and preparation for teaching and learning using picture books and integrating DL. Librarians can curate a list of picture books that align with various subjects such as science, history, mathematics, and wellbeing. For example, a picture book about the life cycle of a butterfly can be used in a science class. Librarians can organise books into thematic collections that align with curriculum topics. For instance, they might create a collection on environmental awareness, cultural diversity, or historical events. Librarians are skilled in selecting books that are appropriate for different age groups and reading levels. They can recommend books that challenge students without causing frustration. By providing books that offer diverse perspectives, librarians help teachers introduce students to

different cultures, experiences, and viewpoints, fostering inclusivity and empathy. Librarians play a crucial role in enhancing students' language skills through the careful selection of picture books that feature rich and varied vocabulary. By suggesting books that align with the curriculum yet also emphasise language development, such as those explaining scientific concepts in accessible language, librarians can help integrate language learning across various subjects. This approach not only enriches students' understanding of the subject matter but also reinforces their linguistic development, making picture books a versatile tool in education.

In Ireland, the role of libraries in primary education is recognised within the policy framework, with a focus on integrating library resources into the curriculum. The *Irish Primary School Curriculum* encourages the use of a variety of resources, including libraries, to enhance the learning experience. However, access to libraries and the involvement of librarians can differ significantly from one school to another, depending on local resources and policies. In contrast, the UK places a stronger emphasis on the role of school libraries in supporting literacy and learning. The *National Curriculum in England* explicitly highlights the importance of libraries in educational settings, advocating for their role in enhancing student learning. Many UK schools employ dedicated librarians who work closely with teachers to support curriculum delivery and foster students' reading habits. The *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals* (CILIP) in the UK provides detailed guidelines on how school libraries can effectively support teaching and learning, further institutionalising the role of libraries in education. The differences between the two countries are notable. UK policies generally provide more structured support and resources for school libraries compared to those in Ireland. This includes the more formalised role of professional librarians within schools, who actively collaborate with teachers to enhance

educational outcomes. In Ireland, the presence and role of librarians is less formalised, varying widely depending on individual school policies and the availability of resources.

Beyond the scope of this study, further insights into the importance of librarian-teacher collaboration and the impact of library resources on student outcomes can be found in the works of Loertscher (2018); Lonsdale (2003), and Lance & Kachel (2018). These studies emphasise the value of integrating librarians into the educational process to maximise the benefits of library resources. This study argues that librarians are invaluable allies for teachers in planning and preparing lessons that utilise picture books effectively. By selecting appropriate books, focusing on language development, and understanding the policy contexts in which they operate, librarians can significantly enhance the educational experience for students. The differences in policy between Ireland and the UK highlight the varying degrees of integration and support for libraries in primary education, yet both countries acknowledge the potential benefits of librarian-teacher collaboration. Through such collaboration, the use of picture books in education can be optimised, leading to enriched learning experiences and improved language skills for students.

3.5.9 Concluding comment on theme 2

Section two of this review has detailed the position of teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning in the Irish primary setting. It called on a series of key documents to showcase the Department of Education and policy-makers perspectives on what the planning and preparation for T & L should look like. It platformed the role of the librarian as a valuable asset in the development of TPPTL. Having surveyed the concept of TPPTL, the review will now shift its focus to the third prong in this research study-disciplinary literacy. It will explore the concept of DL and examine the discrepancies between content literacy and interdisciplinary literacy

compared with disciplinary literacy. Following this, it will endeavour to ascertain; through research and policy, the place for disciplinary literacy in the primary classroom setting.

3.6 Theme Three: Disciplinary Literacy

Conceptual framework: Academic literacies

> 'Disciplinary literacy matters. And it matters to every teacher and pupil. Indeed, success in each and every classroom depends upon it'
>
> (Quigley in Mortimore 2020, p.3).

Disciplinary literacy (DL) is an evolving concept in the Irish education sphere. It is founded on the premise that literacy and text are specialised across the disciplines. It involves the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills specific to a given subject. It is a process of layered instruction. Its roots lie in secondary and third level education (Lee & Spratley 2010) however in recent years, there have been studies and recommendations to suggest that the adoption of a DL approach should begin in the primary years of schooling (Shanahan & Shanahan 2012). On the Irish shoreline, disciplinary literacy saw its first mention in curricular documentation with the publication of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019). In 2023, the PDST issued a webinar entitled *Disciplinary literacy* which necessitated a compulsory half-day school closure for primary practitioners nationwide to engage with.

3.6.1 Defining disciplinary literacy

Shanahan, & Shanahan, (2008), perhaps the 'founding fathers' of disciplinary literacy in the primary context, depict that disciplinary literacy may be viewed as 'specialized reading routines and language uses'. For them, DL is a set of 'literacy skills specialised to history, science, mathematics, literature, or other subject matter' (Shanahan & Shanahan 2008, p. 44). They make

clear that DL is ‘an emphasis on the knowledge and abilities possessed by those who create, communicate, and use knowledge within the discipline’ (Shanahan & Shanahan 2012, p. 8). In a recent review of literature relating to disciplinary literacy, Burke and Welsh (2018) reported that the disciplinary literacy approach requires literacy teaching to fulfil the needs of a particular discipline, complementing and enhancing the modes of thinking and communicating that are characteristic within that discipline (Moje 2007; 2008, Shanahan and Shanahan 2008; Siebert *et al.* 2016). Similarly, Brozo (2017) illuminates the fact that being literate in a discipline requires knowledge of disciplinary content and the ability to read, write, think, and reason with texts in discipline-specific ways. By using a literacy-based skillset, practitioners can, for example, assist pupils to add background knowledge to a scientific inquiry or provide authentic primary and secondary sources in an historical investigation. Afterall, the first aim listed in the PLC (NCCA 2019) is ‘to support teachers to enable children to build on prior knowledge and experience of language to enhance their language learning’ (NCCA 2019, p. 12).

Significantly, Lent & Voigt (2019) declare that the term ‘disciplinary literacy’ is still unfamiliar to many educators, most particularly those in the primary school setting. In their research, they have discovered that some educators believed that the term had something to do with classroom management. Interestingly, some educators suggested that the phrase would be more accurately namedas ‘disciplinary learning’. For Lent & Voigt (2019) ‘the heart of disciplinary literacy is an understanding of the ways in which knowledge is constructed in each content area and how literacy supports that knowledge in discipline-specific ways’ (Lent & Voigt 2019, p.10). Furthermore, Lee & Spratley (2010) outline that learning to read in discipline specific ways does not need to interfere with learning content. In fact, they argue quite the reverse:

> It is possible to integrate reading instruction in content area courses that accomplish two important ends: (1) meet the needs of students with an array of reading abilities simultaneously and (2) teach all students to reason in the complex ways that the disciplines require.
>
> (Lee & Spratley 2010, p. 9).

Furthermore, Ippolito *et al*. (2019) in their body of research in the USA denote that disciplinary literacy is critical due to a number of factors:

1.	State standards have such high expectations for students literacy abilities-especially being able to read complex text and write about what they know
2.	Career demands require greater literacy skills than before
3.	Diversity and differences in children of the twenty-first century

Table 6: Ippolito and disciplinary literacy (adapted from Ippolito *et al.* 2019, p. xii-xiii)

According to Ippolito *et al.* (2019) teachers are finding that children do not have a discipline specific and general lexicon and are not able to freely move and dance with words. They suggest that disciplinary literacy matters because that is how life is for children, youth and adult learners of today.

3.6.2 Disciplinary literacy and learning dispositions

Building on Lee & Spratley's vision, McConachie & Petrosky (2010) denote that:

> a discipline's content and habits of thinking always go hand in hand. Habits of thinking occur in disciplinary ways of reading, writing, reasoning, and talking. So the big questions for schooling have to do with the ways in which teaching in the core disciplines supports students as they work on problems situated in the content and habits of thinking of the disciplines.
>
> (McConachie & Petrosky 2010, pp. 6–7).

This concept of learning dispositions or habits of mind resonates with my reading of the *Primary Language Curriculum* in its initial draft, as it sought to make purposeful links to the *Aistear Framework* (NCCA 2009) within which enduring habits of mind are outlined as central to the framework's success. Learning dispositions refer to the way in which learners engage in and relate

to the learning process. The importance of these dispositions affect how students approach learning and therefore the outcomes of their learning. The New South Wales government website indicates that development of these dispositions is vital for pupils to build as they navigate to build an awareness of the way they learn and establish lasting attitudes to learning, an essential part in enabling them to become lifelong learners. Some of these dispositions include persistence, agility and flexibility, motivation and drive to learn, metacognition (thinking about thinking) and problem-solving and questioning. In the PLC, these dispositions are claimed to be 'at the heart of language learning outcomes in this curriculum' (NCCA 2019). Aistear defines dispositions as enduring habits of mind and action and states that 'a disposition is the tendency to respond to situations in characteristic ways' (NCCA 2009, p.54), including independence, curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resilience and resourcefulness. Figure 20 shows a snapshot from the *Aistear Framework* (NCCA 2009), listing the dispositions, which are fundamental foundations to the success of higher order skills such as disciplinary literacy.

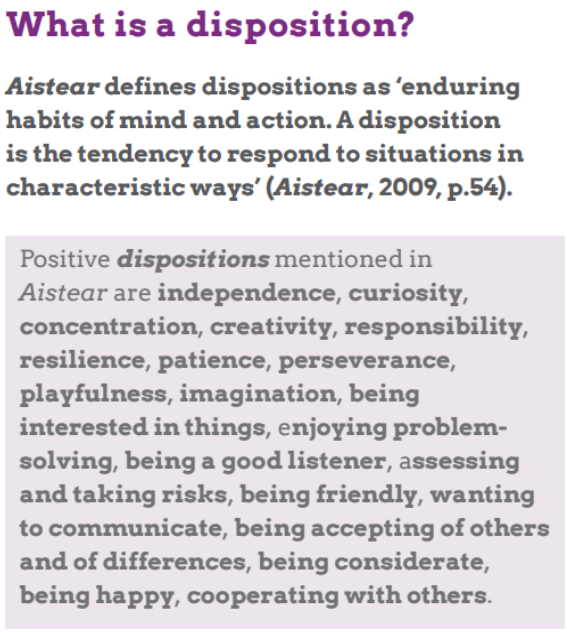


Figure 20: Aistear Framework: Dispositions (NCCA 2009)

Disciplinary literacy enables the fostering of such dispositions to take place. Moje. (2015) declares that [in order] ‘to teach disciplinary literacy, teachers need to involve learners in inquiry that allows the learner to gain insight into how questions are asked and examined and how conclusions are drawn, supported, communicated, contested, and defended’ (Moje 2015, p. 257). This is exactly what the inquiry-based curricular model of Aistearsuggests. Furthermore, Rainey *et al.* (2018, p.371) discuss disciplinary literacy practices as the language and symbolic tools that members of academic disciplines (e.g., biology, philosophy, musical theatre, architecture and design, psychology) employ to create knowledge collaboratively. In the pursuit of knowledge production, all experts in these disciplines engage in cycles of inquiry. This process involves formulating questions or problems, conducting investigations using discipline-specific methods, communicating their findings to specific audiences, and evaluating their own claims and those of others.

3.6.3 DL: The ‘outside in’ versus ‘inside out’ approach

William Brozo, in his presentation at the *European Conference on Literacy*, Dublin 2022, outlined his current thinking about disciplinary literacy, detailing his first encounter with DL when he was confronted with an obstacle in a chemistry class and was told ‘You gotta read like a chemist, Bill’. It was then he realised that effective reading skills are not always enough when it comes to negotiating complex, domain specific texts. Brozo (2013) presented an ‘outside in’ versus ‘inside out’ approach in his attempt to help define disciplinary literacy in practice (See Figure 21). In his *Generic Reading Strategy* approach: Outside in; we observe an infusion approach, one which educators globally will use since it embodies traditional approaches to teaching and learning including vocabulary cards, content area texts and anticipation guides. Here there is content,

formulas and strategies which educators ‘outside in’ them to achieve the lesson content. This is not a disciplinary literacy approach. Generic content literacy strategies as Brozo (2013) outlines, often create roadblocks for the teachers of disciplines. They do not lend themselves to the discoursing and language in the disciplines and teachers can become resistant to the approach. On the other hand, educators can allow the content itself to inform how they think, reason and write. Effective subject area teachers engage ‘inside out’ literacy practices organic to their discipline and cannot be improved upon with generic literacy strategies (Draper 2008). In this mode, educators do not start with strategies or formulas but rather with the text. This approach is comparable with this study as it adopts an ‘inside out’ style similar to that outlined by Brozo (2013), as it explores the capacity of picture books within disciplinary literacy in the Irish primary classroom. In this way, educators have an opportunity at this present moment, amidst Irish curricular change, to add to the knowledge base and be curriculum makers. As Allen Curnow (1942) envisioned, simply by sailing in a new direction you could enlarge the world.

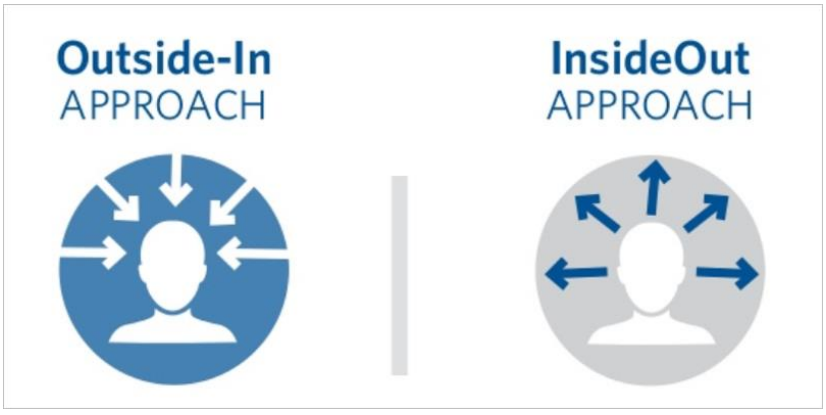


Figure 21: Outside in V’s Inside Out Approach, Brozo 2022

3.6.4. Interdisciplinary literacy Vs disciplinary literacy Vs Transdisciplinary literacy

Lent & Voigt (2019) say that in Canada interdisciplinary literacy is an umbrella term for disciplinary literacy because 'some teachers want to emphasise the importance of literacy within disciplines as well as across them' (Lent *et al.* 2019, p.10). They also highlight the benefits of focussing on disciplinary literacy through interdisciplinary teams in which a community of members of a discipline come together to engage in disciplinary dialogue. This finding has led to the supposition that a professional learning community would be a productive instrument for my research in so far as that the participants needed to upskill somewhat in this area due to the relative newness of the ideology of DL in the primary setting. Interdisciplinary literacy is the ability to critique disciplinary cultures and work effectively across disciplines. Ippolito *et al.* (2019) declare that we are an interdisciplinary society. Educators must be enabled to understand the language of historians and the way that a scientist thinks and the way a mathematician analyses a problem. Educators need to understand disciplinary literacy in order to build creative, critical thinkers and problem solvers. Individuals working in particular disciplines can often struggle to hear and understand the perspectives of those working in other disciplines. This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic which saw medical professionals, scientists, world leaders, educationalists, consumers and many others with differing disciplinary backgrounds conflicting as they sought to understand the medical science behind the virus. Thus, the skills and knowledge which are necessary to enable different disciplines to effectively work together – interdisciplinary literacy – formulates an integral and necessary part of teaching and learning.

3.6.4.1 Fostering a transdisciplinary mindset

Conceptual Framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory-the Microsystem

Transdisciplinary learning involves exploring relevant concepts, issues, or problems by integrating viewpoints from multiple disciplines to connect new knowledge and gain deeper understanding in real-life contexts. In a transdisciplinary environment, best practices avoid compartmentalising learning and instead focus on exploring content through inquiry. As Shenton & Hay-Bibson (2011) suggest, for successful transdisciplinary learning, collaboration and involvement of all participants is essential. It is important to recognise that the primary purpose of transdisciplinary learning is to comprehend the world beyond the traditional school setting, applying knowledge to real-life situations. Transdisciplinary learning goes beyond the confines of individual subjects, connecting with the real world and understanding the present global context (Philipp & Schmohl 2023; Fam *et al.* 2018). Figure 22 below presents a structured approach to fostering a transdisciplinary approach, exploring competency domains, pedagogy, philosophy, process and mindset. This approach aligns with how children naturally learn through play, creation, questioning, and exploration to make sense of their lives, people, places, and events. Therefore, this mindset reflects the habits of mind referred to earlier in the *Aistear framework* (NCCA 2009). Furthermore, Ojamaa *et al*. (2019) highlight the value of a transdisciplinary pedagogy for methodical translation of the theoretical concepts into practical solutions in teaching and learning culture. Efforts to decipher and bring such an ideology from theory to practice is reflective of the aims of this study.

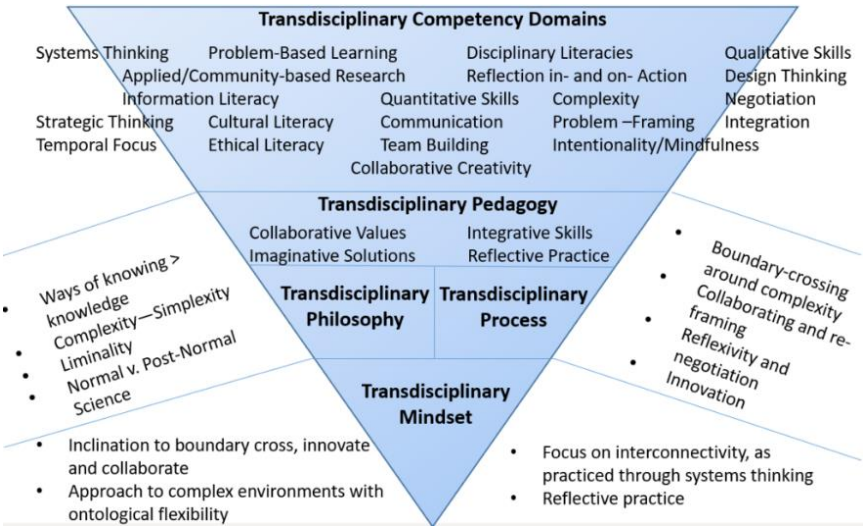


Figure 22: Transdisciplinary Studies, Claremont Graduate University

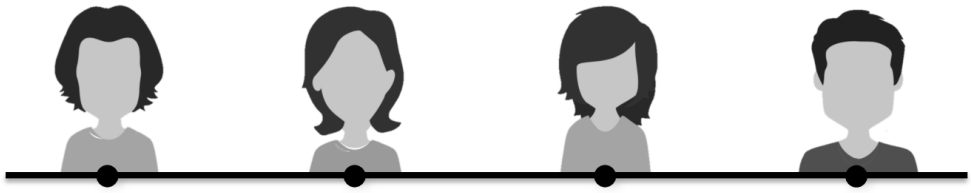
3.6.6 Content area literacy instruction Vs disciplinary literacy

Content area literacy has existed for over a hundred years (Jacobs 2008). It focusses on the acquisition and application of general reading comprehension strategies across disciplines to support reading and writing (Ippolito *et al.* 2019) It concentrates on the general literacy skills necessary to help students to obtain content knowledge. Brozo *et al.* (2013) and Dobbs *et al.* (2016; 2017a; 2017b; 2020), argue that a layer of disciplinary literacy instruction must be added to a strong foundation of content-area instruction in order to best support the advanced literacy work required of students as adolescents, university students and beyond. Appendix 15, offers a comprehensive comparison of the two concepts, highlighting the similarities and differences between content area literacy and disciplinary literacy.

An historian uses the skill of investigation as she seeks to understand events, perspectives, contexts and language. A scientist adopts an evaluative skillset, examining evidence, explanations, hypotheses, new understandings and data. A mathematician then works in symbols and abstract ideas, looking for patterns and solutions (Lent & Voigt 2019). Quigley in Mortimore (2020, p.5)

outlines that many teachers of discipline specific subjects can lack the confidence to address literacy barriers and to best manage students' needs in their subject domain. It is the nuanced-specific strategies that are needed to explicitly teach oral language, reading and writing in each discipline which often go untaught and misunderstood by practitioners. It is evident that much professional development needs to occur in order to accelerate what is deemed as best practice into actual practice in every day classrooms. With the paradigm shift in educational reform in Irish primary schools at present, a disciplinary mindset needs to be evoked by practitioners on a national scale.

3.6.5 What is disciplinary thinking?



Alex: Disciplinary Latent	Lisa: Disciplinary Emergent	Taylor: Disciplinary Realized	Ryan: Disciplinary Applied
Alex does not define disciplinary literacy. She conceives of literacy instruction as a blend of general and disciplinary approaches to reading and thinking, though she does not explicitly discern the difference. There is no formal attribution to the influence of disciplinary experts.	Lisa defines disciplinary literacy skills as reading, writing, and thinking like a disciplinary expert. Lisa promotes discipline-specific thinking skills, though she not does call it that. Lisa does not attribute any specific skills to the work of disciplinary experts. Her approaches to teaching literacy are general in nature (e.g., identify main idea).	Taylor defines disciplinary literacy as the impact that the work of disciplinary experts can have on classroom literacy. Taylor asks her students to read and think like a variety of disciplinary experts. She does not formally teach students how to act like an expert, instead relying on her own thinking aloud in front of students.	Ryan defines disciplinary literacy as adopting the approaches of disciplinary experts. Ryan creates disciplinary reading protocols (e.g., bookmark with discipline-focused questions) to demonstrate disciplinary thinking. Ryan supports his students to investigate the work that disciplinary experts do and provides models of this work.

Figure 23: Supporting Teacher Learning about Disciplinary Literacy: An Exploration of Professional Development, Social Studies Teachers' Thinking, and Inherent Challenges (Aumen 2017)

Disciplinary literacy provides the necessary scaffolding for students, especially those struggling with disciplinary thinking and with reading and writing complex and abstract texts (Hynd-Shanahan 2013; Schieppegrell & de Oliveria 2006). But what is disciplinary thinking? Disciplinary thinking can be viewed as a schema for thinking which incorporates thinking across the disciplines and making associations between disciplines. This involves linking concepts or disciplinary content in diverse areas which are frequently thought of as unrelated, but with connections and associations that allow each distinct area to better describe the other. Figure 23 above shows the different stages in disciplinary thinking by showing how each student thinks at the latent, emergent, realised and applied stages. Such stages require explicit teacher modelling and the gradual release of responsibility as advocated by Pearson and Gallagher (1983). Metacognition and drawing the pupils awareness to how their brain is thinking as they are thinking and learning is the success path toward effective disciplinary thinking and learning. Such is the overarching concept for this research, outlined in the conceptual framework in Chapter Two.

3.6.7 Cross curricular integration

Cross curricular integration has been a staple heading in the planning documents of Irish primary teachers since the 1999 curriculum. Thematic and topic planning using core text books has been the primary source of this integration for many years. With the shift to digital media, there came a new mode of curricular integration in the past decade which enhanced curricular integration to include video clips and PowerPoint presentations. With the adoption of WALT (we are learning to) and WILF (what I'm looking for) strategies in many classrooms nationwide students began to explicitly see the link between subjects, topics and strategies used to teach, learn and create

connections between subjects. The PLC in its section 2.1 Language shapes who we are, declares that:

> language learning has significance for children's learning across the curriculum. While children continue to learn and acquire language, they also learn through language. Each curriculum area has its own terminology and its own way of using language; therefore, every lesson is a language lesson in itself.
>
> (*Primary Language Curriculum*, NCCA 2019, p. 18)

Cross-curricular learning is often referred to in curriculum documents, in place of or alongside integrated learning. However, there is little conceptual precision and steadiness in the use of such terms internationally. It is noteworthy that teachers, in a review of the Irish primary curriculum, reported that children's textbooks/workbooks were more helpful than the curriculum for classroom planning. This is an important discovery. Teachers were critical of the sheer breadth and depth of the curriculum. They reported finding it difficult to navigate and to access across subjects and levels (NCCA 2010). There are echoes of this finding in current reform proceedings. In Pepper's (2008) study, cross-curricular competencies were highlighted. This is a consideration is the nature of the primary teacher's work. INCA (2003) says that most primary teachers are generalists and there has always been a degree of overlap between subject areas (INCA 2003, p.7). The primary practitioner is advised to think across subject boundaries, and though this may encourage greater integration, it almost unavoidably results in overlap or duplication (NCCA 2010).

3.6.8 The role of language and DL

The PLC's rationale states that:

> language enables children to engage emotionally, socially, cognitively, imaginatively and aesthetically in relationships and cultural experiences. It empowers children to develop their thinking, expression, reflection, critique and empathy, and it supports the development of self-efficacy, identity and full participation in society.
>
> (NCCA 2019, p.7)

This language needs to be explicitly taught through meaningful contexts, as this study set out to examine. The curriculum supports that learning, language and literacy are closely intertwined. The tools that are provided by language will support learning in a way that extends across and beyond the school day. These are life-long learning skills. Looking across the curriculum, we can see that important concepts, dispositions and skills influence how we communicate in different subjects. For example, explaining a food chain in science requires vocabulary and language structures that are quite different to those used to describe the elements present in a musical composition. The texts associated with the visual arts can be contrasted with the print-based text structures children might encounter in a novel. Comprehending a primary source in history requires skills that are different to those needed to appreciate a poem. The comparisons are endless yet the comparisons need to be explicitly made.

Disciplines communicate in different ways. Teaching language and literacy throughout the curriculum, in a manner that supports thinking and learning in different subjects, is termed disciplinary literacy. Learning in other curriculum areas offers rich potential for the meaningful and critical application of language and literacy skills. Engaging children in inquiry in another subject gives an authentic context for development in oral language, reading and writing. Planning for, and teaching language in an explicit way will support both linguistic development and understanding of a discipline. The *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019), encourages the integration of language and subject-based learning across the school day, week and year (NCCA 2019, p. 48). It is in the hands of educators to adopt the principles and vision set out in the curriculum and indeed management teams to lead and develop this vision within individual schools nationwide. However, despite such clear vision and rationale afforded by the PLC, the transfer into practice is something which warrants further investigation. It is through this study that the 'how'

of this ideology is explored. How can linguistic development and understanding of a discipline transfer into every day classroom practice? How can this integration be meaningfully planned for? Through what medium and through which resources is this best adopted?

3.6.8.1 The language of integration

Integration takes on a host of meanings, especially in the educational sphere. Thus, it is important to clarify its position within this research. Integration and inclusion are words that go hand in hand in the primary education sector. According to the NCSE's *Inclusive Education framework* (NCSE 2011) the difference is between being there and taking part, with integration prioritising the placement of pupils in particular settings and inclusion promoting actual participation and accommodation. The emphasis here is on the integration and inclusion of children with special educational needs in the primary classroom. On the other hand, the word integration, as used in this study is taken from the literal meaning, to blend, incorporate or integrate. In the context of this study, the blending, incorporation and integration of a multitude of subjects is observed through the lens of disciplinary literacy and through the mode of picturebooks. Within the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019), integration is defined in terms three key components, (i) the transfer of skills that occurs across languages (ii) teaching language in other curriculum areas (iii) interaction across the three strands of oral language, reading and writing. The second component here lends itself to disciplinary literacy and its key position in the face of the new curriculum. For an in-depth review on the concept of Integration, refer to the robust longitudinal studies of Burke and Lehane (2023a; 2023b).

3.6.8.2 Language and DL in Irish policy and curricula

The *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011 – 2020* (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2011) set out a curriculum reform agenda. 2019 saw the introduction of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019), and within it saw the first mention of the term disciplinary literacy. Looking across the curriculum document, we can see that important concepts, dispositions and skills influence how we communicate in different subjects. The PLC sets forth its vision on the development of language across the strands of oral language, reading and writing. The elements of language learning across each of the strands are:

1. Developing communicative relationships through language
2. Understanding the content and structure of language
3. Exploring and using language.

Table 7: Elements of language learning across the strands of the Primary Language Curriculum

This language learning does not stop when a literacy lesson is complete. Indeed the elements of language learning span right across the curriculum as students communicate, understand and explore language in all subjects on a daily basis at school. Metacognitively, students are often unaware of the connection between this language learning as it translates to other subjects but as the curriculum states 'a web of interconnections exists, not only among the elements but also across the strands' (DES 2019, p. 31). I would argue these interconnections exist across all subjects which can be illuminated through the teaching of disciplinary literacy. The curriculum states that 'teaching language and literacy throughout the curriculum, in a manner that supports thinking and learning in different subjects, is termed disciplinary literacy' (NCCA 2019, p.48). On page 48 of

the curriculum document we see two paragraphs afforded to disciplinary literacy, and so, the predominantly secondary role of DL is seen here; planting its roots in the primary school curriculum. The paragraphs (see Appendix 16), are pertinent to this research as they pinpoint the intersection of this study-investigating the position of disciplinary literacy within the Irish primary school context and the planning, teaching and language needed to support the development and understanding of a DL approach, engaging children in inquiry and in the meaningful and critical application of language and literacy skills.

3.6.9 Disciplinary literacy- a secondary school issue?

> Children learn about a lot of 'stuff' across the curriculum. It is very broad. This knowledge is probably contributing to literacy outcomes, but disciplinary literacy can be quite difficult to teach.
>
> (Burke cited in Buckingham 2024, p.36)

Conceptual framework: Academic literacies

Disciplinary literacy is traditionally rooted in the secondary and university academic years. However, a growing number of researchers are assessing the importance of disciplinary literacy in the early years (P. David Pearson, Diane Lapp, Barbara A. Baker, Timothy Shanahan, Susan Hill). Young children can practice the skills of close observation and description used by scientists and communicate these observations and descriptions through writing, speaking or drawing (Condie & Ippolito 2016; Ippolito *et al.* 2018; Ippolito, Condie *et al*. 2017). It is pertinent to view disciplinary literacy through the lens of a 'crosswalk mindset' as advocated by Ippolito *et al.* 2019. Educators are often cross walking through a continuum of language and learning with their students. Similarly, the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) seeks to foster alignment and continuity between pre-school, primary and secondary education, encapsulating a crosswalk mindset as a core principle. In secondary schools, content area teachers often have to defend their

own instructional goals (Ippolito *et al.* 2019). Practitioners recognise the importance of literacy and how it plays a central role to their pupils understanding of their specific subject however these practitioners have content to cover and exams to prepare for, therefore how they approach literacy is not often tailored to the demands of the academic subject (Quigley in Mortimore 2020). Research reveals that students tend not to understand the nuances associated with the various disciplines unless they are explicitly taught (Stahl *et al.* 1996). Shanahan and Shanahan (2014) explain that elementary teachers can begin to prepare students for disciplinary reading by helping them distinguish among the texts. Burke (cited in Buckingham 2024), outlines in the opening quote of this section how disciplinary literacy is a difficult thing to teach. This study sought to find ways to simplify this.

3.6.9.1 Teaching DL in a child friendly way

Taking what was a predominantly used approach in second and third level education and applying it to a primary school context, must be done with great care and consideration. Reinforcing the 'Goldilocks effect' (Hess & Waring 1978), See Figure 24 below, it is essential that DL is taught in a manner that is not too easy, not too difficult but just right.

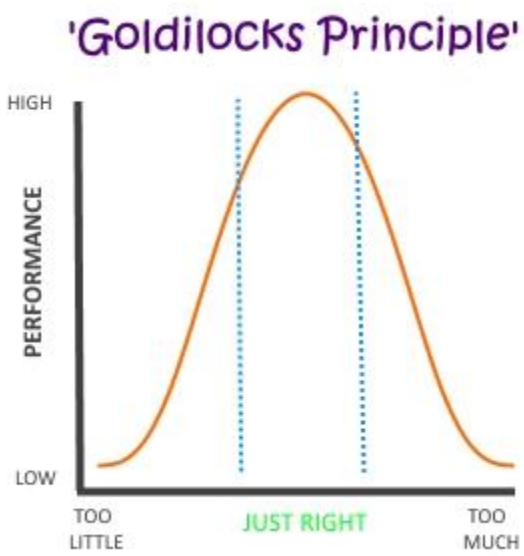


Figure 24: The Goldilocks Principle, Hess & Waring 1978

The old proverb states 'you can't put an old head on young shoulders'. This principle rings true in the instance of this research. It is imperative that the premise of DL in its current perch in the second and third level settings, is not forced upon young minds in a complex way. As Shanahan and Shanahan (2014) depict, on one side, it could be argued that, although there is no cognitive cause for any delay; children can start to think like scientists or historians from an early age, there simply is not much reason to promote such ideas early on, since texts do not give much opportunity for engaging in such thinking. On the other hand, what evidence is there to wait? As Shanahan & Shanahan (2014) argue, even young children can understand that two people may explain an event in different ways because of their different viewpoints. So too, they can create explanations and interpretations of a picture or artifact from the past. Therefore, it seems plausible that when texts do begin to differentiate, students will already have some of the habits of mind needed to interpret them in sophisticated ways. This correlates with the dispositions of mind that the PLC, nurtured by the *Aistear framework* (NCCA 2009) supports, as previously discussed. Undoubtedly, the

disciplines pose particular and unique literacy demands. Through explicit teaching opportunities, practitioners can help ensure that students will be ready to negotiate these gateways to college and career success. It is never too early (Shanahan & Shanahan 2014). How does one begin the process? Disciplinary thinking is a strong a starting point.

3.6.10 Overlap with disciplinary literacy and critical literacy

The PLC (NCCA 2019) sets forth its stance on critical literacy (CL) on page 49 of the document. Therein it declares that ‘meaningful and active engagement with literacy requires us to go beyond traditional conceptions of what it means to understand what we read’ (NCCA 2019, p.49). This understanding of what we read was traditionally known and taught as reading comprehension. Pupils encounter a range of texts in different forms and modes on a daily basis. The PLC goes on to say that it has become progressively more important for pupils to be aware of the underlying biases that impact the perspectives presented in these texts. As every text has been created by at least one author, every text is shaped and constructed by social factors. Critical readers not only understand what they are reading, they question it. This mentality is key to the dissemination of this study. Again, it promotes metacognition, the conscious awareness of thinking about what we are thinking while we are thinking it. As well as asking the questions outlined on page 48: Who is represented in the text? Who is not? What ideas are given prominence? What ideas are ignored?, this study seeks to give children the opportunity to ask critical thinking questions such as What genre is this text written in? What information do I learn from this text? What was the authors intent? How does this text enhance my learning of a given topic? In this way pupils are given the

autonomy to pose their own higher order thinking questions or respond critically to the questions of others.

Critical literacy requires 'actively identifying, analysing and challenging the perspectives offered in texts. It also involves questioning the influence of these viewpoints on our everyday lives' (NCCA 2019, p. 49). The curriculum states that from a teaching perspective, CL is supported by reading and listening to multiple texts, from multiple perspectives. This may include the perspective of an historian, a scientist, a mathematician, a humanitarian. In order to walk in the shoes of these disciplinarians, children must be shown how these people think, talk, came to be-understand and be compassionate toward the human side of the person in order to truly appreciate and critically evaluate their works. The curriculum explicitly states that teachers 'can facilitate critical literacy through carefully considering the texts that children encounter in their classroom and helping children to analyse who and what the texts represent.' This study argues that careful consideration of text choice is imperative to critical literary success. My own experience as research member of the nationally acclaimed programme, *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Courtney & Gleeson 2008), with its emphasis on Transactional strategy instruction (TSI), along with Roche's (2014) *Critical Thinking and Book Talk,* add shape to this teaching and learning approach. The curriculum vision is that children may be enabled to:

> produce texts that consider alternative perspectives, that challenge the norm, or that explore underrepresented voices. In applying their language and literacy skills in this way, they come to be active, thoughtful and critical contributors to the world in which they live.
> (NCCA 2019, p. 49)

By using picturebooks, students are able to consider such alternative perspectives, applying their language and literacy skills across subject matter.

3.6.11 Transfer into practice: The Irish context

PDST, in their series of eight webinars which have been delivered on a compulsory basis to primary schools nationwide in an effort to embed the PLC with classroom planning and practice, have dedicated one such session to the area of Critical Literacy and another to that of Disciplinary literacy. Thus professional development in this area has been obligatory.

In the Critical literacy webinar we again see the mention of disciplinary literacy (both in the English and Irish language). The slide is labelled *The Primary Language Curriculum in Practice,* (See Figure 26), suggesting and that components outlined therein represent the essential elements of achieving the aims and indeed learning outcomes of the PLC. Important to note, DL is ranked alongside the overarching components such as *Content and Language Integrated Learning* and the *Transfer of Skills* as key components in the effective delivery of the PLC. There is a distinct overlap between each of these concepts, one which this piece of research sought to examine in further detail.

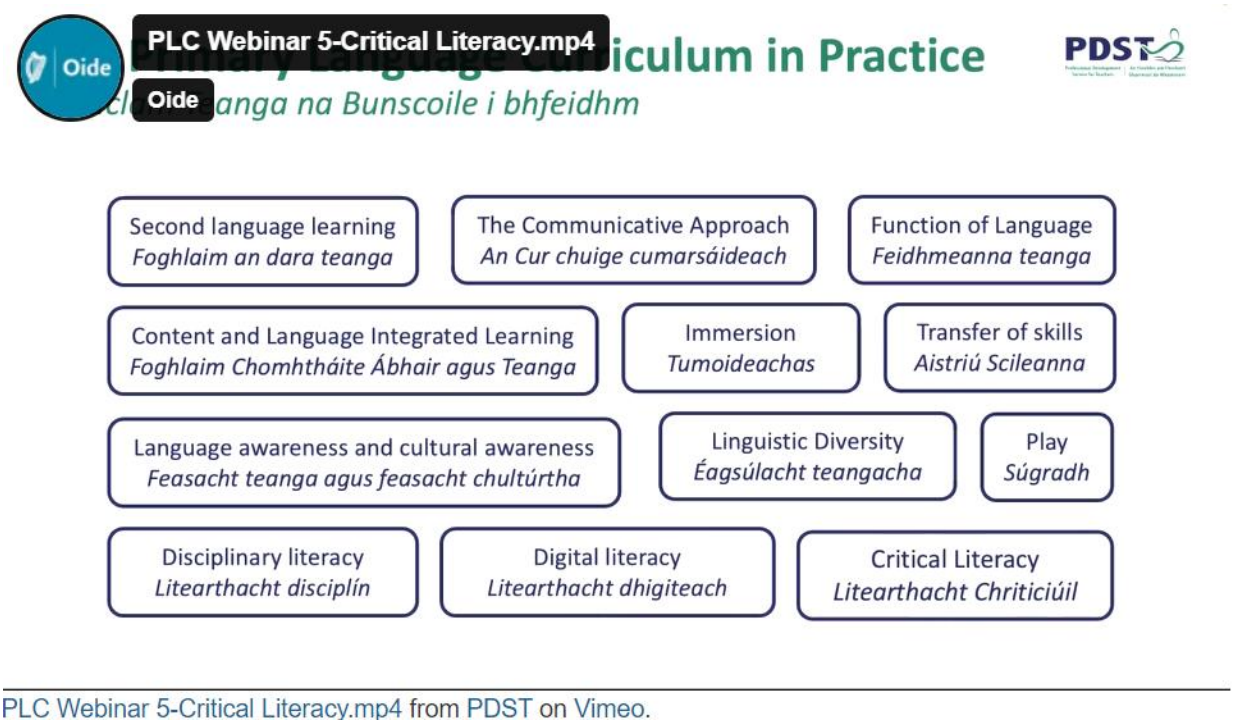


Figure 26: The Primary Curriculum in practice: Key elements, PDST Webinar 5

3.6.12 Texts across the disciplines

Primary school teachers in Ireland use multiple text types (report, procedural, persuasive, information, narrative) on a daily basis to teach subject content. This includes class novels, information textbooks for history and geography, explanation and procedural text pieces for science, visual texts for art education, emotive literacy pieces for SPHE, to name a few. Many schools use a separate text book for each subject area, culminating in up to ten text books per child. These textbooks are most often pre-packaged programmes produced by educational companies, namely Folens, C. J. Fallon and Gill Education. Having worked for and produced a number of literacy programmes with one of these companies, I can validate the extensive workload that goes into the production of such programmes, however, this model has come under scrutiny by the inspectorate in evaluations conducted in schools across the nation over the past number of years.

In these evaluations, there has been scrutiny regarding an over-reliance on textbooks at the primary school level[7]. Reports highlight that teachers often default to textbooks for classroom planning, which can limit the broader, more flexible application of the curriculum. These concerns have been noted in various thematic inspections over the past years, with calls for more diverse teaching methods to better align with curriculum goals and student engagement. In the DES *A Guide to Inspection in Primary Schools* (DES 2016), three areas are identified for examination during school curriculum evaluation. The inspector evaluates and reports under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

Quality of pupils' learning
Supporting pupils' learning through learning experiences and teachers' practice
The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE in progressing pupils' learning

Table 8: School Curriculum evaluation criteria (DES, 2016)

Under the quality of pupils' learning, the inspector:

> will enquire into the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject and how their skills and attitudes in that subject are developing. The extent to which learning in the subject is progressing as pupils move from class level to class level is also considered.
> (DES 2016, p.19).

Interpreting a selection of the reports (over 15,000 reports available), it suggests that there are a number of schools which rely heavily on the aforementioned textbooks as the core content and planning for subjects taught. In the UK and Scotland such a model is alien to primary teachers who, by comparison, often battle to find suitable resources and text pieces for lesson delivery

[7] The "*Irish in the Primary School*" (2005) report by the Inspectorate addresses concerns about an over-reliance on textbooks in language teaching. It highlights how an excessive focus on textbooks limits interactive and varied teaching methods, which can undermine curriculum goals. Other reports, such as *"Science in the Primary School"* (2007), also discuss the issue in the context of subject-specific teaching but is not as directly focused on textbook reliance as the Irish report.

across the subjects. The balance, therefore, must lie somewhere in the middle. When teachers use literacy as it was planned, as a discipline-specific instrument to support reading, writing, speaking and doing-their pupils become increasingly more adaptable and self-sufficient as they navigate challenging texts and tasks unique to each subject area. In addition, students learn how to view texts as more than simply 'conduits for knowledge; texts become windows into how and why knowledge is constructed' (Lent & Voigt 2019, p.10).

The literature on DL promotes the use of information texts to support the implementation of disciplinary literacy across subject areas. It is not questionable that information texts would assist the delivery of disciplinary literacy-specific lessons, however it is questionable to what extent primary school children would engage with this focus on information when they are already living in what is regularly described as an era of information overload. This study, on the other hand, endeavoured to explore the place of picture books as a tool to enable children to 'see the artist behind the artwork', exploring the artists thoughts in order to understand and appreciate their work, examine the perspective of a person from history in order to deepen their understanding of a world event and appreciate environmental awareness as a geographer or scientist through the continuum of story and illustration. In this child-friendly manner, the avenue for disciplinary literacy is unearthed and paved for a language learning journey to be reached. The use of narrative, fictional texts as reading material would also necessitate deliberation. Data from the 2014 *National Assessment of English Reading and Mathematics* (Kavanagh & Weir 2018) reveals that teachers use informational texts considerably less frequently than narrative texts. It is recognised that a broad range of texts, in different formats and modalities, would be necessary for use across the curriculum.

3.6.13 What constitutes a good teacher resource?

In mathematics, teachers often use Bruner's (1966) CPA approach, which moves from concrete to pictorial to abstract methods, allowing space for mathematical equipment before and during the learning of concepts.In science, teachers enable scientific learning experiences whereby pupils can engage with experimentation using scientific apparatus (Obe, 2018). In music, pupils are often provided with opportunities to play musical instruments or listen to the works of composers (Lamont 2002) and in art there are countless images and materials available for pupils to examine and observe the works of a variety of artists (Lancaster 2002). So too, there are many resources used in the effective delivery of literacy lessons (Duke 2011). Some of these include the use of magnetic letters, sand trays, flip charts, puppets, trips to the local library, author workshops, to name a few. So too, there lies a place for picture books. It is argued in this study that the place for such a resource is not only within literacy lessons, but as fundamental resources to be used right across the curriculum in order to deepen children's ability to become critical thinkers, confident speakers, adept in the language they choose to use in particular situations depending on the subject and audience. According to Hessey (2016) a good teacher resource is one that is accurate, useful, efficient, and relevant. It is imperative that resources are curriculum-relevant and framed in the wider context of the subject. Hessey (2016) declares that a good resource should make connections, showing students how this resource builds on, is built by and links to others. In this way, teachers can visualise how it can be most efficiently used over numerous lessons and in plans of work.

3.6.14 What are practitioners to do?

Quigley in Mortimore (2020) cautions educators not to ignore the decades of effort and research which have culminated into the here and now, however if educators were to recalibrate their approach to literacy by focusing on 'disciplinary literacy', they could offer a 'crucial bridge between general knowledge of literacy and the practical implications for thinking, reading, writing and talking like a subject expert in history, biology or mathematics'. In order for students to learn how to wear the various discipline-specific hats, practitioners must upskill at a national level in order to adapt their practice and transform their work.

Irish primary school classrooms have seen an increase in research-based best practices in recent years. The PDST offer an abundance of resources, planning aids and in-school assistance to schools across the country. In terms of literacy, their team produce regular e-bulletins and have produced an array of documents which have become staple features in classrooms nationwide. With PDSTs publication and nationwide in service of *Writing Genre-A Structured Approach, Five Components of Effective Oral Language, Guiding Comprehension* and *The Reading Process*, literacy has seen a dramatic overhaul in Irish classrooms, during which pedagogy and practice have been the cause for review in many school improvement plans nationwide, resulting in real and lasting change. Within the aforementioned documents, there lies intrinsic links with disciplinary literacy, however it appears these have not yet been explicitly made. The writing genre leads practitioners through the seven steps to teaching a writing genre, exploring in-depth genres such as procedural, explanation, narrative, exposition and writing to socialise. So too, the oral spoken text types focus on oral debate, oral report, oral recount and oral explanation, enhancing pupils abilities to speak competently and confidently on a range of topics in a range of genre. The children are led through a process which includes familiarisation, analysing, shared, guided,

modelled and independent work leading to presentation to audience. This model, much of which was led by the Australian model of *First Steps*, is exemplary. It is this type of explicitly defined teaching that is required if disciplinary literacy is to become a reality in Irish primary classrooms.

Practitioners must give children opportunities to make connections across the disciplines in a child friendly way, just as the diagram illustrated in Figure 28, set forth by the Education Endowment Foundation envisages. Although situated within the secondary school context, this diagram could be adapted as a child-friendly approach to begin the process of making disciplinary literacy a real feature of the planning and preparation for teaching and learning in Irish primary classrooms.

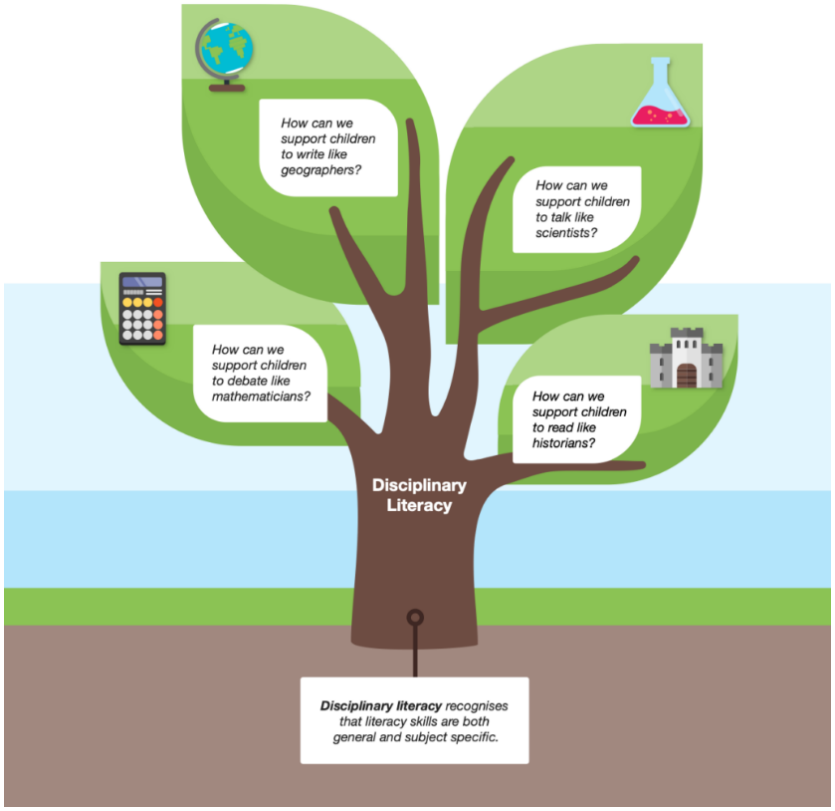


Figure 28: Disciplinary Literacy Tree, Leading Learner 2019

So too, the comprehensive grid compiled by Lent (2017), See Figure 29 below, is a tool which practitioners in Irish primary schools may wish to employ in their preliminary discussions around the topic of DL and how this may transpire into their planning and preparation for teaching and learning. The grid, which is currently being employed by PDST personnel in their efforts to highlight DL, showcases what scientists, historians, mathematicians and literary agents do as they read, write and think. This comprehensive overview offers both students and teachers an effective starting point with which to develop a DL framework at primary level. Such prompt questions could be utilised in a WALT/WILF (We are learning to/What I'm looking for) model to further ensure a metacognitive awareness of the thinking of DL for pupils. In this way, students would assess and monitor their own understanding and application of the concept within actual classroom practice. Such a shift in thinking would require a whole school approach in order to meet its effectiveness over time and across standards, building from year to year, in a similar format to that employed by the *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Courtney & Gleeson 2008) model, which builds on students' knowledge and use of comprehension strategies at different stages throughout their primary years.

What are Literacies within the Disciplines? The following lists for each of the major content areas, while not comprehensive, can act as starting points through which communities of teachers can begin to think in terms of disciplinary literacy (Lent, 2016).

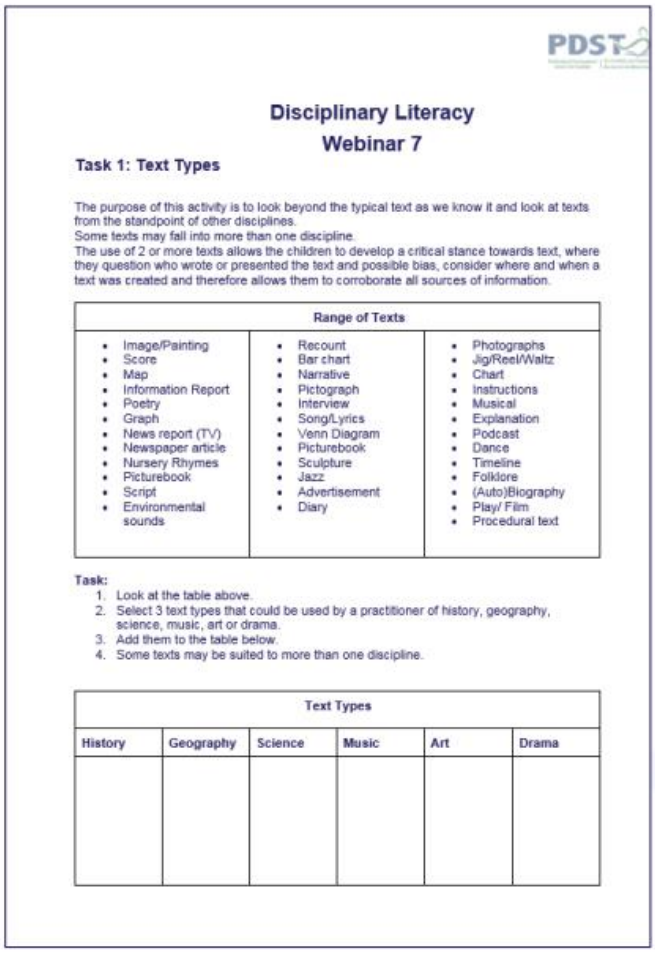
	Read	Write	Think
Science	***When scientists read, they*** • Ask "Why?" more than "What?" • Interpret data, charts, illustrations • Seek to understand concepts and words • Determine validity of sources and quality of evidence • Pay attention to details	***When scientists write, they*** • Use precise vocabulary • Compose in phrases, bullets, graphs, or sketches • Use passive voice • Favor exactness over craft or elaboration • Communicate in a systematic form	***When scientists think, they*** • Tap into curiosity to create questions • Rely on prior knowledge or research • Consider new hypotheses or evidence • Propose explanations • Create solutions
History	***When historians read, they*** • Interpret primary and secondary sources • Identify bias • Think sequentially • Compare and contrast events, accounts, documents and visuals • Determine meaning of words within context	***When historians write, they*** • Create timelines with accompanying narratives • Synthesize info/evidence from multiple sources • Emphasize coherent organization of ideas • Grapple with multiple ideas and large quantities of information • Create essays based on argumentative principles	***When historians think, they*** • Create narratives • Rely on valid primary and secondary sources to guide their thinking • Compare and contrast or ponder causes and effects • Consider big ideas or inquiries across long periods of time • Recognize bias
Math	***When mathematicians read, they*** • Use information to piece together a solution • Look for patterns and relationships • Decipher symbols and abstract ideas • Ask questions • Apply mathematical reasoning	***When Mathematicians write, they*** • Explain, justify, describe, estimate or analyze • Favor calculations over words • Use precise vocabulary • Include reasons and examples • Utilize real-word situations	***When Mathematicians think, they*** • Consider patterns • Utilize previous understandings • Find connections • Estimate, generalize, and find exceptions • Employ mathematical principles
English Language Arts	***When students of English read, they*** • Understand how figurative language works • Find underlying messages that evolve as theme • Assume a skeptical stance • Pay attention to new vocabulary or words used in new ways • Summarize and synthesize	***When students of English write, they*** • Engage in a process that includes drafting, revising, and editing • Use mentor texts to aid their writing craft • Pay attention to organization, details, elaboration and voice • Rely on the feedback of others • Avoid formulaic writing	***When students of English think, they*** • Reflect on multiple texts • Ask questions of the author • Consider research or others ideas • Discuss ideas and themes • Argue both sides of a point

From "*Disciplinary Literacy: A Shift that Makes Sense*," by Releah Lent, in the February 2017 issue of ***ASCD Express***. © 2017 ASCD. All rights reserved.

Figure 29: A DL model for the classroom, Lent (2017)

Finally, the PDST's Disciplinary literacy pack, which accompanies its Webinar 7, communicated to all schools nationwide in 2023, provides some planning tools and prompts for teacher to use as modes for thinking and talking about disciplinary literacy within their own school context, setting seeds for planning for DL in near future and as the entire new curriculum is implemented and realised. Figure 30 below asks teachers to consider the types of texts that they are currently using in their PPTL. Picturebooks are one such text that feature in the list. The planning tool asks teachers to consider choosing 2-3 text pieces as they explore DL at a surface level, possibly through the use of the prompt questions as highlighted in Lent's grid above. This

purposeful planning is evidence of efforts to bring policy into practice with a clear link between DL and picturebooks apparent. This study explores this marriage in a much deeper light.



PDST

Disciplinary Literacy
Webinar 7

Task 1: Text Types

The purpose of this activity is to look beyond the typical text as we know it and look at texts from the standpoint of other disciplines.
Some texts may fall into more than one discipline.
The use of 2 or more texts allows the children to develop a critical stance towards text, where they question who wrote or presented the text and possible bias, consider where and when a text was created and therefore allows them to corroborate all sources of information.

Range of Texts		
• Image/Painting • Score • Map • Information Report • Poetry • Graph • News report (TV) • Newspaper article • Nursery Rhymes • Picturebook • Script • Environmental sounds	• Recount • Bar chart • Narrative • Pictograph • Interview • Song/Lyrics • Venn Diagram • Picturebook • Sculpture • Jazz • Advertisement • Diary	• Photographs • Jig/Reel/Waltz • Chart • Instructions • Musical • Explanation • Podcast • Dance • Timeline • Folklore • (Auto)Biography • Play/ Film • Procedural text

Task:
1. Look at the table above.
2. Select 3 text types that could be used by a practitioner of history, geography, science, music, art or drama.
3. Add them to the table below.
4. Some texts may be suited to more than one discipline.

Text Types					
History	Geography	Science	Music	Art	Drama

Figure 30: PDST's Disciplinary Literacy Webinar 7 Resource

3.6.15 Concluding comment on theme 3

In order for DL to become a reality in Irish primary classrooms, it is vital that specific skills and ways of thinking are explicitly taught to primary pupils in a manner reflective of Pearson and Gallagher's GRR (1984). The 'transfer of skills' across the curriculum (and across other

languages) is a phrase coined by the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019). Such skills, as Eisner (1992) suggests will serve to bring a defragmented curriculum to a more unified position. Thus far, the literature review has investigated curricular reform, predominantly in Ireland. It has examined the concept of teacher planning and the reimagined framework for the planning and preparation for teaching and learning as set forth by the NCCA. It has presented disciplinary literacy as an emerging concept in the primary school setting. The review shall now turn to its final spoke as it proceeds to discourse the key area of picture books and their role in the primary classroom and indeed in disciplinary literacy. Much research indicates that authentic literature, especially high-quality literature, is an effective tool to teach content area material across the curriculum (Albright 2002; Bean 2003; Bintz 2011; Ciecierski & Bintz 2015; Murphy 2024; Palmer & Stewart 1997). It is through this lens that picturebooks are situated within this research.

3.7 Theme Four: Picturebooks

Conceptual framework: Cultural literacies model (Hirsch's Core Knowledge Sequence)

> The mental activities of a reader absorbed in a picture book have much in common with the processes which mature, highly competent readers employ as they read other kinds of texts, such as novels and poems.
>
> (Fox 1996, p.159)

Lewis (2001) developed the compound spelling of picturebooks, a word which is now widely and increasingly used by scholars in this field (Styles and Salisbury 2012; Roche 2014; Gamble 2019). A picturebook is typically 32 pages long with a balance between text and illustrations (Lewis 2001). Reading a picturebook is a unique experience which is different from other forms of literature and one which is not designated for children alone. Meek (1991, p. 115) describes picturebooks as 'a distinct kind of imaginative looking'. The picturebook, for many, is seen as an art form in its own right. Styles and Arizpe (2015), cited in Gamble (2019) describe picturebooks as 'timeless mini art galleries'. 'A picture is

worth a thousand words', the saying is often said- illustrations can host meaning, representation, inference, and sustain a visual impact which can be striking and long lasting. Gamble (2019, p. 186) says that 'the picturebook is arguably the most innovative and experimental form of literature of the past 25 years'. Important to this research, in its exploration of picturebooks as a tool for DL teaching, Lewis (2001, p. 136, cited in Gamble 2019) suggests that 'the charm and challenge of the picturebook arise directly out of its variety and versatility and its capacity for endless metamorphosis'. Lewis (2001) goes further to depict that picturebooks have the capacity for genre incorporation, which could be revolutionary in Irish primary classrooms, if adopted, something which this research endeavoured to ensue.

A picturebook is not simply a book with pictures, but something which fosters interaction between illustration and written text. The English noun 'iconotext' depicts a form of document consisting of text and images that complement each other. Gamble (2019) argues that such iconotexts are far more powerful than the separate components of art and writing. As this research is framed in the primary school setting, the exploration of picturebooks as a child-friendly means of introducing and exploring disciplinary literacy gains rationale in light of these definitions. As the picturebook writer; Shaun Tan (2010) denotes, there is an appealing simplicity in the form of picturebooks. The fact that one can read pictures before one can read texts, allows one to build strong oral language skills, another factor which this research explores as it tests to decipher the language required to teach DL at primary level and the means through which that may be taught, whether that be through picturebooks or other texts and resources.

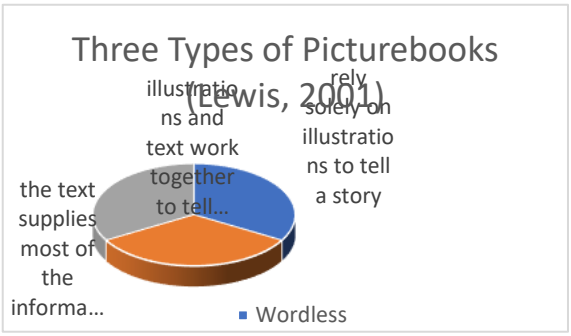


Figure 31: Lewis' Three Types of Picturebooks

In picturebooks, there is a parallel storytelling between the picture and the text. The pictures interact with the words and vice versa. The reader is an active agent in the reading process, taking ownership of their learning. Such independence echoes the vision set forth in the Aistear framework of dispositions, as outlined previously. Gilliland (cited in Walsh 2017, p. 95), speaks of the playful nature of picture books and the link between storytelling and the child's imagination having a positive effect on their language development. She describes how by having a playful approach to the teaching of literacy, teachers can target 'very specific language that the children need for their language development across all areas of the curriculum' Gilliland (cited in Walsh 2017, p. 95). This is the specific link which has been explored through this piece of research, exploring picturebooks through a disciplinary literacy language building lens. 3.7.1 What is the definition of a 'high quality picturebook'?

> ‘The provision of high-quality resources and guidelines would enhance teacher use, comfort and confidence with curriculum integration.’
>
> (Burke & Lehane 2023a, p. 110)

According to the *National Library of New Zealand*, picturebooks use illustrations, with or without text, to convey stories. To do this, the author and the illustrator jointly share the responsibility of making the picturebook 'work'. What makes a good picturebook may be subjective, however, there have been many picturebooks awarded with prestigious awards such as the Carnegie Medal which is an indication of its quality and prestige. The *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals* (CILIP) Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals are the UK’s oldest children’s book awards, recognising outstanding reading experiences created through writing and illustration in books for children and young people. The CILIP Carnegie Medal is awarded by children’s librarians for an outstanding book written in English for children and young people. Similarly, the CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal is awarded by children’s librarians for an outstanding book in terms of illustration for children and young people. Unique in that they are judged solely by librarians, the roll-call of past winners includes: Arthur Ransome, C.S. Lewis, Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman, Noel Streatfeild, Sally Gardner and Elizabeth Acevedo for the Carnegie; and Raymond Briggs, Shirley Hughes, Janet Ahlberg, and Children’s Laureates Quentin Blake, Anthony Browne, Chris Riddell and Lauren Child for the Kate Greenaway. The criteria for the awards include the visual experience, the artistic style, visual representation, synergy of illustration and text (Kate Greenway Award) as well as plot, themes and characterisation (Carnegie Medal Award). Of interest to this study, is the role that the librarians play and the extensive knowledge that they possess in the field of picturebooks. Detailed in Chapter Five is a cross comparative case study between the role of the librarian in Ireland and that of the UK in which cohorts of librarians are

situated in schools and act as guides and mentors to both pupils and teachers whereas librarians in Ireland remain a separate body, although they do engage in collaborative projects with schools. The capacity for role expansion and the effect this may have on the implementation of disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks in the primary classroom is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six. Notwithstanding this, the high quality picturebooks that are necessary for TPPTL and for DL require time to attain. While padlets of such recommended resources are available by literacy gurus (See figures 33-35 in Appendix 18), it is essential that professional development in both selecting and using PBs is established for and by schools.

3.7.2 Choosing picturebooks for TPPTL and DL

Picturebooks can be employed to capture students' attention (Routman 2000) and can also serve as a way-in books (Keene & Zimmerman 1997) to spark interest and attention. This statement is echoed in the findings of this research in Chapter Five by Irish practitioners, librarians and key educational stakeholders. In such ways, PBs deliver a sense of fascination into topics that may become exciting to explore further by young children (Bintz 2021). Such armour may be viewed as invaluable by practitioners seeking to find ways to draw in pupils to lessons on particular, and perhaps, difficult topics across the curriculum (e.g. war, grief, bullying). This is also true for a disciplinary literacy stance as practitioners strive to find 'a way in' to the mindset required for DLT. There is a growing trend taking place for the past number of years (which is directly related to this study) in educational spheres, particularly on the social media platform of Twitter, amongst literacy specialists and practitioners who have a passion for literacy. Educationalists (including myself) such as Roche (author of *Critical Thinking and Book Talk*), Mathew Tobin (lecturer in Primary English and Children's Literature, author), Dr Treasa Bowe (Irish primary school teacher),

Jon Biddle (primary teacher and English coordinator), Ben Harris (primary teacher, writer), Simon Smith (primary school principal), Martin Galway (teaching and learning advisor), Duke Skywalker (head teacher), Anne Thompson (librarian), Melanie McGilloway (librarian), are some of these key leaders driving the picturebook movement. These persons dedicate much of their online platform presence to picturebooks, the use of picturebooks in the classroom and indeed; the cross-curricular use of picture books, [the later primarily advocated by Mathew Tobin through his PhD and university work with undergraduate students which focuses on the selection of picturebooks for cross-curricular planning culminated through the creation of a freely available padlet which supports cross-curricular planning through high-quality picture books]. If this knowledge and bank of resources was more widespread and made available to schools, perhaps the role of picturebooks would feature more prominently in TPPTL and indeed for DL.

It is evident from this discourse, that the use of picturebooks in the classroom is a valued teaching resource and one which teaching colleges are promoting for future educators as a teaching tool. This is evident in the UK through Mathew Tobins work, as highlighted above, and also in Ireland, in MIC, through the work of Dr Anne Dolan. In her lecturing role, Dolan has spent the past decade striving to enhance the position of picturebooks in teaching and learning, with a particular focus on Geography and the area of diversity (See Figure 36 Appendix 18)

By ensuring that picturebooks feature in initial teacher education programmes, there is a strong sense that PB's will begin to feature more in TPPTL.

Further to this, in programmes such as *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Courtney & Gleeson 2008), lists of recommended picture books are provided. These were compiled by a team of teachers who spent two years devising the programme under the guidance of Dr Martin Gleeson

and Professor Ann Courtney. I was one of the teacher researchers involved in the formulation of this programme. In Ireland, many schools have used this manual to choose selections of picture books for each class level. PDST advisors have supported schools further in this regard through their school support roles, however, it has been with the publication and implementation of the *Primary Language Curriculum* that saw further emphasis on the use of picture books through Roche's *Critical Thinking and Book Talk* section in the Teacher's Toolkit. This was further extended by the learning outcomes in the curriculum itself using the language of the comprehension strategies which have been associated with the teaching of picturebooks in Irish classrooms since the introduction of *Building Bridges* in 2008. The problem is that, unlike the *Core Knowledge Sequence* as advocated by Hirsch in the conceptual framework chapter, there is no consistency from school to school and in teacher training detailing how to use these texts effectively which rests on the shoulders of teachers themselves. It is through this study that the discourse with teachers around the selection of these books and indeed how to plan effectively to deliver high quality lessons sought to take place.

3.7.3 The role of picturebooks in the preparation for teaching and learning

It is categorically unquestionable that reading books to children has significant benefits both academically and emotionally. It has been reported that children who read or are read to perform better on state exams than those who do not (PISA 2018). The world of children's literature is a beautiful one. It offers escapism, imagination and brings authentic dialogue to the foreground which can be explored by adult and child in an interactive and child-friendly manner (Hunt 2006; Galda *et al*. 2001; Lukens 1998). This premise has long been a core practice for teachers of primary school children. Indeed, as Bishop (1990) famously stated:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are right however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experiences and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. (Bishop 1990, p.3).

Picturebooks, however, are traditionally thought of as belonging only in infant classrooms (Fletcher & Reese 2005; Mendoza & Reese 2001; Moss 1978). This common misconception has been overhauled in recent years in Irish primary classrooms with the adoption picture books from infants to sixth class. Picturebooks are an ideal springboard for introducing children of all ages to big ideas, critical engagement, and the notion of making meaning together through thinking and discussion. Using picture books in this way helps to create real readers (Leland *et al*. 2017). The reality is that many teachers are unaware that such books exist and also teachers do not feel confident in their ability to select such pieces of literature and use them to great effect in their classroom practice. Cremin *et al*. 2008b says that many primary teachers rely on the books they enjoyed as children when choosing class literature pieces. The UKLA (2017) *Teachers as Readers* survey of 1,200 teachers, showed that teachers relied on a narrow repertoire of children's authors, showcasing limited knowledge of poetry and picturebooks (well over half the sample (62%) were only able to name one, two or no picture fiction creators). They did however, find that in terms of read-alouds, picture books were by far the most frequently read to the class with 35% of the response. Yet, many of the picturebook makers mentioned within the study, were the creators of texts targeted at children in the early years or KS1 (e.g. Eric Carle, Mick Inkpen, Nick Butterworth, Julia Donaldson). There were much fewer mentions of named picturebook makers/illustrators who offer texts for KS2/ the middle-senior classes. This lack of awareness or knowledge is a concerning trend.

The guidelines on the preparation for teaching and learning for primary school teachers in Ireland, as discussed in detail in theme two of the review, calls on teachers to engage in visible, invisible and recorded planning. Exemplars on how to plan for using picturebooks in the classroom is detailed in the *Primary Language Curriculum Support Material for Teachers*. Furthermore, there is an abundance of material online relating to planning picturebook lessons for the classroom. Even more recently, there has been a surge in the number of webinars provided by Irish education centres in the area of picturebooks. This has been driven forth by Dr Treasa Bowe, also a former *Building Bridges of Understanding* teacher researcher as well as Clara Maria Florentini of Marino College. With such trends being set, the position for using picturebooks in the Irish primary classroom is being strengthened. With the addition of the PDST's webinar 7 on disciplinary literacy, showcasing the use of picturebooks in this medium, through their video of an authentic Irish classroom setting, the case for using picturebooks through a disciplinary lens is slowly coming to light. Building on this, Burke & Lehane's (2023b, p.11) framework for planning integrated learning, could be utilised to support teachers in ascertaining how meaningful connections can be built and what activities will support integrated learning such as that presented in this research using the lens of PBs as a tool to make meaningful connections and support DL learning.

3.7.4 Wordless picturebooks (WPBs)

The title of this study queries the phrase 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. For the purpose of this study, the 'picture' in question is the illustrated artwork within the picturebook. These illustrations are often accompanied by words but a growing number of picturebooks are now wordless; placing a bigger emphasis on the illustrated word. Advocates of the wordless

picturebook and the power of the illustrated word, (Bosch 2017 ; Ching-Han *et al.* 2016 ; Beckett 2014 ; Serafini 2014a; Arizpe 2013; Crawford & Hade 2000; Arif *et al.* 2008), detail how wordless picturebooks engage children in higher order thinking skills, enhanced comprehension and a deeper understanding of the concepts and themes explored within picturebooks. However, according to Ramos and Ramos (2011, p. 326), WPBs are 'often considered non-literary products … for very young 'readers' who cannot actually read,' and some people may assume that the 'absence of text may imply a lower quality, lack of interest or, in some cases, a lack of coherent narrative.' That said, Ciecierski *et al*. 2017, states that using wordless picture books goes far beyond the early years while Honaker *et al.* 2023 states, that WPBs are underrated and misunderstood by teachers and students, and frequently relegated to classrooms with young, pre-emergent readers. Furthermore, Honaker *et al.* 2023; Louie *et al.* 2015; Safford *et al.* 2007; Early 1991; Flatley *et al*. 1986, all highlight the fact that using wordless picturebooks to support EAL students is a worthwhile and fruitful task, while Duckels *et al*. 2019 goes further to say that using picture books to discuss topics such as refugees can greatly enhance children's understanding of such topics and this empathy and awareness can help shape the holistic development of the child. These are worthwhile considerations with the increased levels of immigrants reaching Irish shores of late. A further consideration is how such wordless picture books may feature as a key tool of the TPPTL for DL.

Building on this, Read *et al.* (1982) talk of teaching 'visual literacy' through wordless picture books, a concept which has been revived in recent years (Brown & Savic 2023; Deroo 2023; Brown 2022; Eline 2022). According to the definition given by the *Association of College and Research Libraries* (ACRL): 'Visual literacy is a set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media.' Visual literacy or

critical visual literacy (CVL) as advocated in the work of Dufflemeyer & Ellertson, 2005 in their study on Multimodal communication across the curriculum, detail the position of the visual image as ‘an individual carrier of meaning’ and something which is ‘consciously arranged to convey a particular message’ (Veen 1998 cited in Dufflemeyer & Ellertson 2005). Such strength in imagery can assist the student in comprehending and discoursing topics. This can be translated right across the curriculum and can be done in a disciplinary literate focus. This premise is further discoursed in Chapter 5 through the professional learning communities which partook in this study. So too, as the *Primary Language Curriculum Support Material for Teachers* (NCCA 2024, p.4) in its segment on picturebooks, exhibits the importance of using picturebooks to support students in navigating an increasingly visual world and enabling them to engage in ‘deep thinking about visuals’ which supports ‘the development of key skills such as observing, noticing, comparing and connecting.’ (NCCA 2024, p.4). Such skills are also fundamental in the metacognitive awareness, or thinking about one’s thinking, and the intentional use of disciplinary literacy.

The potential of wordless picturebooks is yet to be fully realised, particularly in the older classes of the primary school. The PLC *Support Material for Teachers* promotes the use of wordless picturebooks (See Figure 37 Appendix 19). It is the training and professional development of teachers which needs to be encouraged in order for children to experience the value, opportunities and awakenings of these books. Wordless picturebooks can also play a key role in the development of disciplinary literacy amongst primary school children. The overarching aim of picturebooks and wordless picturebooks is the equivalent, to help readers become more engaged in and attentive of any text (Sulentic-Dowell; Beal, & Capraro 2006). Wordless picturebooks may be deemed as one of the most beautiful art forms in literature and have much potential for sparking new conversations about new perspectives (Ciecierski *et al.* 2017). It is this

language register that is explorable as a means through which disciplinary literacy may be taught using picturebooks, including wordless books.

3.7.5 Picturebooks during the Covid-19 pandemic

During the pandemic, PDST published a document entitled *Ready for Remote Literacy, Online Language Learning Experiences*. In it they encouraged practitioners to consider using picturebooks to explore cross-curricular and disciplinary literacy, stating that a picture book presents opportunities for enriching the children's language through meaningful discussion as well as thematic exploration, research and presentation (PDST 2020). At a time when families were plunged into an online learning platform, the case for using picturebooks again came to the fore as a key resource in ensuring that a rich literary learning experience was provided for pupils during periods of remote learning.

Real readers, afterall, learn *how* to read (Leland *et al.* 2017) This is an explicitly taught skillset. Throughout their eight years of primary education children acquire these skills through explicit teacher modelling in order to make them real readers. They learn how to interact with text, create goals for reading, evaluate text for important ideas, note structure of text before reading, make predictions, construct thoughts, revise, scan, skim, question and monitor their understanding as they read. They also, sometimes intrinsically, other times through modelling, learn how to read different kinds of text differently. This factor pertains to this study in the pursuit of making the in the head thought processes visible (metacognition). Children can read for enjoyment and understanding but can also look beneath the surface. Whilst also challenging assumptions and premises that may be hidden, fostering their own assumptions and ultimately be enabled to discuss them with others. While reading picturebooks aloud is a wonderful practice, research shows that

it is largely through the thinking, interaction and dialogue that happens after the reading, that development happens (Roche 2014; Wiseman 2011). *Critical Thinking and Book Talk* (CT and BT, Roche 2014) encourages children to become critical thinkers. The approach is about fostering thinkers, speakers and readers who enjoy reading, and discussion and dialogue about books (Roche 2019). This process can be as much an enjoyable approach to T&L for the teacher as it is for the pupils. As Anthony Browne said 'picturebooks are for everybody at any age, not books to be left behind as we grow older' (Browne 2004, p.235). As Irish curricular reform graces the corridors of schools nationwide, it is worth considering what materials teachers enjoy using to teach, as the study has sought to discover.

3.7.6 Choosing picturebooks for disciplinary literacy

> Picturebooks are useful in supporting the web of interconnectedness across our strands, elements, and learning outcomes within our integrated language curriculum.
> (*Primary Language Curriculum, Support Material for Teachers*, NCCA 2024)

In 1997 Robert Dunbar remarked that 'the world of Irish children's literature is a strange, complex, and fascinating place'. So too is the abundance of children's literature produced internationally. It is imperative that practitioners choose good quality books that have been written and illustrated with care and for specific purpose. It is worth noting that a picturebook is not the same as an illustrated book. If the images were removed from an illustrated book, the story would still be complete. A picture book *needs* the images to complete the story. When choosing a picture book, Roche (2019) encourages teachers to ask themselves five key questions:

1. What could I do with this book?
2. Is the context of the story familiar to the reader?
3. What are the underlying topics which might provide a stimulus for critical thinking?

4. Can the children make connections between the story and/or imafes and their own experiences?
5. Does the book present a different viewpoint on some issue?

While there is clear evidence that there is an abundance of recommended picturebooks for practitioners to choose from, it is important that teachers engage in their own perusal of picturebooks and choose titles that suit the needs of their particular school setting. The point was made evident through the interview with NCCA which is discoursed in Chapter five.

3.7.7 Why focus on picturebooks? The dialogic classroom culture

> By exploring picturebooks in depth and creating interactive, dialogic reading experiences with picturebooks, teachers enable children to develop a range of comprehension competencies and systems for understanding.
> (*Primary Language Curriculum, Support Material for Teachers*, NCCA 2024)

Conceptual framework: Vygotsky's theory of language

The *Primary Language Curriculum* views literacy as triadic in nature. The literature is widespread, asserting the claim that reading and writing float on a sea of talk (Britton 1983, p.11) and oral language is at the heart of all learning. Traditionally, Irish pupils were exposed to a Three r's curricula- reading, writing and arithmetic. Oral language featured in the 1999 curriculum and grew in strength over the next two decades. The *Primary Language Curriculum* places oral language in a central position as its worth is realised not only in literacy but across all subject areas. To assist with the enhancement of children's oral language capabilities, picturebooks provide a fantastic medium for engaging children in inspired discussion which enhances language and literacy development. When pupils begin to use the language they hear in the books and as concepts, strategies and skills are explicitly modelled for children, they gain an added bank of new,

sophisticated vocabulary and a greater ability to think and speak cohesively (Roche 2019). This approach echoes Alexander's (2008) ambition of the creation of the dialogic classroom. Alexander (2008) emphasises the significance of developing classrooms as dialogic spaces. Dialogic teaching and learning utilises the power of talk to encourage and extend learning, thinking and understanding (PDST 2020). Alexander (2008) stresses five key principles in the creation of this classroom structure Collective, Reciprocal, Supportive, Cumulative, and Purposeful. These features support a collaborative and dynamic learning environment where students engage in meaningful dialogue, enabling the development of critical thinking and disciplinary literacy.

Collective: Learning is a group effort, with students and teachers participating together in discussions and activities. This collective aspect encourages students to engage with one another's ideas, helping them to understand subject-specific content and build on each other's insights. In the context of picture books, this collective approach allows students to collaboratively interpret the text and illustrations, supporting shared literacy development.

Reciprocal: Dialogue is two-way, where both students and teachers contribute, listen, and respond to each other. This reciprocal interaction encourages students to actively engage in the learning process, particularly when discussing complex disciplinary concepts and texts. When using picture books, reciprocal conversations allow students to consider different perspectives and interpretations, enhancing their understanding of both the narrative and disciplinary content.

Supportive: The classroom environment is one where all participants feel valued, and ideas are respected. This supportive atmosphere is essential for building confidence, particularly when

exploring new or challenging disciplinary ideas. In the use of picture books, support ensures that all students, regardless of reading ability, can engage with the text and participate in discussions, promoting inclusive literacy development.

Cumulative: Learning builds progressively over time, with each interaction adding to students' understanding. In the context of disciplinary literacy, this means that students deepen their knowledge through repeated, layered dialogues that expand their vocabulary, concepts, and analytical skills. With picture books, this cumulative learning occurs as students revisit the same books or themes, gaining new insights and building upon previous discussions.

Purposeful: Dialogue is goal-oriented, aiming to deepen understanding, develop skills, and foster inquiry. This feature is particularly important for disciplinary literacy, as students engage with subject-specific content to develop expertise in a given discipline. When using picture books, the purposeful nature of the dialogue encourages students to not just decode text, but also critically engage with the visual and narrative elements, fostering a deeper understanding of the content within specific disciplinary contexts.

Dialogue, by its nature is an interactive process. The dialogic classroom, dialogic classroom talk and dialogic approaches to learning (Murphy *et al*. 2022 ; van der Veen *et al.* 2021; Kim & Wilkinson 2019; Edwards-Groves *et al*. 2017; Lyle 2008; Christoph *et al.* 2001) enrich the language acquisition and abilities of pupils. Burke & Lehane (2023b) denote that dialogue is important for learning across the curriculum. Language, after all, is the basis for learning, returning to the Vygotskian influence in the conceptual framework of this research. Language empowers

children to develop their thinking, expression, reflection, critique, and empathy and it supports the development of self-efficacy, identity and full participation in society (PLC rationale). In Dialogic Classrooms, teachers and children act as co-enquirers, collaboratively engaging in a generation and evaluation of new interpretations of texts in order to gain a deeper appreciation of the world and themselves, dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to stimulate and extend students' thinking and advance their learning and understanding (Alexander 2008).

The *Education Endowment Foundation* states that Dialogic Teaching aims to improve pupil engagement and attainment by improving the quality of classroom talk. Teachers are trained in strategies that enable pupils to reason, discuss, argue and explain rather than merely respond, in order to develop higher order thinking and articulacy. Picturebooks are a rich resource to help fulfil the vision of dialogic teaching and learning. By their very nature, picturebooks open up discussion and dialogue, often in increasingly sophisticated ways. Metacognition is employed through the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies which enable pupils to confidently and competently engage in dialogue in a collaborative and constructive way in the primary classroom. (See accompanying DVDs in *Building Bridges of Understanding* manual to view authentic clips of a dialogic classroom culture set up through the use of picturebooks).

Dialogue about picturebooks can focus on all aspects of the book-the characters, events, illustration, language, plot or setting (Roche 2014). In her CT & BT approach as outlined and promoted by the PLC in its *Support Materials for Teachers*, classroom dialogue is used through picturebooks. This complements the approach taken by *Building Bridges of Understanding* (Courtney & Gleeson 2008) which also supports a dialogic classroom culture through the use of picture books. Dialogue is an intrinsic feature in disciplinary literacy as practitioners seek to bring a conscious awareness of the language of a particular discipline to the forefront of the pupils mind

as they are learning (metacognition). The specific language to be taught in these disciplines at primary level is a topic yet to be fully realised (Beck & Calvo 2023; Schleicher 2021; Mpofu *et al*. 2020; Tang *et al.* 2016).

3.7.8 How do picturebooks feed into disciplinary literacy?

Conceptual framework: Academic literacies

> Picturebooks facilitate an integrated approach to literacy instruction and when used effectively can act as a valuable support to children's language, literacy, and knowledge development.
>
> (*Primary Language Curriculum, Support Material for Teachers*, NCCA 2024)

There are thousands of picturebooks out there on a variety of topics in a variety of languages. There has been some longstanding, recent and ongoing research on the use of picture books across the curriculum (Oberman 2023; Olmstead *et al*. 2023; Moses 2020; Bintz & Monobe 2018; Ciecierski 2017; Ommundsen 2021; Jenkins 2010; Shea 2010; Sharp 1984). One such study by teaching practice students in Oxford University under the guidance of PhD candidate, Mathew Tobin. Tobin (2022) has created a resourceful padlet which supports cross-curricular planning though high-quality picturebooks. Picturebooks are not just a valuable resource for literacy lessons. Indeed they can be utilised across the curriculum to create fresh and meaningful opportunities for children to delve into disciplinary literacy (Clabough *et al*. 2023; Bintz *et al*. 2021; Hughes 2021; Wrenn *et al*. 2021; Unsworth 2015; Brock *et al*. 2014; Giorgis & Hartman 2000). The *Primary Language Curriculum Support for Teachers* outlines how picture books can be used for linkage and integration. For example, picture books can be 'a rich and valuable resource for looking at and responding to visual arts' (DES 2019). They are 'ideal for acting as springboards for discussion in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), drama and so on' (DES 2019). Roche (2019), within the support

material for teachers document, depicts how particular picture books integrate with mathematical topics.

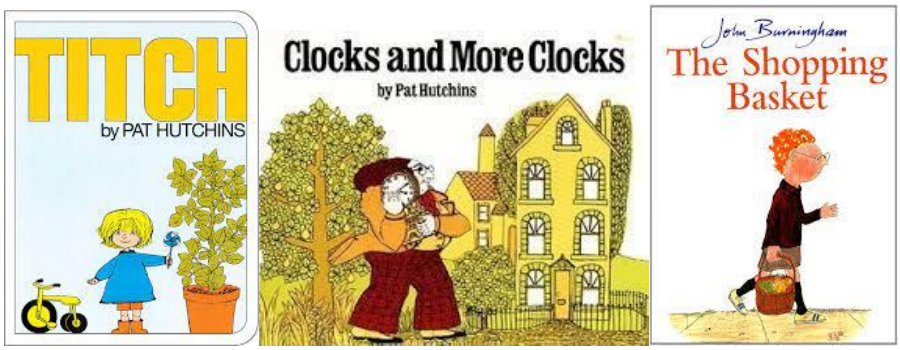


Figure 39: Picturebooks for Mathematics

Titch by Pat Hutchins is ideal for discussions about size and height, while *Clocks and More Clocks* again by Pat Hutchins is useful for discussing the concept of time and *The Shopping Basket* by John Burningham is an opportune way for a discussion on money and shopping. PDST STEM (PDST 2023) have recently published a document which advocates the use of picture books to enhance the teaching of STEM. These are broken down by strand and strand unit into topics that could be utilised for the planning and preparation of teaching and learning. This is testament to the growing interest in the use of picturebooks across the curriculum. There are thousands more picture books which could be divided up into subject areas. Some teacher-researchers (Mary Roche, Patrick Burke, Matthew Tobin, Duncan McCarthy, Duke Skywalker, Treasa Bowe), in recent years, have created useful Padlet resources culminating such picture books by topic and subject. This is proof of how practitioners are shifting toward this reformed way of using picture books in the classroom. How it transfers to actual classroom practice on a larger scale is yet to be ascertained.

Adults may intuitively wish to shelter children from the stark realities of life. However, truthfully-framed literature on difficult topics can help children by providing comfort and support

for those who are experiencing these difficult issues first-hand (Bowen & Schutt 2007). Sandmann (1997) illustrates how such books help children by showing them that they are not the only ones going through a particular situation or feeling. When children find a book that features a character whose situation they identify with, there is a release which enables them to take control and find a solution to their own problem. Furthermore, Lewison, Hint, Leland & Moller (2002), in their paper on *Using Controversial Books To Support Engagement, Diversity, and Democracy*, proclaim that reading such literature encourages understanding and empathy with others, as children 'make personal connections to characters that are different from themselves and events that are different from those in their lives' (Lewison *et al*. 2002, p.217). Such texts have the ability to humanise abstract topics and help children to think critically and talk openly about how they might feel and what they might do in a particular situation (PDST 2020). It is the planning for and delivery of discourse such as this which this research has probed into.

Practitioners need to 'get to know' the books that are out there and make real efforts to place these at the heart of their planning and lessons through an interdisciplinary approach. In this way, disciplinary literacy learning will happen more easily and more purposefully. Callow (2018) shows how topics such as fleeing from a war torn country, multiculturalism, immigration and refugeeism are highlighted and explored through picturebooks (See Appendix 18). As the Irish classroom landscape continues to invite pupils from war-torn Ukraine, such topics have never been more prominent and real for students to discuss and form an understanding and empathy toward. As Burke & Lehane (2023b) highlight, creative pedagogy and critical pedagogy are key components in the development of particular ways of thinking or habits of mind. Such is the metacognitive awareness afforded by the explicit teaching of PBs through a critical thinking, dialogic approach.

3.7.8.1 Picturebooks for biodiversity, the environment and climate change

Dolan (2014) in her book, *You, me and diversity*, acknowledges the central role that picturebooks play in the development of critical thinking, intercultural learning and in the promotion of teaching and learning that values all children. Dolan declares that picturebooks can be used with all class levels and as part of whole-school programmes if teachers differentiate their methodological and conceptual approaches, moving beyond the descriptive model to a deeper analysis and higher order thinking model. This is reflective of Roche (2014) *Critical Thinking and Book Talk* approach which is further platformed by the *Primary Language Curriculums Support Material for Teachers.* In her work, Dolan critiques a selection of picturebooks and advises on how to use them in the classroom. She provides a directory of picturebooks that feature development and intercultural themes such as climate change, migration and social justice, and range from the earthquake in Haiti to the struggles for civil rights. The framework used for categorising the picturebooks gives teachers a planning tool to ensure they offer children a full range of development and intercultural perspectives while also adhering to literacy guidelines.

3.7.9 Text sets-picture books are not enough

This study does not seek to place picture books as the one-stop-tool to achieving disciplinary literacy success for primary school pupils. While it does view picturebooks as a central resource in achieving many of the aims associated with the dissemination of disciplinary literacy among young minds, it also acknowledges the place for other types of texts in achieving this overarching aim. When teachers plan lessons, they aim to offer children many more learning opportunities than a single classroom text can provide. Text sets are increasingly seen as a tool to deliver high-quality

lessons across the disciplines (Reynolds 2022; Folk *et al*. 2020; Lupo *et al*. 2020; Folk & Palmer 2016; Beck 2014). A text set is a collection of related texts organised around a unit topic, theme, concept, or idea. A text set is made up of:

• A Challenging Core Text
• Visual, video or digital text to activate background knowledge
• Information text to build discipline specific background knowledge
• Accessible text to ensure connections to the target text

Table 10: Text Sets (Adapted from Lupo *et al*. 2018)

Lupo *et al*. 2018 suggest a framework for using text sets effectively. See Figure 41 below. This complements the work of Burke (2023) and PDST (2023) who advocate for the use of text sets to achieve the aims of disciplinary literacy. So too, Treasa Bowe, teacher influencer, PhD and literacy expert in Ireland, regularly showcases her use of text sets to great effect in the senior primary classroom.

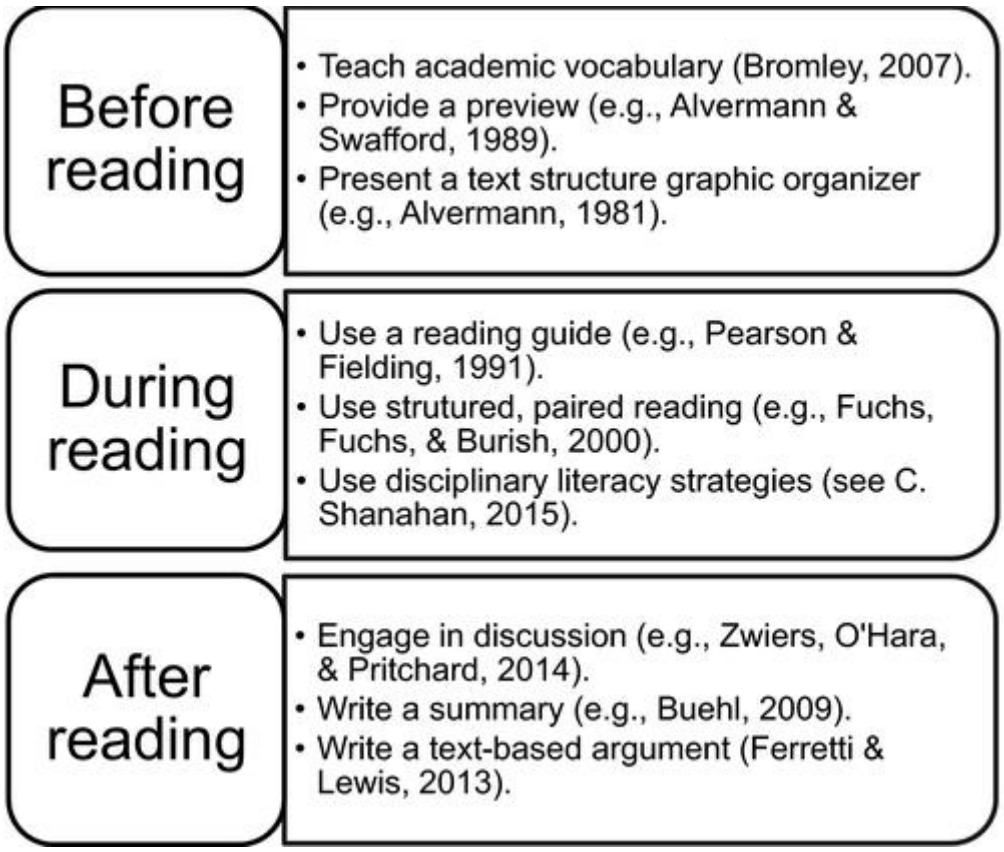


Figure 41: Framework for using text sets (Lupo *et al.* 2018)

It is without question that text sets are an excellent model for ensuring that children are exposed to a wide range of texts. Timetabling, teacher planning, lesson assessment and reflection are contributing factors that will impact on the effective delivery text sets and indeed of picturebooks as teachers navigate these pedagogical approaches across standards. What will be key here is the professional development and school leadership, without which, progression may never be reached. Recommendations for same can be viewed in Chapter Six.

3.7.10 Explicit instruction: the central feature to the success of picturebooks and DL teaching and learning

Routman (1996) supported by Block (2008) declares that it is essential to read aloud to children on a daily basis. Imperative to this, is that reading aloud involves thinking aloud (Duffy 1989) and

the awakening of metacognitivity (Keene and Zimmermann 2007). The *Primary Language Curriculum* further calls on the transfer of these skills across the curriculum and in subject and topic specific teaching and learning. Explicit instruction is central to the success of all of these teaching methodologies. Furthermore, the purposeful and explicit shift in language brings disciplinary literacy to the centre of an evolving curriculum. Some examples of the learning outcomes which highlight this can be seen in Appendix 17.

To this end, professional development, competence and confidence building for practitioners is fundamental to the success of lesson planning, delivery and instruction. This is further illuminated in the discussion of findings in Chapter Five. It is only with competent and confident teaching that such competence and confidence will transfer to pupils, particularly with the emerging concept of DL making its way into the primary school setting and the infancy in deciphering the language associated with the various disciplines at primary level. Furthermore and joining the dots between DL and picturebooks, as Dolan (2014 p. 9) states in relation to the effective use of picturebooks in the classroom, 'such potential may only be realised in conjunction with the astute adult who selects the books and facilitates a critically engaged discussion with the text, illustrations and messages from the book.' With an abundance of courses and webinars available to primary teachers in Ireland through the various education centres and central educational bodies, it is clear that a review of the system of professional development and the transfer into practice needs to be undertaken.

3.7.11 Concluding comment on theme 4

The final theme in this literature review, that of picturebooks, has now reached conclusion. This section has illuminated the potential use of picturebooks in the classroom and posited them through

a DL lens. Echoing the cultural literacies model of the CKS as set forth by Hirsch, and the Vygotskian theory of language is man's finest tool, the premise of using prescribed text pieces in the form of picturebooks has been deliberated. Drawing on the *Primary Language Curriculum Teachers Toolkit* as well as the key works of Roche, Fiorentini, Gleeson, Bowe and Dolan, within the Irish context, the role of picturebooks within the primary classroom context has been positioned in a new light.

3.8 A summary of the literature review

This chapter has reviewed the literature in the areas of curricular reform, teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning, disciplinary literacy and picture books. Predominant to the Irish context, it sought to review the trajectory of reform, planning and practice to decipher how the transfer into practice of new policy and new curricula may manifest. At the cusp of a major curricular reformation in Ireland, the review sought to align disciplinary literacy and picturebooks within the curricular framework and the guidelines for the preparation of teaching and learning as set forth by the Department of Education. Posited amongst the findings of the *Children's Schools Lives CSL Study* (2024), the application of research such as this shall be of significant interest in how the new curriculum will reflect the real lived experiences of children in Irish classrooms. Arising from the review are a number of problem statements which follow, which this study has sought to address.

1. A gap in educational practice: Disciplinary literacy is traditionally taught at secondary and tertiary levels, but there is a lack of research and pedagogical strategies for introducing these concepts effectively in primary education. My study addresses the need to develop and evaluate methods, such as using picture books, for teaching disciplinary literacy at earlier stages.
2. Limited resources for primary disciplinary literacy: Current educational resources and curricula for primary schools do not explicitly incorporate disciplinary literacy. My study explored how picture books can fill this gap by providing age-appropriate materials that help young students engage with and understand complex disciplinary concepts.
3. Early literacy development challenges: Primary educators often struggle with introducing academic concepts in a way that is both accessible and engaging for young learners. My study investigated how picture books, with their combination of visual and textual elements, can be used to overcome these challenges and support the development of disciplinary literacy from an early age.
4. Integration of visual literacy in disciplinary learning: There is a need to understand how visual literacy, often overlooked in traditional disciplinary literacy frameworks, can be integrated into primary education. My study addresses how picture books can serve as a medium to teach both visual and textual literacy, contributing to a more comprehensive approach to early literacy education.

3.8.1 Concluding comments of the chapter

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, in 6th century BC, noted that change is a natural occurrence. This does not mean that foundations are uprooted with each new bringing. So too, in the context of current curricular reform, whilst many educationalists embrace the change it will bring, they understand that education and teaching retain its roots and traditions as it evolves and changes with the times we live in. Returning to the introductory parable, 'the essence of true education is timelessness. It is something that endures through changing conditions like a solid rock standing squarely and firmly in the middle of a raging torrent' (Pediwell 1939, p.44). It is important now to pause and consider how the changes that are made today in how education is disseminated, in consideration of this literature review, will impact on its ability to remain timeless. The OECD says that the aim of education has continued to shift its emphasis from the collection and memorisation of information to a broader concept of knowledge:

> whether a technician or a professional person, success lies in being able to communicate, share, and use information to solve complex problems, in being able to adapt and innovate in response to new demands and changing circumstances, in being able to marshal and expand the power of technology to create new knowledge and expand human capacity and productivity.
>
> (Binkley *et al.* 2011, abstract).

This review has displayed the point of connection with the literature and the research topic to ascertain, at the cusp of curricular reform, what capacity there may be in teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning for disciplinary literacy, using picturebooks as central texts. Reflective of the OECDs shifting aim as outlined above, this review has shown innovation, adaptability and the creation of new knowledge. The thesis shall now progress to outline the methodology and research design of the study which is detailed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

‘The wise man lets go of all results, whether good or bad, and is focused on the action alone.’

(Bhagavad Gita 200BC)

Image 4: The Red Tree by Shaun Tan

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research methodology is founded in the case study approach, providing a comprehensive lens through which to examine the intricacies of the chosen phenomenon-disciplinary literacy, picturebooks and TPPTL. Case study research serves to enable an in-depth analysis and exploration of real-world contexts (Merriam 1998; Miles & Huberman 2020; Hancock *et al*. 2021). In understanding the research question, the case study design offers a nuanced perspective, allowing for the exploration of multiple variables within the natural settings where the phenomenon unfolds (Lofland *et al*. 2022). This chapter outlines the rationale behind selecting the case study method, exposes the criteria for case selection, and presents the procedures and techniques employed for data collection and analysis. Through the careful application of this research methodology, I uncovered rich insights from human participants and contribute to a deeper comprehension of the interplay between disciplinary literacy and picturebooks in teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning (TPPTL) in the Irish primary school context. The chosen methodology profoundly influences the research by shaping the framework through which data is collected, analysed, and interpreted, thereby determining the depth, validity, and reliability of the study's findings (Kothari 2004; Tan 2022; Mishra & Alok 2017).

The chapter is divided into two sections: Methodology and Research Design, each section impacting on the next. Section 1 discusses the chosen methodology of case study which was employed to carry out this research study, while Section 2, through Yin's (2009) case study framework, presents the six stages of the research design used for undertaking this research.

SECTION 1: METHODOLOGY

4.2 Introduction to methodology

There are three over-arching types of research-quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods (Sarantakos 2017). Each takes a different methodological approach and each with a differing set of objectives. Qualitative research concentrates on words, descriptions, concepts or ideas with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the density of a situation while quantitative research focusses on numbers and statistics with the aim of testing or confirming hypotheses (Patton 2005). Mixed methods based research draws both qualitative and quantitative together (Brannen 2005). The nature of this study necessitated the use of a qualitative approach because it sought to explore the subjective experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of educational stakeholders regarding disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in primary classrooms, requiring in-depth, contextually rich insights that quantitative methods alone could not provide.

To complement this, the data analysis methodology adopted by this study, is based on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021; 2006). Maykut and Morehouse propose that 'words are the way that most people come to understand their situations; we create our world with words; we explain ourselves with words; we defend and hide ourselves with words' (Maykut and Morehouse 1994, p. 18), thus, in qualitative data analysis and presentation, the task of the researcher is to find patterns within those words and to present those patterns for others to inspect. By ensuing a predominantly qualitative design and methodological approach to this linguistic study, I have ensured consistency and rigour as both methodology and design align systematically. Case study research belongs to the constructivist paradigm (Mertens 2019; Baxter and Jack 2008), and is described as both a research approach and a research method (Simons 2009; Yin, 2009; Mertens 2019). This study also belongs to the constructivist paradigm, as presented in Chapter

Two. Although defined as a qualitative research method (Mertens 2019; Baxter and Jack 2008), case study research can include both qualitative and quantitative data (Yin 2009), such is the format of this study.

4.3 Choosing the methodology

There were several factors to consider when choosing the methodology that would best suit the aims of this research. To this end, the pre-empirical stage of research was imperative in analysing the research problem and its context and to seek clarity in my aims and questions for research. This question development, as emphasised as a fundamental stage by Punch & Oancea (2014), helped to disentangle issues, restating the original problem as a series of empirical research questions, as outlined in Chapter One.

It is argued that much educational research is individualistic and does not add to cumulative body of knowledge (Tooley & Darby 1998, Hargreaves 1996, Bassey 1999). As an educational researcher, this argument was worth considering as I set out to make the crucial decisions which determined my research design and methodology. Having studied the many educational methodologies that exist and; in order to meet the objectives of my study, it seemed well poised that an educational case study be selected as the 'best fit' for the purpose of my research. An educational case study is an empirical enquiry (Bassey 1999, p.109), based on observed and measured experiences, drawing knowledge from actual experience rather than from belief or theory. As the data collected in this study is done through a mixture of methods-quantitative through its Qualtrics survey and qualitative through its semi-structured interview, professional learning communities and open-ended questionnaire, it is fair to say that the case study methodology is underpinned by a mixed methods approach, which as Bell & Warren (2023,

abstract), outline can be used in a complementary fashion- with a mixed methods approach being used to collect data within a case study design.

4.3.1 Mixed methods as a consideration

Mixed methods was considered as an option for the predominant methodology for this study, however, it was concluded that a mixed methods methodology was not suitable for this research due to its key focus on capturing the depth and richness of individual experiences, interactions, and contextual factors surrounding disciplinary literacy and picture book usage in primary classrooms, which necessitated a comprehensive and in-depth exploration achievable through a holistic case study approach. While a mixed methods approach blends qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research topic, in the case of this study on disciplinary literacy and picture books in primary classrooms, a mixed methods approach would not be suitable due to the complexity and depth of the research questions. Qualitative methods are often favoured when the goal is to explore nuanced experiences, perceptions, and interactions within a specific context, as is the case with this study. Picture books and disciplinary literacy in primary classrooms involve intricate pedagogical dynamics, which may not be adequately captured by quantitative measures alone. Furthermore, introducing quantitative methods alongside qualitative ones might dilute the depth of understanding sought through qualitative inquiry, potentially limiting the richness of insights gained. Therefore, a qualitative case study approach, with its focus on holistic exploration within a specific context, was better suited to capture the multifaceted nature of disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in primary education. This study, therefore comprises a mixed-methods case study, embodying the definition as outlined by Creswell:

> A mixed methods case study design is a type of mixed methods study in which the quantitative and qualitative data collection, results, and integration are used to provide in-depth evidence for a case(s) or develop cases for comparative analysis.
>
> (Creswell 2018, p.116)

However, it was not the mixed methods themselves which guided or founded this study but rather the case study methodology in its own right. This research focused on the experiences, desires and beliefs of teachers in their practice and therefore is overarchingly qualitative in nature (Creswell 2014; Denscombe 2017; Punch 2009). Maxwell (2013) describes how a researcher should not be fixated on finding the best research methodology, but rather, on finding methodologies that are most appropriate to their research. This concurs with Robson's (2002) stance that a research methodology should fit the research being undertaken. Yin (2017) recommends the use of case study when the focus of the study is exploratory and seeks to answer how and why questions. The case study methodology was particularly well-suited for this study on disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in primary classrooms because it allowed for a deep and holistic exploration of the complex phenomena involved. It was exploratory in nature as it explored the use of picture books for disciplinary literacy in primary classrooms. The case study methodology provided the flexibility and depth needed to explore this topic comprehensively. It further allowed me to investigate the underlying processes, mechanisms, and contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of picture books in promoting disciplinary literacy. Through in-depth data collection methods such as interviews, professional learning communities and open ended questionnaires, the case study methodology facilitated a thorough examination of the research topic. This depth of analysis enabled me to uncover underlying patterns, themes, and relationships, contributing to a more broad understanding of disciplinary literacy and picture book usage in primary education. Therefore, the case study methodology effectively addressed the exploratory nature of this study, allowing me to answer 'how' and 'why' questions by delving deeply into the intricacies of

disciplinary literacy and picture book usage in primary classrooms, aligning with the recommendations of Yin (2018) for studies seeking to explore complex social phenomena.

4.4 Linking the theoretical and conceptual framework to the chosen methodology

Qualitative research, as Merriam (1998 p. 45) emphasises, is inherently focused on the inductive construction of knowledge rather than the testing of concepts, hypotheses, and theories. However, this does not refute the crucial role of theory in the research process. The theoretical or conceptual framework serves as a fundamental scaffold, providing essential support to safeguard the underpinnings of a research endeavour. Ragin & Becker (1992) aptly notes that without this framework, one might be left uncertain about the initial steps to take while Merriam (1998) underscores the need for explicit articulation of this framework. The theoretical and conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Two enriched the context and lens through which my study was oriented. By employing the four arched theoretical and conceptual theory framework for this study which drew on academic and cultural literacies as well as Vygotsky's *Theory of Language Development* and Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory*, I have successfully scaffolded the research. Indeed, as Thornton (1997) suggests, perception itself is inherently theory-laden. Clearly defining and grounding these perspectives within the study held as much significance as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that provided cohesion to my research. These frameworks played a crucial role in framing the research problem, generating specific research questions, and guiding the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. In essence, they operated as a guiding force, aligning my study within a set of interlocking frames, as illustrated in Figure 43, adapted from Merriam (1998), thereby enhancing the clarity behind the decision to employ a case study methodology.

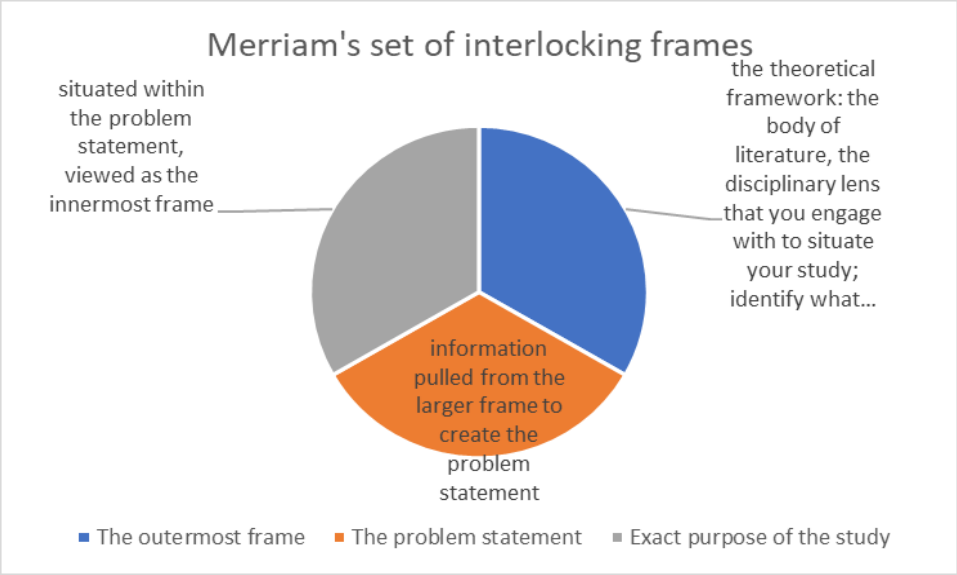


Figure 43: Merriam's Set of Interlocking Frames, Adapted from Merriam (1998 p. 4)

4.5 Case study-the holistic case study

The choice of the case study methodology for this research project, which scrutinises the perspectives of teachers, librarians, and key educational stakeholders regarding disciplinary literacy and the integration of picture books in the Irish primary classroom context, is grounded in its inherent ability to provide a holistic and in-depth exploration of multifaceted phenomena. Yin's holistic case study method model proved to be particularly apt for gathering the rich and nuanced thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of the human participants in this study. Given the multifaceted nature of educational practices and the intricate interplay between disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books, a case study approach allows for an immersive examination within the natural context of the Irish primary classroom. This methodology enabled the exploration of various perspectives and contextual factors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and viewpoints. The holistic case study model aligned seamlessly with the multifaceted nature of the research questions, facilitating a detailed analysis that went beyond mere

quantifiable data, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the complex educational landscape under investigation.

While traditional case studies classically focus on a specific aspect or dimension of a case, a holistic case study model expands the analysis to consider the interaction of various factors, relationships, and contexts. It seeks to capture the entirety of the case in all its complexity, providing a more thorough and comprehensive understanding, as was the case with this particular study. Furthermore, a holistic case study often integrates visions from multiple disciplines or theoretical frameworks to analyse the case from different angles. It considers how various factors from different domains interact and influence one another, leading to a more interdisciplinary understanding of the case. Such was the case with this study as evident through the multiple frameworks employed in the makeup of this study as outlined in Chapter Two. Taking the example of Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* which is one of the four frameworks underpinning this study, it aligns with the holistic case study approach as it adopts a systems thinking approach, recognising that the case is embedded within a larger system of interconnected elements. This perspective allowed me to examine not only the individual components of the case but also their relationships and dynamics within the broader systems. Finally, drawing on Vygotsky's *Theory of language development* once more, by incorporating the term "holistic" I have emphasised the depth, breadth, and interconnectedness of the study, highlighting the comprehensive nature of the research approach.

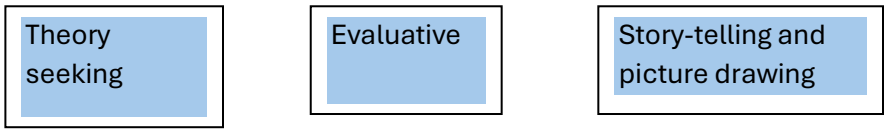
To further defend this methodological choice, case study is considered a key strategy for developing educational theory (Yin 2009). It serves to illustrate educational policy and enrich educational practice (Bassey 1999). It is, however, a widely criticised mode of educational research. Idowu (2016), cited in Wolhuter (2018), proclaims that case study research is the culprit

of ‘causal determinism, non-replicability, subjective conclusions, absence of generalizable conclusions, biased case selection and lack of empirical clout’ (Idowu 2016, p. 184, cited in Wolhuter 2018). These criticisms require an adeptness by the researcher to strive in their efforts to create a piece of valid research that does not fall suit to such critique. And so, in preparation, I turned to Bassey, a key educational researcher, who reflected upon his own work as he sought to reconstruct the concept of educational case study. In his *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*, Chapter 6, he outlined a series of factors for consideration by researchers to ensure that one’s study meets the criteria of an educational case study. Bassey recommends aspiring researchers to use such a checklist in their dissertations (See Appendix 19).

This study effectively adhered to the case study checklist, adapted from Bassey (1999), outlined above. This ensured a comprehensive and rigorous approach to the research. First, I clearly identified the educational nature of the case study, focusing on the examination of disciplinary literacy and the integration of picture books in the Irish primary classroom context. This further reflects Yin’s approach of first contemplating the topic you feel inspired to study. The research explored the intricate dynamics of disciplinary literacy and the employment of picture books in the primary school setting. Furthermore, this research ascertained the judgments and decisions of practitioners, policy-makers, stake-holders and librarians, aligning with the practical and theoretical implications inherent in educational case studies. In the data collection, I ensured that sufficient and diverse data were collected (interviews, focus group, open ended questionnaire, professional learning communities, nationwide questionnaire) to explore significant features of the case, from which I created credible interpretations. Through this well-documented case record, I provided an audit trail for future researchers, allowing them to validate or challenge the findings of this research and construct alternative arguments. This adherence to the case study checklist

reflects a methodologically sound and robust approach to the research, ensuring its credibility and relevance within the field of educational settings.

4.6 Categories of case study



The defining feature of case study research is its focus on 'how' and 'why' questions (Myers 2009) and for this reason is appropriate for descriptive and exploratory studies (Mouton 2001) such as this study. Bassey (1999) outlines three major categories of case study: theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies, evaluative case studies and story-telling and picture-drawing case-studies. For the purpose of this research it was deemed appropriate to employ Bassey's evaluative case study category, to the exclusion of the other two categories. This choice can be attributed to the specific goals and nature of the research inquiry. Evaluative case studies are particularly suitable when the primary objective is to assess the effectiveness, impact, or value of a particular educational activity, program, or intervention. In this study, which delves into the opinions of teachers, librarians, and key educational stakeholders on disciplinary literacy and the integration of picture books in the Irish primary classroom, the evaluative approach aligns well with the need to critically assess the implications and perceptions of these practices. While the story telling and picture drawing category was considered in the formulation of this study, it was deemed inappropriate due to the fact that disciplinary literacy is a relatively new concept at primary level in Ireland, necessitating a more evaluative approach. While theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies are oriented towards developing or testing theoretical frameworks, and story-telling and picture-drawing case studies focus more on narrative exploration, the evaluative category offers a structured framework

for examining the effectiveness and merit of the educational initiatives under investigation. By choosing this category, the research contributed to the practical understanding of how disciplinary literacy and picture books are perceived and utilised in the educational context, emphasising the importance of evaluating the impact of these practices on educational outcomes and informing future decision-making in the field.

4.7 Case study methodologists

Robert K. Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert E. Stake are three foundational methodologists in the area of case study research. Yazan (2015) in his comparative study on the trio summarised their interpretations of case studies as a research methodology, and, while similar, it was Yin's rigorous and systematic approach which aligned best with this research. Yin (2009; 2003) defines case study as 'a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context' (Yin 2003, p. 13). This study was adaptable to the contemporary phenomenon of disciplinary literacy (DL), which emerged in the Primary Language Curriculum in 2019. However, the context of how DL will translate into practice, as Yin (2003) outlines above, is unclear and beyond the researcher's control, especially considering disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the introduction of a new *Primary Curriculum Framework* and new *Primary Maths Curriculum* at the same time as the nationwide closure for the webinar on disciplinary literacy. As a relatively new phenomena, this case study sought to open up the discourse amongst stakeholders and practitioners around DL in order to decipher how this may operate in real life context, again reflective of Yin's definition.

4.8 Defining this case study research

Stake (2006; 1995) says that researchers should view case study as a bounded system and query it as an object rather than a process (Stake 1995, p. 2). Evolving from Stake's perspective, for Merriam (1998), the crucial characteristic of case study research is the limitation of the case. Merriam's definition is in agreement with Stake (1995) and Smith's (1978) view of the case as a bounded system and Stake's (1995) view of case as an integrated system. Merriam sees 'the case as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries' (Merriam 1998, p. 27). In this manner, case can be a programme, an individual, a specific policy, which represent a more wide-ranging list than Yin's and Stake's. The elaboration set forth by Merriam (1998) allowed this research to be clarified further within this methodology as it dealt with individuals, specific policy and possible programmes for teaching. Nevertheless, Cronin *et al.* (2014) says that defining case study research remains problematic because a case study can constitute both a design *and* a research method. Afterall, the terms 'case study', 'case study method' and 'case method' seem to be used interchangeably in the literature (Hamel *et al.* 1993; Yin 2009) causing confusion and lack of cohesion and thus hesitancy. However, it is clear that case study research focuses on specific situations, outlining a picture of individual or multiple cases. In using this design, the researcher can explore 'everything' in that situation, be it individuals, groups, activities or a specific singularity. The exploration of 'the everything' was something which appealed to me as a researcher as an important feature which perhaps, subjectively, other methodologies such as action research or autoethnography may not have been able to produce.

In order to carry out an effective case study, the researcher should follow a case study protocol. Yin (2009) outlines the protocol in four segments. This preparatory work gives the researcher the guidance and purpose which will allow their case study to gain respect in the

qualitative field. This is a beneficial factor. However, Yin, Stake and Bassey denote that critics of the methodology would argue that these protocols are not well defined or substantial enough to be legitimate in the field of research. The next section outlines how, by adopting Yin's case study protocol, this study gained structure and coherence, as well as validity and definition. Yin's (2009, 2003) case study protocol provided a systematic approach to conducting this case study research. Appendix 20 details how Yin's case study protocol aligned with this piece of research by outlining Yin's guidance under the headings of planning and design, data collection, data analysis and reporting, clearly stating its implementation within this study. By aligning the research design and implementation with Yin's case study protocol, I enhanced the rigor and validity of the study, ensuring a comprehensive and systematic exploration of disciplinary literacy and picture books in the Irish primary classroom context through the extensive four phases research design which shall be outlined in Section Two of this chapter.

4.9 Skills of the case study investigator

As well as the case study protocol, Yin (2009) outlines a desired series of skills that a case study researcher should employ, as seen in Figure 44 below. This was advantageous in that it allowed me to be consciously aware of the skills which I needed to employ as I conducted the case study. These included asking good questions and being able to interpret answers, being a good listener and not trapped in my own preconceptions, being adaptive and flexible and remaining unbiased.

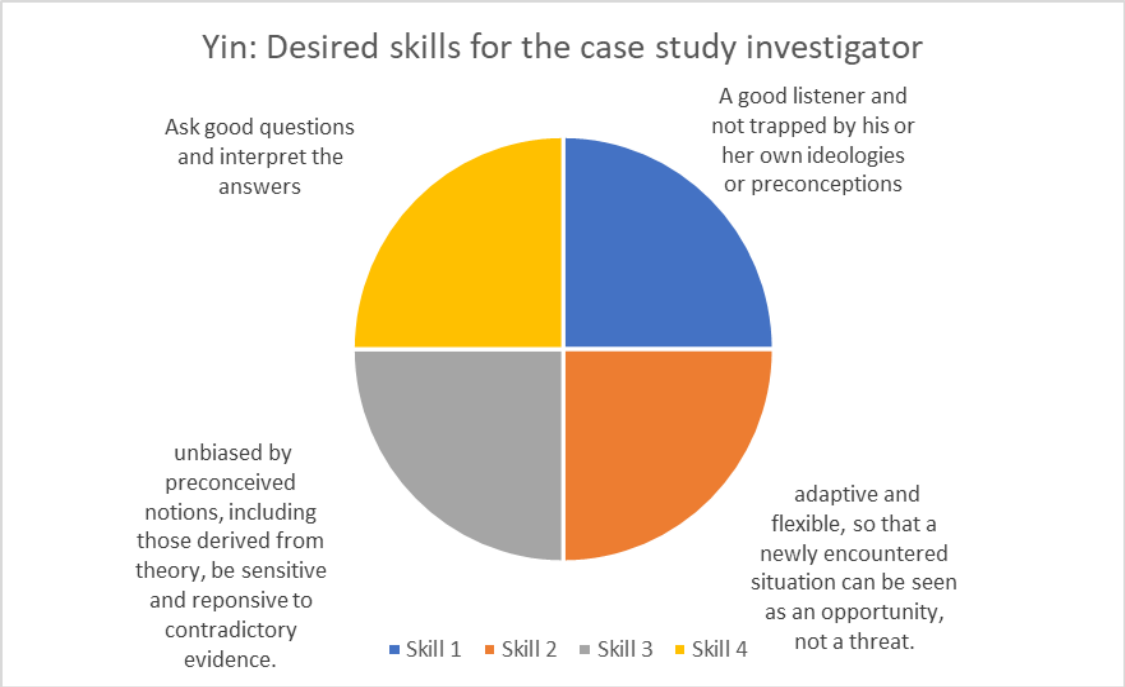


Figure 44: Desired skills for the case study investigator (adapted from Yin 2009)

In the formulation of case studies, entry points are important considerations for the researcher. By establishing these entry points, I had a more grounded plan of where to go next in terms of the research planning. Therefore, this research was guided and adapted accordingly. Particular attention was paid to Skill 3 to ensure that bias and preconceived notions did not impact on the research at hand. The is further detailed in Chapter 5. The entry points, as seen in Figure 45, were made following the completion of the literature review which allowed me to take each of the entry points (what do I know right now? What ideas are dominant in DL and PBs, what are the arguments or debates about these ideologies and what are the roots behind these ideas) and answer these through the available research, thus paving the way for further research through the establishment and refinement of the key research questions.

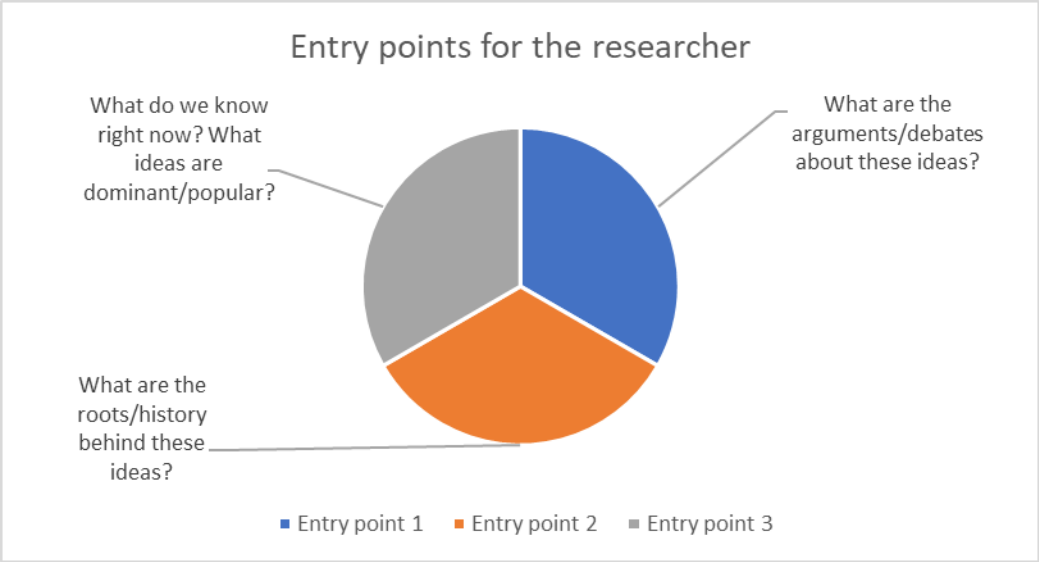


Figure 45: Entry points for the researcher

It is unquestionable that thorough planning and preparation are key to the presentation of case studies. Case study research seeks an in-depth understanding of an individual case (or series of cases) that is illustrative of an area/problem of interest. Rapley (2018) acknowledges that teacher practice can only be changed and enhanced if the underlying reasons for particular ways in which practices are enacted, and the influence of the place and people in a site, is understood. Only then can betterment of teacher pedagogic practice take place. In relation to this study, through exploration and collaboration with practitioners and other educational personnel, teacher practice has the capacity to reform, and so, this study serves to add a layer to the current knowledge base in this regard. This was evident through the in depth conversations in Phase 4 of this research, the professional learning communities, which saw teachers express their emerging knowledge of DL and the deciphering of ways in which PBs may be used to facilitate DL in the classroom. Through this purposeful dialogue, as Rapley (2019) envisaged, practitioners were able to examine their teacher pedagogic practice and identify ways to enrich this.

4.10 Case study advantages

Gomm et al (2000) cited in Cronin *et al.* (2014) identified a series of advantages in conducting case study research. Case studies, have the capacity to provide enriched experiences of unique situations. Such was the case in this study as it uniquely positioned a series of key personnel involved policy making and curriculum delivery in the Irish primary setting. Taking this group of people and giving them the time and space to share their experiences and perspectives on DL and PBs enabled me to take my readers and participants to places where most would not have access or opportunity to go. This was particular to each of the four phases of this study as it sought, as Gromm (2000) outlines, to reflect real life and what is happening in the Irish education system at this point in time. According to Gomm *et al.* (2000), the advantages of conducting case study research include the ability to: (1) take us to places where we might not have access or the opportunity to go; (2) provide enriched experiences of unique situations; (3) allow us to look through the eyes of the researcher; (4) be less likely to produce defensiveness and resistance to learning in the reader; (5) enable us to share the researcher's perspective of the theoretical position in the study; and (6) offer a more acceptable and practically applicable approach than some of the deeper philosophical approaches, as the research reflects real-life contexts.

Furthermore, Bell & Waters (2014) denotes that the case study approach can be particularly suitable for individual researchers because it provides an opening for one side of a problem to be studied in greater detail. This opening, allowed me to examine the perspectives of key educational stakeholders in great detail through the four phases of this project. Yin, however, warns that 'the more a study contains specific propositions, the more it will stay within reasonable limits' (Yin

1994, p. 137). Such was the case in this particular piece of research as it remained within the limits of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and bound by the cases it sought to explore.

A final advantage of case study research is that the exchange that occurs between the participants of a case study is a valuable action. Wells (1999) writes that

> acts of meaning do not occur in isolation but as dialogic contributions to discourse . . . That is to say, they occur in the course of an exchange of meaning between participants in order to perform some actions in a specific situation.
>
> (Wells 1999, p. 235)

Through promoting and encouraging dialogic talk, participants begin to understand and express their own 'personal constructs'. This makes the case study research methodology beneficial for both researcher and participant, which is constructive to the learning process all round. This dialogic culture was cultivated through the PLC model, semi-structured interviews, survey and open ended questionnaires created through this case study research and allowed practitioners authentic opportunities to engage in contributions to discourse in the areas of DL, teacher planning and the use of picture books in the Irish primary classroom.

4.11 Case study as a tool for this study

A case study is deemed a suitable tool when there is a clearly identifiable case with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Yin 2017; Stake 2013). This case study explored the perspectives of primary school practitioners, key educational stakeholders including members of the NCCA, INTO, PDST (Oide), CBI, and librarians (both in Ireland and the UK), on disciplinary literacy and the integration of picture books into classroom instruction. The clearly identifiable case, as Yin and Stake suggest, focused on understanding practitioners' experiences, challenges, and perspectives in using picture books to support disciplinary literacy skills across subject areas. This was achieved through the four phases of research design which

included in-depth interviews conducted with key educational stakeholders. These interviews explored 1. these stakeholders' perceptions of disciplinary literacy, their approaches to integrating picture books into instruction, and the impact of these practices on student learning. 2. The research phases further included open-ended questionnaire where librarians were surveyed using open-ended questionnaires to gather more detailed insights into their experiences with picture books and working with schools. 3. Furthermore, the third phase of the research which constituted a nationwide survey to primary school practitioners, successfully collected broader perspectives on disciplinary literacy practices and the use of picture books in the classroom. The survey identified common challenges, and areas for improvement across diverse educational settings. 4. Finally, the fourth phase of the study, the Professional learning communities (PLCs) facilitated among primary school practitioners fostered collaboration and knowledge-sharing regarding disciplinary literacy and picture book integration. These communities provided opportunities for practitioners to discuss challenges, share resources, and co-develop effective instructional strategies around the topics at hand. This case study therefore, again as Yin and Stake outline, offers a synthesis of practitioners' perspectives on disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in primary school classrooms. The findings inform recommendations for enhancing instructional practices, professional development initiatives, and curriculum design to better support students' literacy development across subject areas.

And so, this study irrevocably took the form of a case study. Case study research stresses the importance of a triangulation of data sources to provide rich data (Stake 2006). Bell (2014) denotes that case studies may be carried out to follow up and to put flesh on the bones of a survey. Case studies may also precede a survey, setting the scene and can be used as a means of identifying key issues which merit further investigation. However, most case studies are carried out as free-

standing exercises which are conducted in order, outlined by Hartley (1994), for which alignment to this study can be viewed in Appendix 20. Using this format, case studies can be tailor-made for exploring new processes or behaviours or ones that are little understood. This case study sought to explore new processes of teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning (TPPTL) specifically for DL in the primary setting, which is an area that is currently little understood as it is such a recent addition to the primary school curriculum. In the professional learning communities, I explored with teachers, ways in which they might begin to plan for DL and what this might look like in their visible, invisible and recorded preparation as set forth by the guidelines for teachers document (See Section 2 of literature review).

4.12 Essential aspects of case study and its application to this study

Jonisdottir *et al*. (2018) summarise the essential and flexible aspects of case study research. This provided me with a set of guidelines to work alongside. As detailed in Appendix 21, I was able to identify the essential and flexible characteristics of this study and use this to navigate the research process. Furthermore, Jonisdottir outlines how the researcher is able to use multiple sources of data, both qualitative or mixed whilst also allowing for the research question to remain flexible. This modality was adopted in this study through its research design which is detailed in Section two of this Chapter. Arguably, however, Jonisdottir's outline does not have a legitimate status as a social science research strategy because it does not have well-defined and well-structured protocols (Yin 2003). In the context of this study, Jonisdottir's outline of the essential and flexible aspects of case study research serves to strengthen the position of the research and to identify the challenges also. (See Appendix 22 for an outline of the Strengths and Challenges identified).

4.13 Criticisms of case study

There are many criticisms of case studies and elements which researchers should be mindful of when using this research method (lack of generalisability, subjectivity and bias, limited scope and depth, difficulty in replication, ethical concerns, time and resource intensiveness). Critics of the case study approach, such as Flyvbjerg (2006) and Idowu (2016), draw attention to a number of problems and/or disadvantages. For example, some question the value of the study of single events and point out that it is difficult for researchers to cross-check information. Others express concern about the possibility of selective reporting and the resulting dangers of misrepresentation (Cronin *et al.* 2014). Historically, quantitative researchers have argued that case study research is anecdotal and unscientific, dismissing the results and findings obtained by this method as lacking validity and reliability (Al Rubaie 2002). According to Burton (2000) and Gerring (2007), case study research is held in low regard or simply ignored. As opposed to other qualitative or quantitative research strategies, such as grounded theory, Meyer (1991) depicts that there are virtually no specific requirements guiding case research. This is both the strength and the weakness of this approach. It is a strength because it allows tailoring the design and data collection procedures to the research questions. On the other hand, this approach has resulted in many poor case studies, leaving it open to criticism, especially from the quantitative field of research.

A major concern is that generalisation is not always possible, though Denscombe (1998, pp. 36–7) makes the point that ‘the extent to which findings from the case study can be generalised to other examples in the class depends on how far the case study example is similar to others of its type’. He illustrates this point by drawing on the example of a case study of a small primary school. He pens: ‘This means that the researcher must obtain data on the significant features (catchment area, the ethnic origins of the pupils and the amount of staff turnover) for primary schools in

general, and then demonstrate where the case study example fits in relation to the overall picture' (Denscombe 1998, p. 37). Bassey (1999) preferred to use the term relatability rather than generalisability. In his opinion, an important measure for judging the quality of a case study is the extent to which the details are adequate and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision making to that described in the case study. Therefore, the relatability of a case study is more important than its generalisability (Bassey 1999, p. 85). He considers that if case studies are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the enhancement of education, if they are relevant, and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are legitimate forms of educational research (Bassey 1999, p. 86). Sykes (1990) questions reliability as a factor which may be a drawback of this research methodology. The following questions, as suggested by Skyes (1990, p.6) were considered in the process of this research:

1. Could the same study carried out by two researchers produce the same findings?
2. Could a study be repeated using the same researcher and respondents to yield the same findings?
3. Would different researchers generate different findings and reach different conclusions?

While it is impossible to definitely answer such questions, the research design, which shall be detailed momentarily, bounded within the case study methodology, allowed for a real and plausible reckoning that concur with the questions posed by Stokes. Through the finely-tuned four phase data collection afforded by this study, a similar study, enacted by another researcher is likely to yield similar results. Specifically, and in order to enhance the validity, reliability, and rigor of my study, I engaged in the process of triangulation. I incorporated multiple sources of data (interviews,

questionnaires, survey, professional learning communities) to provide converging evidence and enhance the credibility of my findings across diverse contexts.

Furthermore, I engaged in purposeful sampling in which I selected participants and cases strategically to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, increasing the transferability of my findings to similar contexts. As well as this, I employed a comparative analysis in which I compared and contrasted findings across different groups within my study to identify commonalities and differences, allowing for broader generalisations. Additionally, I maintained reflexivity throughout the research process by critically reflecting on my own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions in relation to the research. Finally, I successfully provided detailed and rich descriptions of the cases, phenomena, and contexts under study to capture the complexity of the research topic.

4.14 Where case study meets with this study

Punch and Oancea (2014) state that every case, in some ways, is similar to other cases. The pair deduce that what researchers need to focus on is whether they look at what is unique about a particular case or what is in common with other cases. Furthermore, the duo note that, at different times in research, researchers need to do both of these things, and form an awareness of when they are doing each**.** Similarly, this body of research allowed such comparisons to be made. I cross checked my case study against others similar to the field being studied, such as, Graham (2007) and their study on improving teacher effectiveness through structured collaboration; Colwell and Gregory (2021) and their case study on examining preservice teacher's perspectives on disciplinary literacy and Farmer (2019) and their case study on the role of librarians in Swedish schools. This enabled me to look at what was unique and common to my own case study. The

unique design of the four phases of this study proved to accentuate this. The dialogue afforded between practitioners and librarians compared to that of PDST, INTO and NCCA personnel was dissected by examining what was unique and what was common within each transcript (through the six stages of coding in NVivo, as outlined in Section 2). Reflective of Punch and Oancea's (2014) ideology of what a good case study entails, this study met with the same objectives, as illustrated in Appendix 23. The study was comprised of four phases of data collection. Ease phase is considered a sub-case of the case study.

Sub-case 1 constituted a series of six semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in educations, namely INTO, NCCA and PDST.
Sub case 2 established a semi-structured interview with a group of Irish librarians as well as a series of open-ended questionnaires with librarians across Ireland and the UK.
Sub case 3 saw the launch of a nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers in Ireland.
Sub case 4 consisted of a series of four professional learning communities, each community hosting up to three one-hour meetings, with a final collaborative meeting held for all PLC participants.

Table 12: Case studies in action

The order in which the sub cases were conducted was also strategically planned as the information retrieved from participants informed and guided the next sub case. For example, in phase 1, participants involved in policy making spoke of the familiarisation period of curricular change and the expectation that teachers would feel 'at sea' in this stage. This led to a series of questions in the professional learning communities and nationwide survey on how the curriculum was disseminated to compare suppositions versus actual perceptions. So too, interviews with key personnel from PDST/Oide highlighted the resources and time as key issues in the use of picture books in the classroom and so this question was situated in the subsequent sub cases to glean further data to compare and contrast. The design of Yin's case study protocol aligned with this study can be viewed in Appendix 27.

4.15 Other methodologies which were considered for this research

Action research: Often referred to as 'practitioner research' (McNiff 2002, p.15), action research was deemed a contender for the conduction of this research. As Elliot (1991) suggests, action research is the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it. This research did not seek to improve the quality of planning, teaching and learning relating to DL but rather to discourse how this may transpire over time, with DL being a new concept which practitioners are only just learning about. Kemmis (1983) outlines that action research is the trying out of an idea in practice with a view to changing something, trying to have a real effect on the situation. This research sought to have an effect on how DL is planned for and taught in the primary classroom. However, Lewin's (1946) action-reflection cycle theory of action research; viewed as a spiral of steps involving planning, acting, observing and reflecting decided that this particular study would not suit the realms of action research as the research topic at hand was too infantile in terms of robust research in the area and also the fact that a desire to plan, act, observe and reflect was a step ahead of what this research was trying to achieve. Perhaps future research in this field, armed with the knowledge conveyed through this research, intertwined in the deep and meaningful conversations of practitioners as curriculums makers, may be conducted (See recommendations in Chapter Six).

Phenomenology: Phenomenology serves as a means to depict the lived encounters of a particular concept or phenomenon as perceived by various individuals (Paley 2016; Vagle 2016). On the other hand, **Grounded Theory** seeks to formulate a theory that is rooted in the amassed and scrutinized data (Creswell 2018). Although both approaches could have provided valuable insights into the comprehension and experiences of practitioners and educational stakeholders concerning DL and picturebooks, interviews emerge as the principal method for data collection in

both methodologies (Creswell 2018). The researcher held concerns that some subtleties within teachers' lived experiences might be overlooked if regarded as inconsequential by the participants. In contrast, the case study method offers an avenue to incorporate diverse sources (Stake 1995; Yin 2017), affording the research a comprehensive view of how teachers, librarians, policy-makers and others facilitate DL and the use of picturebooks in the primary classroom. Moreover, case studies centre on context, are confined to a specific timeframe, and pertain to distinct groups (Creswell 2018). Thus, when researchers seek an exhaustive grasp of how a group functions in the real world within a particular period, a case study approach becomes a viable choice. Given this premise and considering that this study endeavours to delve into the encounters of a collective of teachers, educational stakeholders and librarians, the case study methodology was deemed the suitable and effective approach.

4.16 Concluding comment on Section 1

Section 1 has outlined the chosen methodology for this study. I chose the case study methodology for this study to gain in-depth insights into the complex interactions and dynamics surrounding the use of picture books in disciplinary literacy instruction in primary schools. By focusing on multiple sub cases, I captured a diverse range of perspectives from educational stakeholders, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, successes, and best practices in integrating picture books into primary school literacy education. The case study approach enabled me to explore the contextual factors shaping practitioners' views and practices amidst a period of curricular reform in Ireland, providing valuable insights for enhancing disciplinary literacy instruction with picture books. Section 2 shall now detail the research design for the study.

SECTION 2: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.17 Introduction to the Research Design

In an effort to provide a clear structure for the application of case study research, the six-step framework proposed by Yin (2009) was utilised to develop the research question.

STEP 1: THE PLAN

As outlined in Chapter One, the research question was established due to the identification of a gap in the research on the use of picture books to support the teaching of disciplinary literacy in the primary school setting in Ireland. With the theoretical and conceptual framework, as outlined in Chapter Two, framing the study, and the literature review detailing the literature in the field of the research under question, the rationale for doing a case study was further concretised in Chapter Four. The importance of this plan ensured that a layer would be added to the research landscape for Irish educationalists so that current and future research can be built, enriching the depth of research available around DL and PBs in Irish primary schools. Thus, the steps taken to ensure that the planning stage of this research were achieved was methodically implemented.

STEP 2: THE DESIGN

The design of the methodology for this study was rigorously conducted. I dutifully turned to Yin on how to best achieve this step through his rigorous research. I further turned to Baxter and Jack, (2008) whose advice around establishing a database to enhance reliability was heeded, and then to Hancock and Algozzine's (2021) handbook in Chapter 5 where they explore how to select a design and the relation between the design and the method as well as illustrations, activities and applications that could be adapted to suit this research design. To triangulate this further, I turned

to Thomas (2021) on *How to do your case study*, and learned about the exploratory nature of the design and analytical frame that the study needed to take. The selected units of analysis and ethical procedures were formulated through the MIREC-3 process for Ethical approval at MIC. This detailed process enabled me to decipher and outline the four phases of the research design as well as initiating the ethical procedures for conducting each phase, committing to storing the results and reporting the findings in a moral and proper manner.

STEP 3: PREPARE

Step three, a timely stage, encompassed the necessary steps required prior to conducting the case study research- (i) the pilot study and (ii) case study protocol. As Alexander Graham Bell said, 'before anything else, preparation is the key to success'. (i) The purpose of the pilot study was twofold. Firstly, it aimed to assess the suitability of the questions and offer early insights into the feasibility of the overall research. Secondly, it gave me valuable experience in conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews and establishing rapport with the participants. Additionally, the pilot study was crucial in helping me develop essential skills in interviewing and managing the flow of conversation. (ii) The case study protocol as outlined in Section 2 of this Chapter, saw Yin's four-pronged protocol enacted, which further founded the research at hand.

STEP 4: COLLECT

To achieve step 4 of Yin's framework, the multiple methods of data collection; interview, questionnaire, survey and professional learning communities was established, described and utilised, as detailed in chapters Four and Five.

STEP 5: ANALYSE

In order to analyse the data in a systematic and cohesive way, Braun and Clarke's, (2006) six phase guide to thematic analysis was used, complemented by qualitative software NVivo 12. Details of this approach and results of same as presented in the findings and analysis Chapters of this research piece.

STEP 6: SHARE

The final step in Yin's framework was the creation and publication of the report (thesis), linking the analysis of the data to the proposals and presenting and sharing this to an audience.

4.18 Data Collection and its instruments

Merriam (1998) declares that management of data should be an organised system that is devised early on in the study. This data management system was set up immediately following Ethics approval for this research. A key component of data organisation, described by Merriam (1998) is coding. The purpose of coding, as McKernan (1991 p. 228) outlines, is to classify evidence and place the data into neat categories so that patterns may be coherently established. Merriam (1998) describes how this occurs at two levels; (1) identifying information about the data and (2) interpretive constructs relating to analysis of the data. Using such a model, coding played a key role in the management of this research framework (See Section 4.25 which details the use of NVivo in this project).

The data was collected in surroundings familiar to educators which allowed participants to act normally. Reflective diaries, observations, meeting transcripts and notes and semi-structured interviews comprised the data collection instruments used. These methodological tools reflect the

values and characteristics of the study at hand. I ensured that the data was accessed, collected and managed in line with Mary Immaculate College's ethical guidelines and sought approval form the university's ethical committee prior to approaching any participants regarding their involvement in the proposed research.

Reflective diaries	Used by the researcher in all stages of the research
Observations	Observations recorded by researcher during/directly after interviews and PLC meetings.
Semi-structured interviews	Interviews with representatives from professional bodies (PDST, NCCA, INTO) And interviews with librarians were recorded and transcribed via Teams, Zoom, Otter Pro.
Focus group/s	Series of professional learning community groups. Meetings were recorded and transcribed via Teams, Zoom, Otter Pro.
Survey	The nationwide survey was created through the Qualtrics platform and distributed via e-mail, QR code, text and social media platforms.
Open ended questionnaire	Open ended questionnaires were compiled based off the interview questions for librarians and distributed via email.

Table 13: Data collection methods pertaining to this research

Reflective diaries

'Self-reflection is central'

(McNiff 2002, p. 5)

Reflective diaries are an essential and effective tool of the teacher researcher (Altrichter et al. 2008). This tool was used from the very early stages of this research project. As an experienced Reading Recovery (RR) teacher, I have a skillset in note taking, carefully observing the child at every turn of the lesson. This training served to assist the reflective diary method of data collection. Examples of which can be seen in Appendix 24.

Observation as a key tool

Observation, as the name suggests, is a way of generating data through observing. Observation data collection method is classified as a participatory study, because the researcher has to immerse his/herself in the setting where their respondents are, while taking notes and/or recording. Dudovskiy (2016) outlines some of the benefits and drawbacks of the observation approach which were considered in the formulation and execution of this reserach (See Appendix 24). Cohen *et al*. (2000 p.315) denote that 'observation methods are powerful tools for gaining insight into situations'. Without the tool of observation, this study would have been null and void. Using Hopkins (1996) four methods of teacher observation as outlined in Table 14, I effectively noted my observations, thoughts, opinions and remarks made during and after PLC meetings and semi-structured interviews. From my experience as a Reading Recovery teacher, the open observation method was one which I was very comfortable with, therefore this was the predominant method employed, with others used sparingly.

Open observation	Using a blank sheet of paper to record observations
Focussed observation	Where the researcher has decided on a specific focus for the session
Structured observation	Involves the use of a tally system or a diagram
Systematic observation	Entails the use of existing observation scales.

Table 14: Observation methods-Adapted from Hopkins (1996)

In interpretive inquiry, Holloway (1997) implies that participant numbers tend to be modest. Yin (2009) suggests that inexperienced researchers should initially engage in 'a simple and direct case study' (Yin 2009, p. 162) due to the challenges associated with handling and interpreting extensive data sets. Nevertheless, Yin (2009) argues that evidence derived from several cases is frequently deemed more persuasive, resulting in a study's overall robustness, and

contributes to a credible comprehension. In this study, by using multiple sources of data – and multiple participants (Maimbo & Pervan 2005) it was not only preferable in order to triangulate data (Yin 2009) but allowed for significant insights to emerge (Myers 1997). The data was collected over a ten month period (January 2023-October 2023) through the following four phases:

Phase 1	Interview with key educational stakeholders (Jan-Feb. 2023)
Phase 2	Nationwide survey (Mar-June 2023)
Phase 3	Interview and open ended questionnaire with librarians (April-May 2023)
Phase 4	Professional learning communities (June-October 2023)

Table 15: The Four Phases of this research

PHASE 1: INTERVIEW WITH KEY EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

Semi-structured interview

Smith (1995) describes research as a dynamic interactive process. Longhurst (2003) illustrates semi-structured interviews as the backbone of qualitative methods. Galletta (2013, p.1) declares that semi-structured interview is 'typically underutilised, yet it has remarkable potential' and its unique flexibility is structured to address specific dimensions of the researchers research questions, which was the case in this research. Furthermore, as Galletta (2013) illustrates, the semi-structured interview allows for the exploration of the lived experience and the opportunity to 'attend to the complexity of a story in need of contextualisation' (Galletta 2013, p.9). In light of Irish curricular reform and the recent landing of disciplinary literacy into the mouths of practitioners at primary level, the need for contextualising the story of teachers making meaning of such policy and curricula was essential to the success of this study. To this end, Opie (2004) identifies three types of interview; structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview. For the purpose of this research, semi-structured interview was employed. This type of interview allowed the flexibility needed when interviewing key personnel. The purpose of these interviews was to

prompt conversation and discussion from participants, avoiding rigidity on one hand and lack of structure on the other. The information gained at interview was then used in the evaluation of the case studies and in supporting key findings.

According to Bell & Waters (2018) one major advantage of the interview is its adaptability. Bell states that a skilled interviewer can

> follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do. The way in which a response is made (the tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation, etc.) can provide information that a written response would conceal. (Bell 2014, p. 157).

In this research, I was able to navigate the conversation and follow up on ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings in a natural way. While questionnaire responses have to be taken at face value, responses in an interview can be developed and explained. However, interviews are time-consuming which is a drawback. As well as this, the fact that interviews are a subjective technique means that there is a danger of bias. Furthermore, analysing responses can present problems, and wording the questions is almost as demanding for interviews as it is for questionnaires. Even so, the interview can yield rich material and can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses (Bell & Waters 2018).

The key skills of an interviewer are outlined in Figure 46 below. It is imperative to note that questions should be open ended, neutral, sensitively phrased and clear to the interviewee (Locke 2002; Patton 2005), and probing/ prompts should not be leading. Also, when expressing interest and attention, it is important to refrain from commenting on answers. To this end, I heeded the advice of my supervisors who have vast experience in the area of research. By pausing and allowing time for answers to progress by the participant and by refining how certain questions were posed, I enriched the dialogue and then by using facial expression, enthusiasm and affirmations, I enriched the interest and attention of the interview/focus group/ PLC.

Figure 46: Key skills of an interviewer- adapted from Qu & Dumay, 2011; Donalek, 2005

Interview Questions

The information gathered from each interview depends on how questions are structured and phrased. According to Cohen *et al.* (2011), it is essential to carefully consider the questions that will make up the interview schedule. In this research, question construction took place in three phases aligned with the study's aims and objectives. Bell (2014) emphasised the importance of piloting questions to ensure clarity and obtain sufficient data. Consequently, the interview questions were piloted with three purposively chosen participants. Phase one involved creating questions based on literature review findings. Phase two included reviewing and piloting questions with three participants to ensure clarity and data adequacy. In phase three, questions were edited, incorporating more open-ended ones for a truer assessment, following an open-ended funnel questioning technique, as proposed by Bell (2014). The interview schedule, linked to relevant

literature, was thematised with major and minor questions, offering flexibility in the semi-structured approach to explore various trajectories beyond the interview protocol.

PHASE 2: NATIONWIDE SURVEY

Consistent with Creswell (2018), questionnaires provide a relatively simple and straightforward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives. As this study attempted to highlight the various understandings, perceptions and attitudes of teachers in relation to disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books, the survey was a particularly suitable tool. Additionally, as Bourgeault *et al.* (2010) denote, the questionnaire can be used to gather data from a large number of geographically-dispersed respondents. Thus, the questionnaire yielded large amounts of data and also supported the case study approach utilised in the study. Furthermore, the use of questionnaire enabled me to establish whether the practices and perceptions of the teachers were consistent with the teachers interviewed. As per the creation of questions in the interview phase of the project, the questions created for the purpose of the survey were carefully sculpted as per Cohen *et al.* (2011) and Bell's (2014) question developing advice.

As supported by Robson (2002, p.254), pre-testing of the questionnaire took place over a number of stages. Draft questionnaires were primarily pre-tested informally amongst colleagues. This ensued rewording of some of the questions and changes to the layout. A formal pre-testing of the questionnaire occurred amongst a group of four teacher colleagues. This process enabled me to determine that the surveys were clear, manageable and beneficial to the study. After informal and formal pre-testing, the questionnaire was dispatched nationwide through email. The email contained information relating to the aims, objectives and procedure of the research. It additionally guaranteed confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability throughout the research process.

Furthermore, it contained a link to the questionnaire which was created through the Qualtrics platform. Furthermore, the questionnaire was distributed through the available additional channels within the survey software, namely, social media, QR code and individual link. An email containing an information note and link to the survey was sent to all 3,300 primary schools in Ireland. The questionnaire was shared on various social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn. The link was circulated by various social media influencers/bloggers in the Irish educational domain also. The questionnaire was launched and relaunched a number of times over a four month period. It yielded 333 responses. I primarily endeavoured to use NVivo to import the Qualtrics survey results, however, the College licence did not support this, therefore the Qualtrics platform itself was used to capture the data.

Survey participants

It is evident from questions one and two (See survey, Appendix 2), that the survey represents a wide cohort of primary school settings across Ireland as well as a wide cohort of teachers from various class standards in primary school settings across Ireland. The predominant groups being S.E.T., Junior Infants and Senior Infants with the least groups represented are third and fourth classes. There is also a encompassing range of roles in the 'other' bracket as outlined in Appendix 2. From the graphic breakdown, it is apparent that the practitioners who took part in this survey had predominantly between 11 and 20 years teaching experience (45.96%). The least amount of teachers surveyed (8.39%) outlined having 31+ years of teaching experience. As envisaged, given the female dominated profession of primary teaching, 91.88% of participants of this survey identified as female.

PHASE 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW AND OPEN ENDED QUESTIONAIRES WITH LIBRARIANS IN IRELAND AND THE UK

Phase three of this research project drew on the experiences of librarians in Ireland and the UK to decipher and highlight the similarities and differences in the models and approaches used by libraries in terms of collaboration and support with primary schools. The open-ended survey, which can be seen in Appendix 3 was delivered to librarians across Ireland and through a librarian contact in the UK. An invitation to interview was also sent prior to the open-ended questionnaire. An interview was conducted with three librarians in Ireland, however the endeavour to interview librarians from the UK did not yield many results. It was at this point that the research phase was reevaluated and an open ended survey was distributed to both Irish and UK based librarians which yielded a substantially better result. The table below illustrates the participants in this phase of the research.

	Irish-based librarians	UK based librarians
Interview	3	1
Open-ended questionnaire	7	5

Table 16: Phase 3 participants

PHASE FOUR: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

> 'Thinking about what we are doing leads us to ask better questions, break out of fruitless routines, make unexpected connections, and experiment with fresh ideas'
>
> (Brandt 2011, p.).

The final phase of this research comprised of a series of professional learning communities. Appendix 25 outlines the format which the PLC sessions took. Slides from the sessions can be found in Appendix 7.

Professional Learning Communities

The communities were established through open invitation sent to a variety of school settings across Ireland. The PLCs centred around gathering evidence of the lived experiences of teachers in primary school settings in relation to navigating curricular reform and teacher planning through the lens of disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books. The participants, who came from multiple schools (eight different school settings were encompassed), participated in the research which saw the establishment of three respective professional learning communities from which a mixture of practitioners across Ireland joined together in a professional learning centre. Participation in the PLC was on a voluntary basis. Each school participant participated in a series of up to four collaborative meetings which involved guided and peer-led discussion along with conversation and dialogue on the topics of teacher planning, disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in the primary classroom.

Each school displayed difference in their respective settings in terms of gender, geographical location and religion. The participants included two principals- one of a rural school in Munster and one of an affluent school in Dublin. Teachers from Sligo, Waterford, West Meath, Limerick and Cork from non-DEIS settings also participated. Five teachers from a DEIS All-girls school took part while one teacher from a DEIS rural school participated. A teacher from a special school setting also formed part of the PLC. With the individual interest of teachers in the study driving the establishment of these PLCs, the participants were mixed at random to formulate the remaining PLCs. The profiles of each school are detailed below. This diversity offered a wider scope to serve for future application of the research to additional schools with similar profiles and perhaps generalisability to non-similar school settings, at the discretion of individual schools.

Table 17 presents an overview of the participants that took part in this study. In line with ethical considerations, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant to ensure that their anonymity and confidentiality were upheld throughout the process.

Table 17: Overview of participants of PLCs

Pseudonyms	Participant Role	Years of teaching experience	School Type	Practicing Name in Current Chapter
Grace	SET teacher	13	DEIS Band 1 All girls, Catholic	Grace, SET Teacher
Mary	Class teacher, AP2	15	DEIS Band 1 All girls, Catholic	Mary, Class Teacher
Kieran	Class teacher	16	DEIS Band 1 All girls, Catholic	Kieran, Class Teacher
Michael	Class teacher, AP2	16	DEIS Band 1 All girls, Catholic	Michael, Class Teacher
Evelyn	Class teacher	14	DEIS Band 1 All girls, Catholic	Evelyn, Class Teacher
Eabha	Principal	18	Rural, mixed, Catholic	Eabha, Principal
Sam	Special class Teacher	18	Special school, Catholic	Sam, Class Teacher Special School
Harry	SET teacher	20	DEIS Band 2 rural, mixed, Catholic	Harry, SET Teacher
Liam	Deputy principal, SET teacher	16	Rural, Mixed, Catholic	Liam, SET Teacher
Tom	Principal	25	Urban, mixed, Presbyterian	Tom, Principal
Eddie	SET teacher	14	Rural, mixed, Catholic	Eddie, SET Teacher
Catherine	Class Teacher	22	Urban, mixed, Catholic	Catherine, Class Teacher
Sean	EAL teacher	11	Urban mixed, Educate Together	Sean, EAL Teacher
Anne	CBI	N/A	N/A	Anne, CBI
Jane	NCCA	12	N/A	Jane, NCCA
Denise	INTO	35	N/A	Denise, INTO
Clare	PDST Advisor	12	N/A	Clare, PDST
Niamh	PDST Advisor	11	N/A	Niamh, PDST
Aidan	PDST Advisor	18	N/A	Aidan, PDST
Alma	Librarian	N/A	N/A	Alma, Librarian Ireland
Aideen	Librarian	N/A	N/A	Aideen, Librarian Ireland
Amie	Librarian	N/A	N/A	Amie, Librarian Ireland

PLC 1

School 1 is an **urban** DEIS Band 1 school situated on the north side of Cork city. It is an **all-girls** school comprising 370 pupils. This presentation school is run under a Catholic ethos. There are 27 staff members, 21 mainstream class teachers and 6 S.E.T. teachers. There is also an Early start preschool attached to the school and a special class unit within the school building. The school avails of an in-house Home School Liaison Teacher, a behavioural support teacher, a shared school completion teacher and a visiting play therapist. As well as a walking principal and teaching deputy principal, there are two AP1 post holders within the school and four AP2 posts. Professional teams within the school include a literacy team, a numeracy team, a green schools team and an Active Schools team. This particular school had prior experience in participating in a professional learning community initiative which saw collaborative sharing of practice and resource between a number of schools across Cork city and county. There were five **teachers** who participated in this PLC, **four** of whom were **class teachers** (two AP post holders) and one **SET teacher**.

PLC 2

PLC 2 consisted of four participants: a walking **principal** of a **rural** school in Cork county, a **teacher** from a **special school** in Cork city, a **teacher** from a **mixed-gender DEIS Band 2** school in county Clare and a **deputy principal** from a **mixed-gender rural** school in county Sligo.

PLC 3

PLC 3 consisted of four participants: a walking **principal** from a Presbyterian school in Dublin, a **teacher** from a **rural mixed-gender** school in county West Meath, a **teacher** from a **large urban**

school in Dublin and a **teacher** from an **urban mixed Educate Together** school in county Wicklow.

Preliminary questionnaire

At the initial meeting with participants, a questionnaire was distributed for each member of the professional learning community to complete prior to our first official session. This was in order to gain some general information about the participants as well as initial responses to the three key areas of research; teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning, disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in the classroom. An overview of each school was subsequently created. The following factors were considered in the overview:

1. Gender of teacher	2. Level of Education	3. Years of experience
4. Current position in school	5. Number of hours spent on planning per week	6. Professional development undertaken

See School Profiles above for further information. Once this information was collated, the professional learning communities were established, each initiated by a virtual introductory coffee morning in an effort to establish a relaxed and forthcoming collaborative learning forum were enacted.

The group's thoughts on what the professional community was, the aims of the meetings and the individual personal goals for participating in such a forum were collated. A brochure was compiled by the researcher, collating these responses, and distributed to members of the group (See Appendix 6). A general topic for each meeting was established and the participants were furnished with two key readings prior/post each meeting. These key readings were chosen carefully by the researcher and were posited to give participants an understanding of the research

around disciplinary literacy, picture books, teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning and curricular reform, which complemented the thematic exploration of this research. The first PLC meeting saw participants asked to choose a picturebook to bring along with them to discuss in terms of TPPTL. This mirrored the approach taken to the semi-structured interviews conducted with PDST, INTO, NCCA and with librarians. The PLC meetings ensued over a five month period, gaining robust data which is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

4.19 Sampling and the use of human participants

Mujere (2016) says that sampling is the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. Mujere (2016) outlines that the sample should be representative of the population to ensure that we can generalise the findings from the research sample to the population as a whole.

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them.
> (Spradley 1979, p.34).

In terms of sampling, the criterion is derived from the research question. This study's central research question asks; *Is a picture worth a thousand words? An investigation into the use of picture books to support the teaching of disciplinary literacy in primary schools.* This study had a dual focus. It proposed to examine the vision of key educational stakeholders and the lived experiences of primary school teachers. Policymakers, teachers and linked professionals have important roles to play in the shaping and development of curriculum (policy and practice). It is important that their voices are heard so that pedagogy can evolve, bridging the gap between policy and practice. Seeing the teacher as the curriculum maker (Kridel 2010), this research thoroughly

explored the position of picture books and disciplinary literacy in a series of primary settings by working with teachers and key stakeholders to identify the ways in which educators can plan for disciplinary literacy in a meaningful and purposeful way. Thus, the use of human participants was essential to the success of this study.

4.20 Tracking bias and evoking reflexivity

> You shall no longer take things at second or third hand…nor look through the eyes of the dead…nor feed on the information in books, You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me, You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.
> (Whitman 1855 p. 25)

As a researcher, bias can translate subconsciously to the research. To this end, I employed two key strategies, one was the invaluable support of a critical friend (Tyndall 2023; Greener 2021; Deuchar 2008) and the other, a reflexive approach toward the research at hand. Reflexivity acknowledges the researchers role in the research (Subramani 2019; Fox & Allen 2014; Forbes 2008). As a qualitative researcher, I viewed myself as part of the research process, and in doing so acknowledging that my prior experiences, assumptions and beliefs would consciously and subconsciously influence the research process. I engaged in reflexivity through (1) jotting notes about participants' comments and my own thoughts during meetings, (2) note-taking as soon as possible after a meeting, and (3) developing and continually editing my work for bias. As a Reading Recovery trained teacher, I was *au fai*t with this type of note-taking and so these strategies enabled a structured tracking method upon which I could rely and reflect on as the research progressed and entered different stages. See Appendix 25 for examples.

Finlay (2002) argues that the process of engaging in reflexivity is full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails, while Darawsheh (2014) acknowledges how reflexive methods can increase rigour in qualitative research. Maynard (2018) states that research is not about intervention, but

rather it is about maintaining that ethical stance and taking care of people that you are researching with. In her SAGE research methods video excerpt, Maynard talks about the three R's; rapport, resilience and reflexivity. Rapport is about how you build a relationship in a research environment with people. Resilience is that pliability which comes from you as a researcher. Reflexivity questions, do you know how you are going to be able to respond and use those unique human stories that come to a reader in a way that really gives you some authentic learning? The three R's require careful consideration by the researcher and an allowance by the researcher to grow into that research role using a set of principles. This formed the backbone of my work throughout this research. Cautionary, McGhee (2007) warns that reflexivity is needed to prevent prior knowledge distorting the researcher's perceptions of the data. This was a careful consideration of this research due to my background experience, as detailed in Chapter One.

4.21 Ethical Implications

This research project holds at its centre the importance of the participants' experiences. Every effort was made to ensure that these experiences were co-constructed, interpreted and expressed in an entirely ethical manner in line with the guidelines of Mary Immaculate College as set out in the MIREC-3. The teachers, pupils, school management and other educational personnel were respected and treated with the highest ethical standards (Creswell 2009). Before data collection began, letters were sent to all key persons involved in the data collection stage of this investigation. Practitioners, educational stakeholders and librarians involved were informed of the requirements and intentions of the research and its process. Through these letters, I endeavoured to acknowledge all the ethical issues that arise in the initial stages of research and eliminate any abuse of power that may occur.

Statements affirming the actions taken to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity were also explained and discussed with all participants before they partook in the research. All computerised and manual data was administered as per national Data Protection Guidelines. Participants are not recognisable from the data. Data obtained was organised into an applicable filing system which can only be accessed by the researcher (Data Protection Commissioner 2016). Consent to conduct such the research was requested from the relevant bodies and individuals. The informed and agreed involvement of practitioners is integral to this entire research project. The reasons for the research were clearly explained and time was allowed for the participants to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of participating in such a project (Creswell 2009). Further details can be seen in the Appendices accompanying this work.

4.22 Deciding on a data analysis method/s

In interpretive research, relevance outweighs rigor, and understanding is sought from the perspective of participants rather than an objective observer (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Glaser & Strauss 2009).

Evaluation criteria in interpretive research differ from those in positivist research, focusing on credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008; Miles & Huberman 1994). Credibility centres on the alignment between researchers' portrayal and participants' perceptions, while dependability relies on rigorous data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Transferability evaluates the applicability of findings to similar contexts, strengthening the need for systematic reporting of evidence (Bloomberg & Volpe 2008; Lincoln

& Guba 1985). Adhering to these criteria enhances the trustworthiness of qualitative research and bolsters its quality (Oates 2006). With this in mind, the data analysis methods used in this research were chosen in conjunction with the methodology, ontology and epistemology of the research. In this way, foresight and lens for the research was created. Following a comprehensive search of the data analysis methods available, it was decided to use a combination of content and thematic analysis to suit the purpose of this research. Furthermore, the use of NVivo was used to support these methods. The following table outlines the rationale for the choosing of these methods to the elimination of other methods.

Data analysis method	Suitability to this research	Reasons for exclusion
Content analysis	Systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes of patterns	Subjective in nature
Thematic analysis	Identifying and analysing patterns and themes in the data by means of thematic codes.	
Grounded theory	Inductive in nature	Focuses on theory construction through the analysis of data.
Narrative analysis		Focuses on the lives of individuals told through their own stories
Discourse analysis		Focuses on naturally occurring language use and types of written text
NVivo software	Software used to organise and analyse interviews	

Table 18: Rationale for chosen data analysis method/s

4.23 Six stages of thematic analysis

The six stages of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021; 2006) were used for each case in a detailed thematic analysis of the data. Each phase is outlined below.

Phases of Coding with Braun and Clarke's Model

1. Familiarisation: I immersed myself in the data by reading through the transcripts and notes multiple times to become thoroughly familiar with the content.
2. Systematic data coding: I systematically coded the data, identifying significant features across the entire dataset and assigning labels to these features. An example of this can be seen in Figure 49 below.
3. Generating initial themes from coded data and collected data: I reviewed the coded data to identify patterns and themes that emerged, organising these initial themes coherently. This timely stage saw the generation of 251 codes, which can be viewed in Figures 55-69 below.
4. Developing and reviewing themes: I refined the themes by reviewing and modifying them to ensure they accurately represented the data and were distinct from each other. Figures 70 and 71 shows the reviewed themes.
5. Refining, defining, and naming themes: I further refined the themes, defined them clearly, and provided names that encapsulated their essence. This saw the creation of The SMALL Framework, which can be seen in Figure 72, with each segment correlating with the findings chapter which can be seen in Figures 73-78.
6. Writing the report: After completing the first five phases, I wrote the report, presenting my findings in Chapter 5.

Throughout this process, Ben and Darragh provided explicit guidance, ensuring each phase was completed thoroughly and accurately. Screenshots from my NVivo platform can be viewed below,

evidencing the appropriate steps taken and intricate detail of the data management system and its coding.

4.24 NVivo

Welsh (2002) outlines how computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) has been widely viewed as a tool for assisting the researcher in his or her pursuit for a precise and transparent depiction of the data. It also provides an audit of the data analysis process as a whole, a process which Welsh (2002) reports has often been missing in accounts of qualitative research. NVivo is aimed at helping users organise and analyse non-numerical or unstructured data. The software allows operators to classify, sort and arrange information; examine relationships in the data. Furthermore, it enables to combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching and modelling. In this way, the researcher can identify trends and cross-examine information in a multitude of ways using its search engine and query functions. Not only this, scholars can make notes in the software using memos and build a body of evidence to support their case or project (Edhlund,& McDougall 2018).

The approach to data analysis throughout this project was multifaceted, consisting of thematic analysis and supported by NVivo 12 software. This triangulation method allowed for a thorough analysis of the data. Through repeated reading and consistent comparison methods of analysis, repeated phenomena is identified. Qualitative research methods have been criticised for their apparent lack of validity and reliability in scientific terms (Strunk 2024). However, the validity and reliability of qualitative studies do not rely solely on method and can only be confirmed if the experiences of participants are related accurately (Mertler 2021). The validity and

reliability of this research project was further aided by the triangulation methods used throughout in relation to site and sample selection, data collection methods, and theoretical foundations.

In this study, NVivo 12 was used as an instrument to support the interpretation of transcribed interviews and questionnaires (Bazeley 2013; Bazeley and Jackson 2013) mounted by the six phases of thematic analysis as dictated by Braun and Clarke (2006). It is noted that qualitative software does not analyse the data sets but supports the organisation of large volumes of text for analysis. Rather, NVivo assists this process by releasing 'some of the time used to simply manage data and allowing an increased focus on ways of examining the meaning' (Bazeley 2013; Bazeley and Jackson 2013, p.2). For the purpose of this research, NVivo was used for three purposes: 1. To code, 2. To develop categories and 3. To develop themes. Coding involves the analytical procedure of classifying data into specific categories. In NVivo, coding takes the form of gathering relevant materials and associating them with a container known as a Node. When accessing a node, all the references in the project that have been coded to that particular node are visible. NVivo offers various types of codes. Theme nodes serve as codes representing the themes or topics found in the data. Relationships are used to document connections between different items in the project. Additionally, sentiment codes are nodes automatically created through auto coding to represent positive and negative sentiments. The software supports both deductive and inductive coding approaches. Deductive coding involves using a pre-defined coding scheme, often based on emerging themes identified during a literature review. On the other hand, inductive coding, the process undertaken in this study, entails generating codes while examining the collected data, allowing for a more exploratory and data-driven approach to the coding process.

The NVivo training tutorial manual (Day 1, p. 30) denotes that auto-coding is very useful for semi-structured interviews and online or open-ended questionnaires. Therefore, at the design

and build phase of the project which is when I built the database, I decided that I would first auto code my data. This would ensure that I tested the extent to which the topic guide worked as a data collection instrument in the field. To this end, I first conducted a pilot interview which I used to auto code. This allowed me to analyse the open-coding and amend my topic guide and interview techniques to ensure that I addressed more of the issues that were in my topic guide design. This preliminary coding or pre-ordering of the data to get it ready for real coding allowed me to show a clear relationship between my research question, the data collection instrument and the preliminary coding. Through the process of auto coding, I was further allowed to spend valuable time in the fruitful pursuit of interpreting the meanings embedded in the participant contributions.

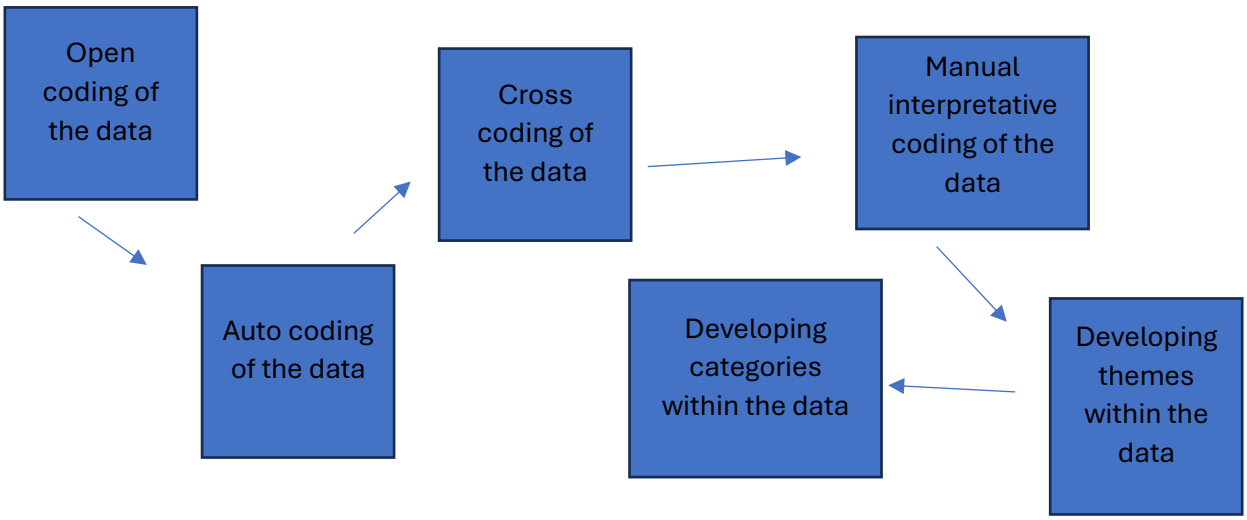


Figure 47: Processes used in NVivo

Concurring with Castleberry & Nolen (2018), a laborious transcription of all interviews took place before I uploaded them to a folder in NVivo. I used the Qualtrics platform to analyse the nationwide survey, which could not be imported into NVivo due to a college license issue, so I created a folder in NVivo to make comparative notes. I then imported the data from the librarian

questionnaires into another folder. My final folder consisted of transcribed notes from the professional learning community meetings. Figures 50-54 in Appendix 28show the folders used to store the transcripts. I then began the time-consuming task of coding. Having completed the NVivo training course twice, I engaged with Ben and Darragh, experts from NVivo, for regular support meetings, and they guided me through each phase of the coding process following Braun and Clarke's model. Figure 48 in Appendix 28, shows evidence of the phases of Braun and Clarke's Model with the accompanying figures in Appendix 28 detailing the intricate coding process afforded to this research.

Limitations of NVivo

While the time consuming nature and non-prescriptive mode of data analysis are notable factors, in terms of auto coding, NVivo only gathers prompted responses so while this can be used for preliminary coding, the second cycle coding should always be cross coding-coding one category against the others which gathers the unprompted responses-only then can the process be complete. A further issue is that auto coding is dependent on formatting and while errors are easily detected, they must be carefully verified and validated. Of note, there is nothing that auto coding does that cannot be done manually.

This research project spanned over a four-year period with year one being dedicated to upskilling in the field of Literacy Education as well as project planning. The Structured PhD in Literacy Education through Mary Immaculate College allowed for a substantial grounding in the trends and issues in Literacy Education which built on my knowledge base acquired through the Masters in Education programme which I completed at MIC in 2009. Table 79 outlines further the

way in which the project progressed during this timeframe, taking all aspects of the research process into account.

4.25 Timeline of the Research Project

This research was conducted over a four year period. See timeline of the research project outlined in APPENDIX _.

This rigorous and systematic approach to the project ensured a robust study, strongly rooted in the solid organisation and efficiency of each phase. Through my modular work in the Structured PhD, I was able to enhance the rigor of my research by engaging with a comprehensive range of modules that developed both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Modules such as Foundations of Literacy Acquisition and Development and Diversity in Literacy Acquisition and Development provided a deep understanding of the key concepts and varied factors influencing literacy learning, grounding my research in robust literacy theory. The Advanced Research Methods 1 and Advanced Research Methods 2 modules helped me refine my methodological approach, offering insights into paradigms, ethical practice, and data analysis techniques, ensuring the research adhered to high ethical standards and methodological rigor. Additionally, the Critical Approaches to Children's Literature and Inclusive Literacy Pedagogy 1 deepened my understanding of literacy as a socio-cultural practice and informed my approach to teaching and literacy inclusion. The Promoting Effective Literacy Leadership in Educational Settings module contributed valuable leadership perspectives, while SPSS-Statistical Analysis provided the tools for analysing quantitative data, such as the Qualtrics survey employed in this study, ensuring that my findings were both rigorous and scientifically sound. Together, these modules significantly strengthened the methodological and theoretical framework of my research, supporting its validity and depth.

4.26 Concluding comments

To conclude, this chapter was presented in two sections. Section 1 discussed the chosen methodology employed to undertake this research study, providing reason for the selected methodology within the parameters of this study as well as justification for the exclusion of other research methodologies. The chapter detailed how I drew on Yin, Stake, and Hartley's frameworks, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the multifaceted nature of integrating picture books into disciplinary literacy instruction in primary schools. By employing Yin's systematic approach to case study research, Stake's emphasis on rich contextual descriptions, and Hartley's focus on narrative analysis, I was able to capture the complexities and nuances inherent in educational practices. Additionally, drawing on Punch and Oancea's and Bassey's guidance, I provided a methodological foundation for ensuring rigor, transparency, and reflexivity throughout the research process, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Section 2, through Yin's (2009) case study framework, presented the six steps of the research design employed for undertaking this study. It also presented the tools for analysis through Braun and Clarke's six-stage approach and the systematic use of NVivo software. The next Chapter shall present and discuss the findings delineated from this investigation.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

‘There is no acquiring without first inquiring’

(Dewey 1916)

Image 5: Jumanji by Chris Van Allsburg

5.1 Introduction

‘The goal is to turn data into information, and information into insight.’

(Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard)

This chapter presents the findings of this research. The findings are the culmination of the extensive exploration and analysis conducted to address the research questions of this study. Through the meticulous data collection and rigorous analysis methods, this chapter uncovers and illuminates the insights garnered from the study. In essence, it serves to offer a comprehensive portrayal of the empirical evidence gathered and the subsequent interpretations drawn.

The chapter is organised to provide a structured presentation of the key findings, enabling readers to navigate through the data with clarity and coherence. The findings, therefore, are presented thematically. The following themes were reflected within the literature review in Chapter Three: (i) curricular reform, (ii) teacher’s planning and preparation for teaching and learning (TPPTL), (iii) disciplinary literacy (DL), and (iv) the use of picture books in the classroom. Arising from the data, a series of overarching themes are presented herein, namely: (i) Planning and Preparation and Teaching and Learning (ii) Attitudes and Understanding, (iii) Agency and Accountability (iv) Library in and Library out (v) Leadership and Knowledge. These themes are presented through a framework labelled The SMALL Framework. The SMALL Framework encompasses the aforementioned themes to showcase **S**chool Based Planning, **M**y Understanding, **A**gency, **L**ibrary and **L**eadership. As outlined in the previous chapter, the six stages of thematic analysis as per Braun and Clarke (2021), were adhered to in the collation and filtration of these themes, as evidenced in Chapter 4, through the intricate NVivo coding process undertaken for this project.

The findings presented herein are not static; rather, they represent a snapshot of the research at a particular point in time. As such, they lay the groundwork for future exploration, inviting further inquiry and debate within the academic community.

The research was conducted through a holistic case study methodology (Yin 2017; 2012; 2009), the results of which shall now be presented and interpreted, reflecting the interpretive framework paradigm of the study (Omodan 2024; Pabel *et al.* 2021; Blaikie & Priest 2017; Maxwell 2005). In case study presentation, as proposed by Yin, (2017; 2012; 2009), the case study report follows a format that employs a single narrative to describe and analyse the case, presenting findings supported by empirical evidence. To enhance the narrative, supplementary elements such as tables, excerpts, and imagery are included to present responses from participants. As the author, Terry Pratchett depicted, 'the best research you can do is talk to people'. Overarchingly, participants voices are central to the presentation of findings which are presented, discussed and analysed in unison.

5.2 Returning to the research question

This study sought to examine the scope for, opinions toward and necessity of disciplinary literacy and picturebooks within teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning in Irish primary schools. Specifically, the use of picturebooks was explored as a child-friendly medium to exhibit disciplinary literacy across the curriculum. Through its four-phase design, the research sought to discover the attitudes and opinions of educational stakeholders, practitioners and librarians, particular to the objectives outlined in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.1. The findings presented in the ensuing sections serve to answer the questions proposed, as well as identifying questions for future research which shall be presented in the final chapter of this thesis.

5.3 THE SMALL FRAMEWORK: AN OVERVIEW

The SMALL Framework serves to guide the reader through this chapter with the acronym derived from the key overarching findings from this expansive array of research. This framework sheds light on school planning (S), my understanding (M) encompassing attitudes and awareness of DL and PBs, teacher agency (A) and accountability and how this affects DL and PBs, the library (L) and its role in DL and PBs and finally the role of leadership (L) in a time of curricular reform.

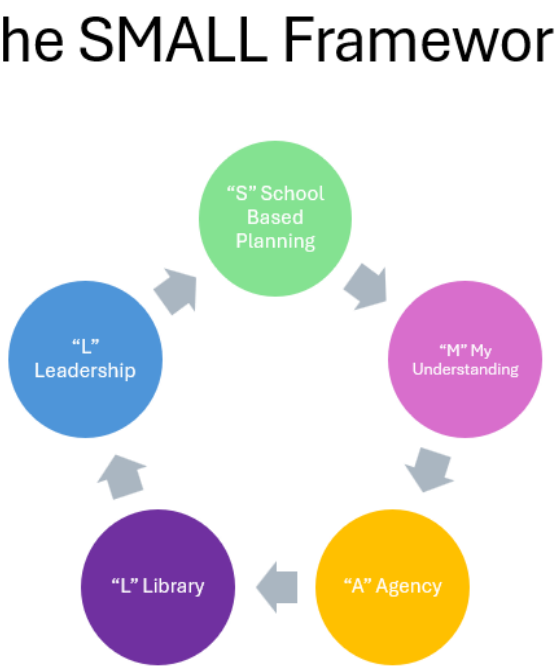


Figure 80: The SMALL Framework Overview

5.4 THE SMALL FRAMEWORK: "S" SCHOOL BASED PLANNING

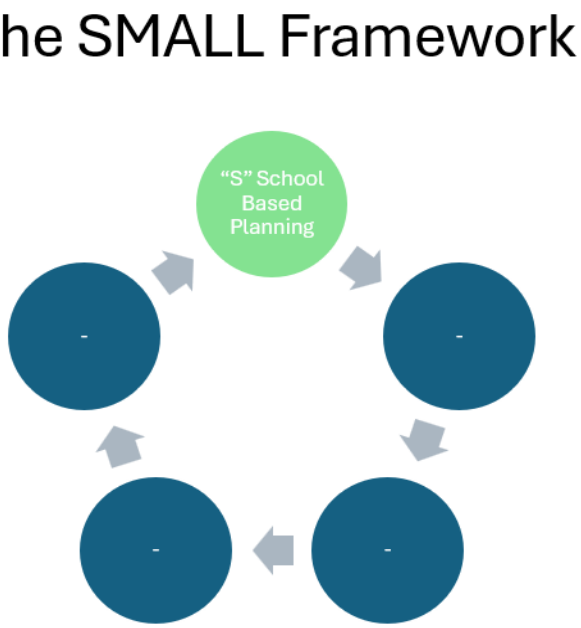


Figure 81: The SMALL Framework: Component 1

The first theme in this chapter concentrates on school based planning, exhibiting teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning in light of curricular reform, interlinked with the research topics of disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks, further showcasing how these concepts can and are transferring into TPPTL in the Irish primary classroom.

Returning to the literature review (See Chapter Three, Section 2) where TPPTL was reviewed in the Irish context, with an analysis of the NCCA document *Preparation for Teaching and Learning-Guidelines for all Primary and Special Schools* (NCCA 2021), the findings shall now reflect the results of what planning and preparation looks like for teachers at the point in time of this research, and, how teaching and learning are currently viewed by the participants of this study, with a specific focus on disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks. Part I will present

findings in relation to professional development and its impact on school based planning. Part II will show the relationship between school based planning, PBs and DL.

PART I

5.4.1 Teacher planning

Yinger (1979) attests that of the many different things that teachers do in the pre-active phase of teaching, planning is probably the most important. Most teachers engage in yearly, term, unit, weekly, and daily lesson planning (Yinger 1980). In this study, teacher planning was discoursed at length in the PLCs, from teachers individual planning, to collaborative planning and whole school planning systems. Given the nature of this study and its focus on DL and PBs in light of the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) and the *Draft Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023), the drilling down into TP was an important factor. As Warren (2000) in their literature review on teacher planning suggest, before teachers can be effective in the classroom, they must decide how to present the curriculum to students in the most effective and efficient manner (Warren 2000, p.37). Quickly identified by participants of the PLC as central to effective planning was their own professional development and keeping abreast of "*best practice*" as well as "*accumulating ways of enriching teaching methodologies and getting ideas for lesson planning"*. To this end, participants spoke about the important role of the PDST/Oide, the various teacher centres[8] as well as online webinars in their pursuit of PD opportunities and discoursed their effect and impact on the quality of their planning and preparation for teaching and learning.

[8] There are 21 full-time Education Centres (also known as Teacher Centres) in Ireland. These centres have been established over several decades, primarily to support the professional development of teachers at all levels of the education system. The establishment of these centres dates back to the 1970s, with ongoing development and expansion to meet the needs of the educational community.

"The PDST advisors are a wealth of knowledge. They are really well trained in the particular subject area and without their guidance, I think I would be going around in circles."

(Liam, SET Teacher)

"The PDST is a great service for teachers who want to enrich their teaching. It's not every country has a system like that and I think that is why our system has such high standards. I was listening to Ciara O' Donnell's podcast on the history of professional development in Ireland while I was out for a walk and I just think the work of teachers in constantly committing to excelling themselves is underestimated. And the work the department have done in providing a service like PDST is also undervalued."

(Mary, Class Teacher)

"The teacher centres are just fantastic. The courses that I have engaged in run by them have really enriched my planning and teaching and also my knowledge of certain pedagogy. Since Covid I think my planning has improved immensely and I put it down to the courses I have participated in from the various teacher centres across the country because it is so accessible now being online and on demand."

(Kieran, Class Teacher)

From analysis of the three responses above, it is clear that the impact of PDST and the teacher centres, as well as the increasing popularity of podcasts, has been positive and valuable for teachers PD and also their planning and preparation for teaching and learning. Interestingly, Kieran's point of view regarding engagement with PD since the Covid-19 pandemic was echoed by the interview held with INTO who further commented on the increased engagement by teachers

in PD post-pandemic. Santagato *et al.* (2023) on the other hand, in their US based study on professional development amongst teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic, signifies a greater emphasis on the collaborative opportunities with colleagues afforded by the pandemic, a factor which was not raised as a factor for PD and TPPTL within this study. It would be noteworthy to see the statistics of professional development conducted by teachers in Ireland during this period and evaluate how this has impacted on their PPTL post-pandemic.

5.4.2 Teacher planning and professional development: Covid 19

This study was conducted amidst a period of curricular reform in Ireland in a post-pandemic period, and so, the findings are reflective of this era, which sees practitioners engaging in an increased amount of CPD, with INTO interviewee, Denise reporting that "*since Covid times, primary teachers have engaged in a huge amount of professional development, and the move to online professional development amongst teachers has catapulted*". Brown *et al.* (2021, p.5) calls this 'the new normal', with UNICEF (2021) attesting that the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant and far-reaching changes in teachers' and schools' practices worldwide . Jenkins (2020) however, speaks of the active and passive responses to curriculum change and the agency afforded to teachers in this regard. Notably, participants of the PLC spoke of it "*being up to the teachers themselves what kind of professional development they engaged in*" and there was "*no requirement placed on teachers to participate in any professional development outside of the DES webinar days which are afforded a school closure*". Particular to the topic of this study, sentiments from the nationwide questionnaire depict that of the 323 participants, 89% would like to engage in professional development in the area of picturebooks.

When this was discoursed in the PLC's, many of the participants were aware of CPD in the area of picturebooks, predominantly due to the social media platforms of teachers specialising in literacy in Ireland (@betweenthecoversofagoodbook being the main platform spoken of followed by @claramariafiorentini). One participant spoke of a summer course[9] held by one of the aforementioned teacher bloggers, commenting that it "*reached maximum subscription due to its popularity*". This reinforces not only the popularity of picturebooks and teachers desire to bring them into their school based planning, but also the influence of social media in TPPTL. This was further echoed in the interview with Denise, INTO, who commented on the demand from teachers to engage in courses around picturebooks increasing in recent years. Mary, Class Teacher however cautioned teachers over-reliance on social media, commenting that teachers are "*putting all our eggs in one basket being influenced by bloggers and taking their word as gospel, yes they may be very well informed but I see huge flaw in such a system".* Lupinacci (2020) in her study on the culture of "scrolling" note that those who engage in scrolling through social media experience five key feelings: excitement, anxiety, reassurance, fatigue, and responsibility. It would be interesting to ascertain how the platforms of such teacher bloggers make teachers feel, as inferred by Mary's comment, there are feelings of uncertainty. Arguably, there are many other systems in place which can assist teachers with their PPTL, however perhaps the prompt availability of social media makes it more accessible and appealing to teachers. In the interview with Anne from CBI, it was detailed how the entity had engaged in assisting teachers to plan for picturebook lessons (See Appendix 33

[9] Summer courses, a means of PD for teachers, must be accredited by the Department of Education to qualify for EPV days (DES, Circular 0035/2020). Courses typically last for a minimum of 20 hours over the course of a week. They may be delivered in various formats, including in-person, online, or a hybrid model. The structured nature of these courses ensures that they meet the professional development criteria set by the department (DES, Circular 0044/2016).

(a)), which is evidence of alternative avenues to gaining resources apart from teacher bloggers. It is the marketing of such resources which may hinder their reachability. Interestingly, the picturebook support packs for teachers were targeted toward the younger classes, with one PLC member commenting on how she would need "*a lot of guidance and support in planning for picture books as I just don't see all that others can see in each page of the picturebook".* When asked in the PLC's if they had heard of the resource from CBI, the answer all round was no, with a further comment from Evelyn, Class Teacher, who highlighted the vast amount of resources that are out there but are perhaps overwhelming or underutilised:

> *"I am sure there are many such resources out there, and similar to the teacher's toolkit, we know they are there and we know they are great but when it comes to planning, you end up turning to the textbooks in your classroom when filling out your fortnightly because you are tired and it's convenient and a lot of the programmes have it all planned out for you anyway*"
>
> *(Evelyn, Class Teacher)*

Spoken about in more detail in Section 3 of this chapter, the use of textbooks in school based planning was noted within the findings of this study, through discourse with the PLC members, as "*commonplace*" and "*the norm*" with some participants noting that they "*wouldn't know where to start with planning without the guidance of the textbook"*. Moulton (1997) denotes that the textbook and their use varies considerably from teacher to teacher. In Ireland, in the ongoing debate on the use of textbooks in the classroom (Walsh, 2016), it is imperative for further research to be conducted in observing how teachers use textbooks and in asking them *why* they use them as they do, in order to reveal significant information about the teaching-learning process and how it can be improved. So too, Catherine, Class Teacher with 22 years' teaching experience,

depicts that "*in theory I think the primary curriculum is lovely and I think all of the support materials that are with that are fantastic. But I don't know have teachers fully engaged with that support material and actually read through it. I don't know if they have."* Such ponderings are a notable reflection of the impact and importance that such key NCCA materials hold in teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning. This further highlights the continuing trend in the difficulty of the transfer from policy to planning to practice (Mossberger & Wolman, 2003). In school culture and the problem of change, as outlined by Sarason, (1996) I saw this further echoed by Michael, Class teacher who illustrates how he "*had just got to grips*" with the planning he was doing with "*solid school plans in place and now all of that had to be changed*", leaving, what Michael describes as "*a feeling of dissatisfaction, fatigue and overwhelm with those working on the ground."* The majority of participants remarked how in their fortnightly plans and yearly plans they had made changes to include the language of the curriculum by using the strands, elements and learning outcomes, however, all participants depicted that their teaching had not changed or had seen minimal change as a result of the introduction of the Primary Language Curriculum. Some participants of the PLC's reported that they were happy with their planning and did not see the need to change anything, perhaps altering "*a few labels and terminology to coincide with the Primary Language Curriculum"*. When asked why, participants explained how they had solid systems in place and with the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*[10] (DES 2011), they had already placed many years of emphasis on literacy and on upskilling in the area. Another participant illustrated how "*oral language had become a big thing in their school before the*

[10] The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for primary schools in Ireland, launched in 2011 by the Department of Education and Skills, aimed to improve the standards of literacy and numeracy among children. The strategy was a comprehensive plan addressing both systemic and school-level changes to enhance teaching and learning outcomes in these fundamental areas.

introduction of the Primary Language Curriculum and this was in an effort to bring the '99 curriculum to fruition". This echoes the work of Larry Cuban, a prominent education historian and scholar, critiqued the frequent cycles of curricular reform in his work *The Lure of Curricular Reform and Its Pitiful History*. He argued that educational reforms often promise significant improvements but fail to deliver lasting changes. Cuban highlighted how reforms are frequently driven by political and social pressures rather than educational needs. As a result, these reforms often overlook the complexities of teaching and learning, leading to minimal impact on classroom practices and student outcomes. Findings from this research highlight discrepancies and uncertainties as to how curricular reform will alter teacher planning and indeed classroom practice.

5.4.3 Teachers professional development and its role in school based planning

This study illuminates the positive attitudes that teachers possess toward professional development. Professional development helps teachers to acquire new teaching strategies and refine existing ones. When teachers approach professional development positively, they are more likely to implement these strategies effectively in their classrooms Desimone (2009). Figure 83 in Appendix 33 which shows how just 7.59% of participants in the nationwide questionnaire would not like to join a professional learning community, indicating a very strong desire from teachers to engage in PD.

Despite this very positive finding, participants in the professional learning community as well as questionnaire participants, portrayed lack of time for professional development and insufficient support as one of the biggest challenges associated with effective implementation of the curriculum and thus any adjustments to school based planning and preparation for teaching and learning. To

this end, PLC members called for time for collaborative planning as a core requirement for such success and change to occur.

> *'Allow teachers collaborate, give us time for planning, provide face to face professional development during school and term time.'*
>
> *(Questionnaire participant)*

Findings from the nationwide survey depict that 48.25% of participants reported to have had participated in a professional learning community while 44.44% had not. 7.30% were unsure whether they had or not (See Figure 84 in Appendix 33). It was further reported that 61.71% of schools did not operate communities of practice while 22.15% did. 16.14% were unsure. (See figure 85 in Appendix 33). A resounding 91.80% of participants felt that there is benefit in teachers being part of a professional learning community while 7.89% were unsure and 0.32% felt that there was no benefit (See Figure 86 in Appendix 33). 73.10% of respondents would be interested in joining a professional learning community while 19.30% said that they may be interested and 7.59% stated that they would not be interested. (See Figure 86 in Appendix 33). Half of schools reported to be in receipt of school support for Literacy from the PDST (See Figure 87 in Appendix 33). These findings show a disparity between teachers desire to participate in PLCs and actual occurrence within schools. Furthermore, it highlights that while half of schools were in receipt of PD from PDST/Oide, there was no onus on schools to participate in such support which begs the question whether schools who receive the support would be better informed in decision making for TPPTL aligning with curricular changes than those who were not in receipt of same. Recommendations around this point ensue in Chapter Six. Overarchingly, positive attitudes toward professional development increase teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities. This confidence

translates into more effective lesson planning and execution. According to Guskey (2002), professional development that addresses teachers' specific needs and provides opportunities for collaboration can lead to increased teacher efficacy and improved student learning.

Research by Lieberman and Mace (2010) indicates that professional learning communities led by knowledgeable and passionate teachers enhance collective teacher efficacy. However, with the amount of schools not in receipt of sustained support from PDST and with post holders and literacy leaders in schools not all leading PD in their schools, as noted in questionnaire responses, the quality and effectiveness of PLCs in Irish primary schools requires further investigation and insight.

Results from questions 42-47 from the nationwide questionnaire show a clear majority in teachers willingness and desire to engage and participate in a professional learning community type model which supports the NCCA's vision in the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to enhance teaching and learning. According to Jane at NCCA, these communities *"promote collaborative professional development, enabling teachers to share practices and reflect on their methods and thus inform their planning."* Furthermore, 91% of practitioners surveyed agreed that professional learning communities were of benefit, despite this, it was reported that 66% of schools did not operate them, with a further 16% unsure whether they did, indicating that such practice is not strong in 82% of schools represented by participants. There is a clear disparity between teachers desires and actual practice in relation to the implementation of PLCs in Irish primary settings.

Upon reviewing the responses provided, it is evident that a majority of participants in this study propose the necessity of regular support from the PDST/Oide to aid principals, class

teachers, and SETs in overcoming the challenges they currently face in implementing the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019). I posit that this form of CPD, directly from Oide primary leaders, holds the most value, as it offers tailored support aligned with each school's specific needs, along with immediate feedback within the context of one's own professional practice (Neuman and Wright, 2010). This aligns with INTO in their *Primary Curriculum Review and Development* (INTO 2022), when they emphasise 'the value of face-to-face engagement between schools and the PDST team' (INTO 2022, p.5). While they acknowledge the successful rollout of online support, the INTO states that 'professional development and learning must return to in-person support as the norm, to be complemented by online provision when appropriate' (INTO 2022, p.5). Such leadership is necessary to ensure that key concepts, such as that of DL and picturebooks are delivered and discoursed amongst practitioners, in a PLC type format, ensuring reflective, accurate and informative PD. Drawing from the findings of this study, I contend that face-to-face, in-school CPD can foster an interactive approach, facilitating collaborative work within one's Professional Learning Community (Lave and Wenger 1991). Participant responses suggest that practitioners engage in CPD with the goal of acquiring new knowledge to enhance their ability to support and improve student outcomes (Grimmett 2014; Miller and Stewart 2013). Such practice necessitates ongoing commitment and continuation in order to bear fruitful and long term results.

5.4.4 Collaborative planning in action: An example from a PLC participant

Positively, an example of collaborative planning came from discourse with Evelyn, a class teacher from a professional learning community. She spoke of the collaborative opportunity afforded by a

staff member in her school which saw teacher agency, collaboration and student leadership at the forefront. See Appendix 33 (b).

From analysing this response it is clear that active, discovery and play based learning were centralised within this collaborative plan[11]. It further afforded senior pupils the opportunity to ascertain the language of the scientist, promoting disciplinary literacy in a meaningful way. The accountability component of this endeavour, however, was remarked upon by another teacher in the group (Eabha, Principal), commenting that it was a great initiative but questioned '*what did that look like in the plans*' and '*how was so much time afforded to it, possibly at the expense of other subjects*'. As a group we further looked at the Primary Language Curriculum and the Science and Maths curriculum and noted the overlap in what was achieved in those STEAM lessons. The general consensus was that if the planning was tightened up and the cross curricular integration was richer, it is a very feasible, meaningful and effective approach to teaching and learning. We then spoke of the possibility of adding a picture book into the planning for a lesson series like this. The picturebooks were explored, using YouTube, to examine their worth and to evaluate whether they would add to an approach like this. This was evidence of Moje's 4E's heuristic in action.

5.4.5 Collaborative planning reimagined

A strong sense of learning from others and reflective learning arose from the PLC comments, with suppositions as to how this may operate on the ground in schools. Suggestions were made to either

[11] Irish primary educational documents that promote active, discovery, and play-based learning: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA):Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009)Primary School Curriculum (1999)Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020)Department of Education and Skills (DES):Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006)Primary Language Curriculum (2015)STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011–2020)

merge such PLCs with Croke Park hours or have them as a separate entity and not an extra thing to do (Harris and Jones 2010; Hord 2009). See is in Liam SET Teacher's comments in relation to this in Appendix 33 (c).

Grace, from the PLC, noted that the majority of Croke Park days were assigned to planning purposes with little time given to conversation or the sharing of teaching ideas in particular subject areas. She makes the point that if teachers who have a passion for or a qualification in a particular subject area, then time could be afforded to those practitioners to share their knowledge, talent and expertise with the staff which would further open doors for others to reflect on and improve their practice. See Appendix 33 (d). Teachers who are passionate about a subject bring a high level of expertise and enthusiasm to professional development sessions. This enthusiasm can be contagious, motivating other teachers to engage deeply with the subject matter. According to Avalos (2011), passionate teacher leaders facilitate professional development that is more engaging and effective, leading to improved instructional practices.

Circular 0042/2014 cites that the 36 hours is to provide additional time to deal with some or all of the following items: school planning; CPD; induction; pre/post school supervision; policy development; staff meetings; nationally planned in-service and school arranged in-service. The INTO argues that there is sufficient scope under these headings for a school to identify its own priorities. Results from this study would argue that Croke Park hours require more direction and allowance afforded to models such as PLCs.

5.4.6 Changes to planning as a result of the dissemination of information: Reflecting on the roll out of the des Webinars

When participants reflected on the PLC meetings that they participated in as part of this study, feedback suggested that such a model brings a deeper understanding of the subject area being perused, and rather than a stand-alone webinar, it was thought that "*the continuous conversation and the various tasks and readings made it feel more like a course*" with the participants "*playing a central role rather than being passive recipients*".

The opinions presented in the comments in Appendix 33 (e), serve to strengthen the case for the establishment of professional learning communities across primary school systems, which would lead to a stronger success rate in how topics, such as DL are embedded in planning and practice (Howell *et al.,* 2021).

5.4.7 How planning transfers into practice

Bednar *et al.* (2013) in their chapter on Theory to practice, how do we link? highlight the gap between theorists and practitioners, and from their work with colleagues in various disciplines, they found a general lack of familiarity with each other's work. So too, this study saw a wide gap between the perspectives held by stakeholders or policy makers and drivers within the Irish education system and that of practitioners working on the ground in classroom settings. This was highlighted by Sam, from the PLC when they posited that there was little awareness around DL and that it was touched on in a webinar but it was only "*by chance*" that one gained knowledge in the area, depending on the group they were in.

> *"This kind of thing* (referring to disciplinary literacy)*-there's little talk about it yet, to be honest, I don't think there's an awareness of it. It was touched upon in the last webinar, but again, we're in our own learning groups. Was that in the primary curriculum framework webinar, have you done that one? Yes. But again, there was nobody leading it per se, we were just split up into junior levels, middle level senior levels. So if you caught that bit of knowledge, it was by chance in your group, but there was no whole staff presentation or conversation around that."*
>
> *(Sam, Special Teacher)*

Such observations beg to question the format and effectiveness of such webinars in the dissemination of key concepts, such as that of DL, held within the *Primary Language Curriculum* and how the NCCA and PDST/Oide reflect and review this rollout in their evaluation of its implementation.[12] This concludes Part I of Section I on School Based Planning. Part II shall now ensue, presenting findings on planning specifically for DL using PBs.

[12] The PDST held a series of webinars to support the dissemination and implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum). Here is a list of the webinars conducted: Webinar 1 (January 2020)Focus: Learning Outcomes Webinar 2 (May 2020)Focus: Playful Learning Experiences Webinar 3 (August 2021)Focus: Primary Language Curriculum and Assessment Webinar 4 (January 2022)Focus: Primary Language Curriculum and Inclusion Webinar 5 (April 2022)Focus: Primary Language Curriculum and Critical Literacy Webinar 6 (August 2022)Focus: Teaching and Learning of Irish Webinar 7 (January 2023)Focus: Primary Language Curriculum and Disciplinary Literacy Webinar 8 (April 2023)Focus: Transfer of Skills in the PLC.

PART II

5.5 Planning Using PBs

Positively, a large percentage of teachers in the nationwide questionnaire reported to use picture books in their preparation for teaching and learning (See Figure 88 in Appendix 33).

Here we note a resounding 87.54% of participants either using or somewhat using picturebooks in their TPPTL. This is a significant finding for this study which illuminates how central picturebooks are or have become in Irish primary schools. Upon review of the data, the PLC saw huge value in using such books as both "*a stimulus*" or "*way in*" to topics such as STEAM and SESE, and also "*a great visual to anchor a series of lessons off of*". The exact same descriptors were used by NCCA interviewee, Jane, to describe the opportune nature of picturebooks right across the curriculum. All PLC participants agreed that they felt the children would engage well with picturebooks and that the older children would enjoy reading such books to the younger classes. They further remarked how the language, for example, in *Paper Planes*, including soaring, swooping, skimming, wings, pilots, fly, race, circle, sailed, crushed, smashed, swish, wild, overhead, would add to the scientific language acquisition of the children and how phrases like 'the wind whipped around it's wings' and 'one huge gust whisked her up into the air' would enrich their understanding of the scientific concept of speed. So too, the imagery capturing the various movement and conditions of the paper planes was thought to serve to enrich pupils understanding of the scientific concept, thus enriching their disciplinary literacy abilities. Participants also remarked how *Paper Planes* could be used for S.P.H.E./Wellbeing as "*it deals with the topic of friendship very well."* This aligns with the views of Roche (2014) and Dolan (2014) in their

promotion of picturebooks in curricular areas. Such findings depict the terrific possibilities picturebooks hold in the language acquisition across the disciplines.

5.5.1 Planning the language of the PB: Forging links to the language of DL

Planning for the language of picturebooks and linking it to DL was described by PLC participants as "*not an easy task*" but something that was "*worthwhile pursuing*". From the example of *Paper Planes* aforementioned, the instructional element of making the paper planes along with the visual steps, was noted by the PLC as an advantage to using such a teaching tool with a DL focus. The language of the scientist was thought to be "*at the fore here*" and participants felt that *"the visuals and the story made the concept more relatable for young children".* This book also led to an advanced conversation around how paper is made and the sustainability factor of recycling paper as well as looking after the planet and planting trees, thus exhibiting the higher order thinking and language development opportunities afforded by such a resource, forging strong links to the discipline of geography and the language of the geographer. So too, participants of the PLC adorned that the picturebook, *White Paper Plane,* was thought to offer opportunities for rich language development and Tier 3 vocabulary (which links directly to the premise of this study as it uncovers insights into discipline specific vocabulary), further using the imagery and the personification of the paper airplane, identified by the PLC as adding "*depth and tangibility*" to the elements of language-communicating, understanding and exploring and using, as set out in the *Primary Language Curriculum*, as shown in the diagram below (Figure 89). This study illuminates that by combining the language acquired through the imagery, words and discourse arising from picturebooks, with the vision set forth by the *Support Material for Teachers* (NCCA 2019) which posits tier 3 vocabulary as 'words that are typically associated with a specific discipline or domain

of knowledge', disciplinary literacy can reach new heights in the primary classroom. By linking the discourse on picturebooks back to the *Primary Language Curriculum*, the group were able to forge tangible links between what the curriculum is asking and what the picturebooks are delivering. This was further viewed through the lens of DL and, although beyond the scope of this project, teachers commented on the merit of creating exemplars[13] (as seen in the *Primary Language Curriculum Support Material for Teachers*, NCCA 2019), in their own ongoing professional learning communities.

Figure 89: The Elements of language, as per the PLC (NCCA 2019)

[13] In the context of the Primary Language Curriculum, an exemplar is a detailed example or model that demonstrates effective teaching and learning practices. Exemplars serve as practical guides for educators, showcasing high-quality student work or instructional strategies that align with curriculum standards and objectives. They provide concrete illustrations of what successful implementation of the curriculum looks like in practice, helping teachers understand how to apply theoretical concepts in real classroom settings.

5.5.2 Collaborative planning for PBs

As a follow up activity from the professional learning community, participants were encouraged to discover further picturebook titles that may also be used for their planning and preparation for teaching STEAM. The titles, collated by practitioners can be viewed in Appendix 28. By taking a topic like paper planes, at the direction of a comment made by one of the PLC participants, participants were able to see how authentic and active decision making by teachers through their own/collaborative research and planning, can be utilised to forge meaningful links with discipline specific concepts and picturebooks. Furthermore, participants commented on how enjoyable this research task was and expressed their desire for more such planning opportunities with colleagues. This correlates with the nationwide survey which saw 73% of teachers willing to join a professional learning community.

> *"I really like it. I think it's a really good opportunity to speak with peers about things that we don't get a chance to talk about in school, Croke Park meetings and things like that. We never really reflect that much on our own teaching. It's all about planning and trying to keep planning in line with what's happening. You know, with the curriculum and things like that, but we never actually reflect about our own practice that much, I think so it's really good to kind of share and get some feedback on what you're doing and kind of elaborate more on what you should be doing. And some get some advice too.*
>
> *(Liam, SET Teacher)*

The comment from Liam, SET Teacher, emphasises the work of Orit Avidov-Ungar (2014) who identified the professional development motivation of teachers as intrinsic or extrinsic and the role

that hierarchy may play in the effective and meaningful PD of teachers. Findings from this study suggest that a professional learning community is a means of sparking motivation for professional development amongst practitioners.

> *"It's interesting to hear people's thoughts on what they're doing and how they're teaching literacy and especially reading and modelling it for different standards to have an opportunity to talk in this setting with other colleagues and learn from them is very beneficial."*
>
> *(Catherine, Class Teacher)*

Catherine's comment sheds light on the capacity to enrich planning through learning from others, which Knight (2007) further emphasises in their work, further detailing how coaching by experienced and passionate teachers can lead to significant improvements in lesson planning and delivery.

Building on the pictorial element of the picturebook, as discoursed in the PLCs and interviews with key educational stakeholders, findings shall now ensue to explore the worth of the picture in TPPTL and indeed in the learning experience designed for the pupils.

5.5.3 The value of the picture in TPPTL

Through an analysis of the data, it is evident that participants from all phases felt that the value of the picture in picturebooks is "*significant*". The imagery in picture books was thought to "*play a crucial role in vocabulary acquisition for primary school pupils by providing visual context and enhancing engagement, which supports deeper understanding and retention of new words*" (Jane, NCCA). Similarly, Denise, INTO spoke of how the visuals can create "*tangible links between what the text is trying to tell and what the picture is conveying*". So too, Seán, EAL teacher identifies

how "*the image can scaffold the EAL child where perhaps language is a barrier*" or, as Harry, SET Teacher depicts, "*can strengthen a high achievers ability to infer meaning*". This correlates with Nikolajeva and Scott (2013) who argue that the interplay of text and image in picture books can scaffold children's comprehension by providing immediate visual context that supports word meaning. Building on Seán, EAL Teacher's comment, Evelyn, Class teacher identified that "*the visual aspect of the picturebook was advantageous in planning for UDL (*Universal design for learning*) as it provided multiple means of representation and catered for different learning styles*". This reflects the theory set forth by Paivio (1991) who speaks of combining visual and textual information to cater to different learning styles, reinforcing understanding through, what is labelled a dual coding theory, which posits that information is better remembered when presented through both visual and verbal formats (Paivio 1991).

Furthermore, the participants from all four phases of the study identified that visually appealing illustrations have the potential to capture children's attention and make reading a more engaging and enjoyable experience. This increased engagement was thought to motivate children to spend more time with books, thereby exposing them to more vocabulary. Such observations reflect the research by Sipe (2012) which suggests that the aesthetic and narrative qualities of illustrations can draw children into the story, making them more likely to engage with the text and absorb new words. In the case of DL, the choosing of the book is of particular importance as it necessitates slow looking by the practitioner to pick out that discipline specific language and also, as PLC member, Tom (principal) outlines, "*to have the time to find the books in the first place!"*

Pantaleo (2020, p.40) speaks about 'slow looking' in an approach to exploring the visual component of picturebooks. Similarly, the professional learning communities were afforded the time for 'slow looking' and deeper exploration of the imagery in a selection of picturebooks.

Participants, upon their discovery of the depth that some pictures held (examples in Shaun Tan's books in particular), agree with Pantaleo when they say that

> The complexity of the picturebook format requires slow looking by readers/viewers. However, students need to receive instruction about and have opportunities for engaging in slow looking in order to develop the disposition to do so.
>
> (Pantaleo 2020, p.40).

The overarching feeling from PLC participants was that in order for such depth of the visual image and the specific language associated with same to be unearthed, teachers and students would need to be afforded the same 'slow looking' approach as Pantaleo describes. Not only this, but practitioners felt that they would need further guidance themselves in the resourcing and planning of such content which led to further conversation regarding exemplar cards and the use of text books which findings shall now be presented with further recommendations to be discoursed in further detail in the next Chapter (See Chapter Six). Nonetheless, findings highlight that visual representations in picturebooks can bridge the gap between concrete and abstract thinking, making it easier for young learners to grasp complex ideas, such as the example of paper airplanes as shown previously in this chapter.

Finally, data revealed that repeated exposure to words in different contexts, (like that in *Once Upon a Raindrop*, as seen in Image 11 & 12), within the same book, helps reinforce vocabulary learning. PLC participants denoted that the consistency of seeing a word associated with the same image can help children internalise its meaning more effectively, such as that associated with the vocabulary of the water cycle. This reflects the work of Biemiller and Boote who have shown that repeated readings of picture books lead to significant gains in vocabulary knowledge (Biemiller & Boote 2006).

5.5.4 Planning: Choosing key scenes from picturebooks to build the language of disciplinary literacy

Following a semi-structured interview and an open ended questionnaire with Children's Books Ireland, I was directed to a resource called *Class Reads*, which I was able to use in the PLCs which enabled me to scaffold teachers as they explored various picturebooks. A series of prompt questions served to guide teachers in their evaluations and possible use for DL. As Albert Einstein depicted, 'Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.' So too, this study's findings offer insight into how disciplinary literacy cannot be merely the learning of facts across disciplines, but the training of the mind to think- to think like a historian, like a scientist, like an artist, wearing the various 'hats'. Such training requires metacognition, or an awakening of the conscious awareness of what one is doing while they are doing it. Such is the findings of this study which show that by slow looking, by in depth analysis of imagery and vocabulary, DL can transfer from policy to classroom practice.

5.5.5 Planning: Taking recommendations and applying them: From Shanahan to the PLC

Within the PLCs, and as proposed by Hord (1997), participants were directed to a series of key readings which participants took time both within the PLCs and outside of the PLCs to peruse and study. (See Appendix 7). Participants commented that such academic reading was "*daunting at first*", and, " *a little bit out of my comfort zone*" while others proposed that such a model "*should be the backbone of effective PD in schools*". In one of the PLCs, participants were directed to key points from Shanahan's paper, developing their own understanding of DL in-depth. Shanahan wrote for the NCCA in 2019 about Disciplinary Literacy in the Primary School. In this document he listed five pedagogical recommendations. This study hones on recommendation number five

which encourages primary school teachers to afford particular attention to helping their students gain the vocabulary of the various disciplines (Shanahan 2019). Within this recommendation, Shanahan calls on Beck and McKeown (2013) to further highlight that although the language of the disciplines differs, what it takes to learn vocabulary is general across fields of study, and includes learning to use this vocabulary in both oral and written language. Specific to the recommendations set forth by Shanahan, the findings of this research point toward the necessity of further guidance for teachers through the development of language cards for the teaching of DL.

> *"From reading the work of Shanahan I can see that students must be taught the specific vocabulary used within a discipline, including not only understanding the meanings of terms but also how those terms are used in disciplinary contexts."*
>
> *(Eabha, Principal)*

Building on this and in agreement with Shanahan and Shanahan, Seán from the PLC declared that

> *"In Irish classroom settings, applying disciplinary literacy to vocabulary instruction would involve integrating these specialised literacy practices into the teaching of subjects across the curriculum. For example, in history classes, students might learn how historians use specific vocabulary to discuss events, compare sources, and construct arguments. This can help students better engage with historical texts."*
>
> *(Seán, EAL Teacher)*

Upon analysis of the above comments and other such comments made by PLC participants, the findings of this study posit the imperativeness of engaging practitioners in academic readings to fully understand concepts that are expected to become a reality in the classroom, thus assisting in bridging the gap between policy and practice. It further posits the importance of continued

academic engagement by practitioners. Few of the PLC members reported to have an additional qualification aside from their teaching degree, highlighting the lack of incentive or desire to engage in academia once established in their teaching role.

5.5.6 Planning: Visual literacy forging links with DL

Picturebooks were the central resource explored within this study. Wileman (1993) describes visual literacy as the skill to interpret and comprehend information conveyed through images or graphical representations (Wileman 1993, p. 114). Related to this concept is visual thinking, which Wileman explains as the capability to transform various types of information into visuals, graphics, or other forms to effectively convey that information (Wileman 1993, p. 114). Heinich (1999, p. 164) offer a similar perspective on visual literacy, defining it as a cultivated skill to accurately understand and produce visual messages.

Through our discussion around participants favourite picturebooks and their own memories of picturebooks, a discourse evolved around the use of visuals to replace text or complete text. A participant had engaged in a CPD course around PBs concurrent to our community meeting and highlighted the fact of how longstanding imagery and visual literacy has been in the teaching and learning of literacy. (See image from *The Runaway Doll* 1908 cited in Lothrop 1877). Findings from this study posit that visual literacy, especially when integrated through picturebooks, plays a significant role in enriching vocabulary development across various subject areas This complements the work of Mehigan (2010; 2009) on vocabulary instruction, word knowledge and vocabulary development. The power of the visual lies in its ability to convey complex ideas that words alone might not fully express. Picturebooks, with their combination of text and illustration,

provide a rich multimodal experience that engages learners in deeper cognitive processing. According to Bang (2016) in *Picture This,* the use of line, colour, shape, positioning, angle, perspective, size, author's purpose, and framing in illustrations can significantly enhance comprehension and retention of new vocabulary. These visual elements help to contextualise and reinforce the meaning of words, making them more memorable for students (Bang 2016) The ensuing sections depict this in action. Furthermore, participants of the PLC's agreed that visual literacy in picturebooks encourages active learning and critical thinking. Serafini (2014a) says that as children interpret images, they are prompted to make connections between the visual cues and the accompanying text, thereby enhancing their understanding of the vocabulary used. This process of decoding visual information and linking it to language can support vocabulary acquisition not just in language arts, but across subjects such as science, mathematics, and social studies (Serafini 2014a). For instance, findings from this study prove that picturebooks about scientific concepts, such as paper airplanes, can introduce and reinforce subject-specific terminology through detailed illustrations that depict processes, structures, and phenomena, aiding in the comprehension and retention of complex terms.

5.5.7 TPPTL: Using prompt cards for exploring picturebooks

Through our examination of the visual imagery in a variety of picturebooks across the professional learning communities, I employed a prompt card, taking guidance from Bang (2016) in her book *Picture This,* and so, I asked participants to describe what they saw using the following anchors:

Line	Colour	Shape
Positioning	Angle	Perspective
Size	Author's purpose	Framing

Table 19: Picturebook prompt card

The following two picturebooks seen in Images 6-8, were used alongside the prompt card seen in Table 19 above. The prompt card served as a powerful tool to guide participants in the professional learning communities to explore the depth of a picturebook by examining its visual elements in detail. By using the specific anchors provided—Line, Colour, Shape, Positioning, Angle, Perspective, Size, Author's Purpose, and Framing—participants engaged in a structured analysis that revealed the layers of meaning within the illustrations. I provided a step-by-step approach to using the prompt card which can be viewed in Appendix 1 and is a recommendation set out in Chapter Six.

Images 6 & 7: The Journey by Francessca Sanna

Discipline: Geography

PLC participants noted from Image 6 & 7 the "*intense emotions that are vividly depicted from the child's perspective*". The lines are "*jagged and chaotic*", conveying the fear and uncertainty of the situation. The colours are "*predominantly dark, with blacks and deep blues, creating a scary and sinister atmosphere*". The shapes are "*sharp and menacing, especially in the portrayal of the guard, who seems larger than life, towering over the mother and child, emphasising the threat he poses*". Positioning was noted as particularly important by participants, with "*the mother positioned protectively around the children, her figure hunched in a defensive posture*." The perspective was noted from the child's eye level, making the intimidating figures and elements around them seem "*even more overwhelming*". The size of the guard and the "*helper*" is "*exaggerated*", making them appear "*monstrous and evil*", while the mother and children seem "*small and vulnerable*". The author's purpose in using these visual elements is to "*evoke the intense emotions of fear, trust, and helplessness that the child feels*". The framing of the scene is "*claustrophobic*", adding to the tension and sense of entrapment. These findings serve to exemplify the depth that a picturebook can offer in exploring a theme of migration/war with the groundwork, such as that evoked by the prompt card, serving to create rich understanding and vocabulary acquisition in the subject area, for the pupils exploring this book.

5.5.8 Reading and writing float on a sea of talk: Teaching the language of disciplinary literacy through picturebook prompt cards

When looking at picturebooks and DL, this study not only investigated the oral language potential and dialogic classroom culture, but also the capacity to use picture books to enhance the written component of DL. In the professional learning communities, we explored the writing rope and how the picture book could be used to engage pupils in writing across the disciplines.

Image 8: The Butterfly by Patricia Pollaco

Discipline: History

Similarly, the second example showcasing the use of the prompt cards by the PLCs depicts how practitioners were able to negotiate the depth that the picturebook had to offer in the discipline of history and the topic of the Nazi occupation of a small French village where a Jewish girl was hidden. In this book participants commented how the lines were "*sharp and tense, especially around the Nazi officer's fist*", which is depicted "*with harsh, angular lines that show aggression and threat*". The softer, more curved lines around the girl were thought to contrast this, emphasising their vulnerability. The colour palette is "*dark and muted*", with "*heavy use of shadows to create a terrorising atmosphere*" the shapes are "*rigid and angular"* when it comes to the Nazi officer, making him seem more frightening. The positioning of the Nazi officer's fist is close to Monique's face, dominating the frame and "*drawing immediate attention to the threat she is facing"*. The angle is slightly tilted upward, looking up at the officer from the child's perspective. This was thought not only makes the officer seem larger and more intimidating, but also placed the viewer in the position of the child, heightening the emotional impact. The author's

purpose in this illustration was thought to convey the "*intense fear and oppression experienced by the characters and the terrifying reality of the Nazi occupation and the constant threat faced by those hiding from persecution."* Such in-depth and slow looking at the visual again serve to highlight the richness of the experience and insight afforded to the reader by engaging in such an activity. Participants reported that their understanding of the Nazi occupation was greatly enriched but also more memorable from relating with this text. This highlights the power of the picture. Despite this finding, results from the nationwide survey suggest that confidence levels among teachers in relation to teaching the language associated with disciplinary literacy varies, suggesting that teachers require further supports in identifying this language. See Figure 90 Appendix 33.

Clare, PDST Advisor, highlights the capacity for DL to enable teachers and pupils to look at topics across different angles. She details how DL can improve timetabling and also provide skills for pupils in different subject areas. See Appendix 33 (f).

In order to support practitioners with teaching the language of DL, q34 of the nationwide survey was posited (See Appendix 33), which resulted in the belief that language cards for DL would be beneficial or somewhat beneficial. This finding led to a recommendation around the use of language cards for DL, which is detailed in the ensuing chapter.

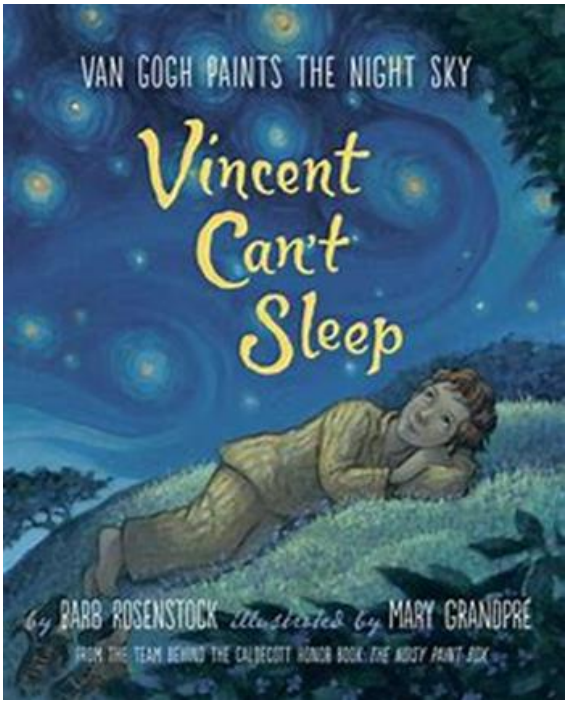
Supporting the language card ideology, Kindle (2009) in their five step approach to building vocabulary with picturebooks, details in steps 1 and 2 that practitioners should identify words to be taught and then consider the type of word learning required. This ideology was outlined in the professional learning community with practitioners and, following a discussion on how this could apply to DL and PBs, a series of language samples were made using a selection of

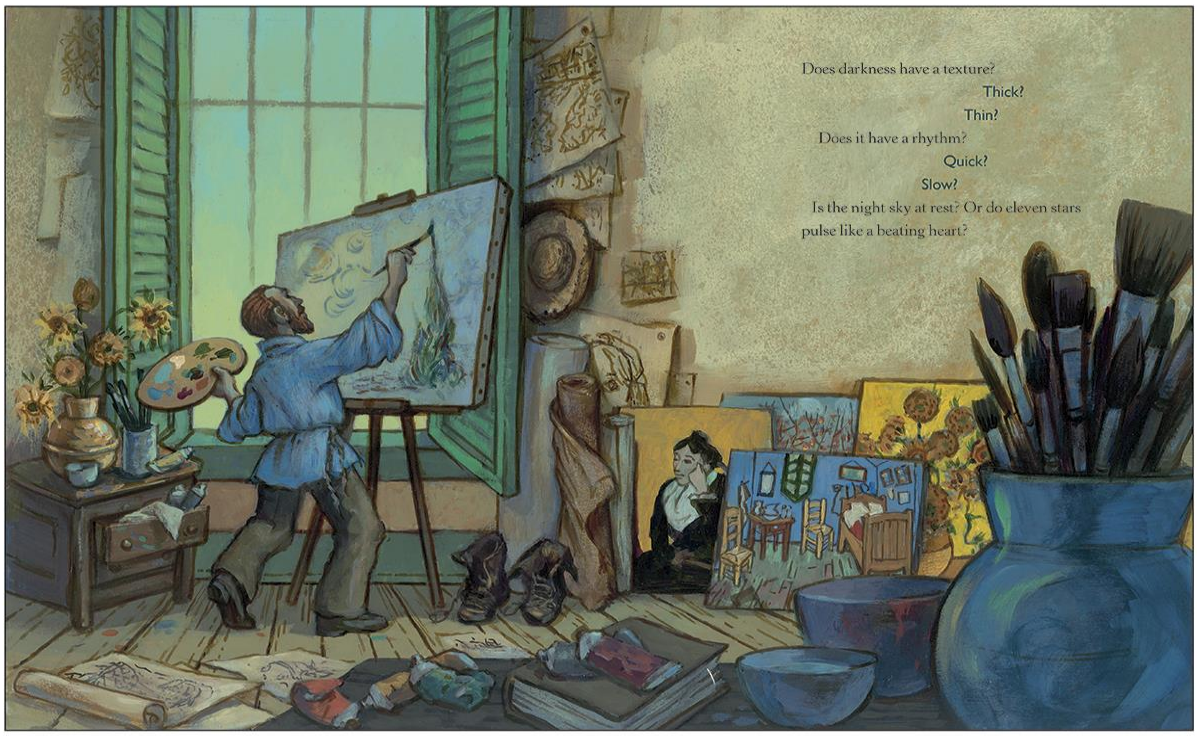
picture books. Also referenced in this PLC during the creation of these language cards was *Text Talk Lessons* by Utah Reading First Educators, in which tiered vocabulary for a series of texts is outlined along with prompts for teachers to use such vocabulary both in explanation and in context. This combined knowledge led the practitioners to develop a series of language cards, teasing out the language of DL within a series of picturebooks. Examples of which shall now be presented and discussed. Such rich, targeted and selected language calls to answer the recommendation set forth by Gilliland (cited in Walsh 2017, p.95), when she speaks of the importance of negating the Matthew effect of the word-poor getting poorer.

5.5.9 Planning: Language cards for DL and PBs

DL Language Card: Sample 1, Language of the Artist

Discipline: Art





Images 9 & 10: Vincent Can't Sleep Van Gogh Paints the Night Sky, by Barbara Rosenstock (Author), Mary GrandPre (Illustrator)

The picturebook shown in images 9 & 10 above, was identified for the teaching of art and the disciplinary language associated with art. The language card 1 (See Appendix 27) was collated by the PLC members. It serves to showcase the depth of language associated with art and the artist that this picture book exhibits. Supporting the work of Nikolajeva & Scott (2013), this and subsequent language cards, exhibit the language or words of the picture book which are then consolidated, magnified and meaning-making for pupils. Concerning the interaction between words and images in picture books, there can be: (a) symmetry, where words and pictures hold equal importance; (b) complementarity, where both contribute distinct information; (c) enhancement, where each element enriches the meaning of the other; (d) counterpoint, where words and pictures convey separate narratives; and (e) contradiction, where words and pictures

seem to express opposing ideas (Nikolajeva & Scott 2013). In order to delve into these five aspects, this study's findings promote the use of language cards, prompts and planning grids to assist practitioners in getting the most out of the picturebook. In this way practitioners can effectively draw up the language associated with the particular discipline that the picture book has been identified for.

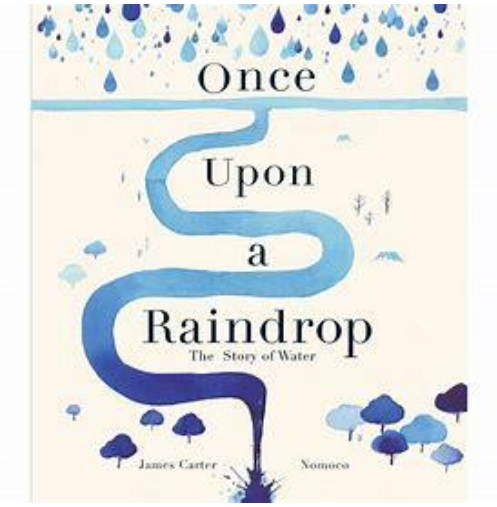
Participants acknowledge that the picturebook relates to wellbeing in terms of being unable to sleep, geography in terms of the countries visited and visual art in terms of the artistic language used (See comments relating to this in Appendix 33 (g). Furthermore, Mary, Class Teacher depicts how the reader gets to know the artist more in-depth through the picturebook.

> *"I think technically like we don't often teach them much about the artist, but it's like, this really shows so much about his life. His personality things he has done, and things he felt. So absolutely a strong one for disciplinary literacy."*
>
> *(Mary, Class Teacher)*

Consistent with the recommendation from the *Support Material for Teachers* which promotes the linkage and integration of picturebooks across the curriculum, with a particular emphasis on visual arts, this study found that there is a much deeper connection between the picturebook and the subject integration where language is concerned. Using a DL lens, the language as shown in Appendix 28, taken from the picturebook *Vincent Can't Sleep* offers a rich foundation for pupils to attain the language of the artist through a rich learning experience. The *Primary Language Curriculum* attests that 'picture books can provide a rich and valuable resource for looking and responding to visual arts which in turn supports curricular integration' (PLC *Support Material for Teachers Critical Thinking and Book Talk Using Picturebooks*). This study goes a step further to

identify the language focus that can serve to strengthen a visual art lesson and thus engage disciplinary literacy through visual arts.

DL Language Card: Sample 2, Language of the geographer



Images 11 & 12: Once Upon a Raindrop by James Carter

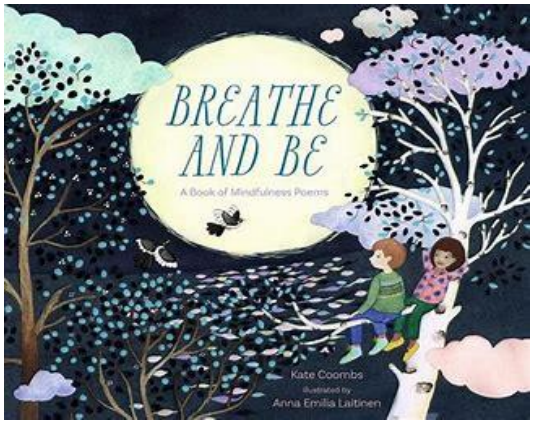
Discipline: Geography/Science

Language Card 2 (See Appendix 29), compiled by PLC members serves to exhibit the language of the geographer through the picturebook, Once Upon a Raindrop which showcases the water cycle. Participants noted that the picturebook *Once Upon a Raindrop* is proceeded by thirsty facts about water in an acrostic style. This was thought to add to the geographical disciplinary nature of the text. Furthermore, by positioning the words in a circle, participants saw that the symbolism of the cycle was made visual. Also the patterns of the water in drops, puddles, lakes, waves, and the colour palette of different shades of blues were said to add to the understanding and consolidation of the topic. Finally, the use of different languages and the use of the word for water in multiple languages was thought to promote EAL.

Teaching students these specific linguistic and textual practices enhances their ability to comprehend and engage with subject-specific content. By teaching students the specialised literacy skills required in each subject, educators can help them to develop deeper understanding and higher-level thinking skills. This approach not only improves content knowledge but also prepares students for advanced study as they progress to second and third level. Shanahan argues that fostering disciplinary literacy helps bridge the gap between novice learners and expert practitioners, ultimately leading to more meaningful and effective education (Shanahan 2019). In the primary school context, the findings from this study show that the dissection of texts, such as that of picturebooks as shown through the language cards across various disciplines, can help to bridge the gap between firstly amongst practitioners as they begin to make sense of this concept within the curriculum and then as deliverers of the concept in meaningful ways to their students.

DL Language Card: Sample 3, Language of wellbeing

Discipline: Wellbeing



Images 13 & 14: Breathe and Be by Kate Coombs

The third example of the language card for DL (See Appendix 30) focuses on the discipline of Wellbeing. Considering that Wellbeing is a core subject in the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023), participants were particularly interested in dissecting the picturebook *Breathe and Be* to decipher what kind of language associated with wellbeing featured. The language card in Appendix 31 shows that there is a significant amount of language associated with wellbeing which participants say, together with the illustrations, paint the picture of the words and bring the

language of Wellbeing to life. These intentional vocabulary and language experiences are evidence of the extent to which PBs can be used to teach the language of DL. Lewis (2001, pp.136-137) says that 'the picturebook is ideally suited to the task of absorbing, reinterpreting and representing the world to an audience for who, negotiating newness is a daily task'. Thus, the newness of DL can be applied to the picturebook, as the findings of this study have shown.

DL Language Card: Sample 4: Language of the historian

Discipline: History

Image 15 & 16: Anne Frank by Josephine Poole

A final example of the language cards (See Appendix 31), composed by the PLC's showcases the language of the historian in the picturebook, *Anne Frank.* In this book, participants of the PLC commented on the way the imagery drew the reader in and although there was a lot of information and language associated with the war and the plight of the jews, it was the imagery in this one which participants felt spoke the language of DL. This is apparent in the image showing Anne Frank being taken away by the German police, Kieran, Class Teacher noted that "*her eye contact with the reader speaks volumes".*

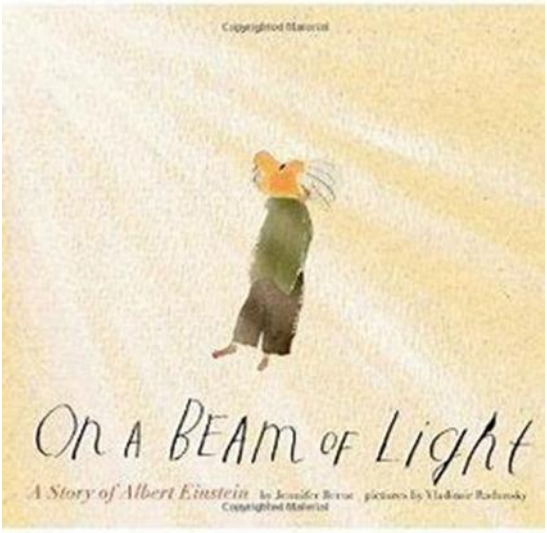
5.5.10 How picture books may be used for planning for disciplinary literacy

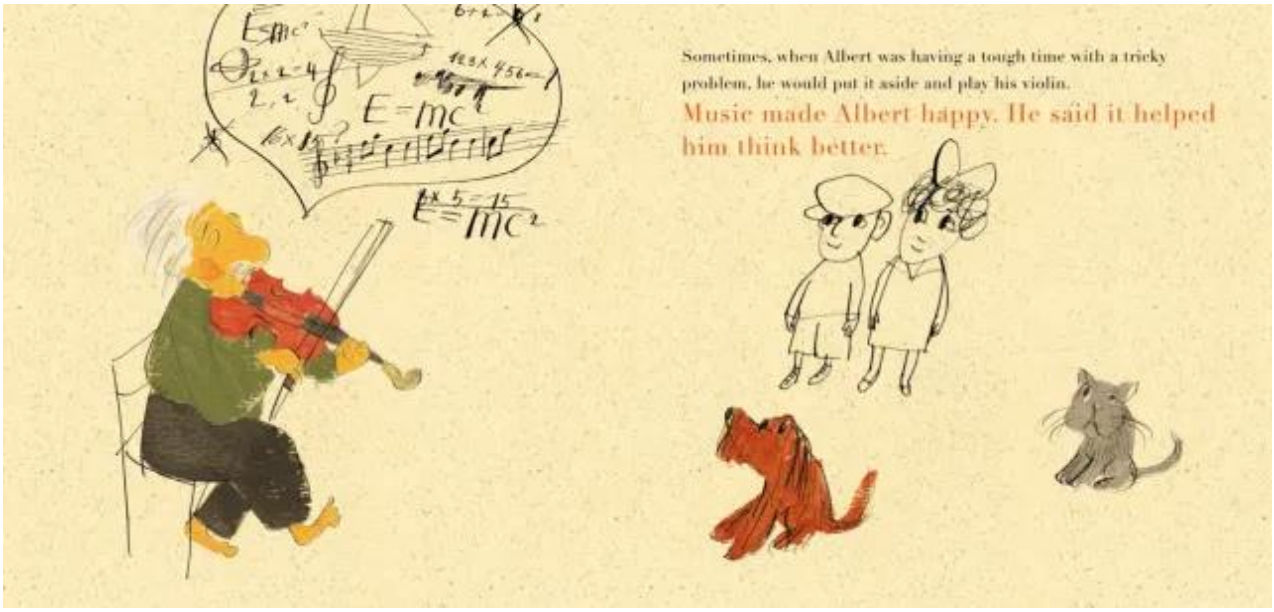
Picture books can be powerful tools for teaching disciplinary literacy by making complex concepts accessible and engaging across subjects. In science, picture books can introduce scientific terms and ideas, foster inquiry through observations, and illustrate processes like the water cycle, as seen in the example shown in Appendix 31 using the picture book *Once Upon a raindrop*. In mathematics, they can relate math to real-life contexts, promote problem-solving with story-based puzzles, and support visual learners by making abstract concepts concrete. For history, picture books provide context for historical events such as that shown above using the example of Anne Frank, develop empathy through diverse cultural perspectives, and teach critical analysis by evaluating the accuracy and bias in historical narratives. In arts, they help teach narrative structures, enhance vocabulary as shown through the example of *Vincent Can't Sleep*, and build comprehension through strategies like questioning and inferring. Picture books also contribute to art and visual literacy by exploring art techniques, encouraging interpretation of illustrations, and inspiring creativity. Additionally, they support wellbeing by addressing themes such as empathy and resilience, modelling conflict resolution, and encouraging self-reflection and personal

wellbeing, as shown in the example shown in Appendix 37 in the picturebook, *Breathe and Be*. By integrating picture books through interactive regular timetabled read-aloud sessions, practitioners can make learning more engaging and effective across various disciplines.

Participants from the PLC's in this study further highlight how using thematic picturebooks can link with the curricular learning outcome of Categorisation which can further link to the discipline of science (See Appendix 33 (h), while Sam, Special Class Teacher, also highlights how PBs for DL can enrich Aistear or be used as a pre/post teaching methodology (See Appendix 33 (i).

Such findings serve to highlight the diverse and expansive opportunities that PBs host, not only for DL, but for other areas of the curriculum.



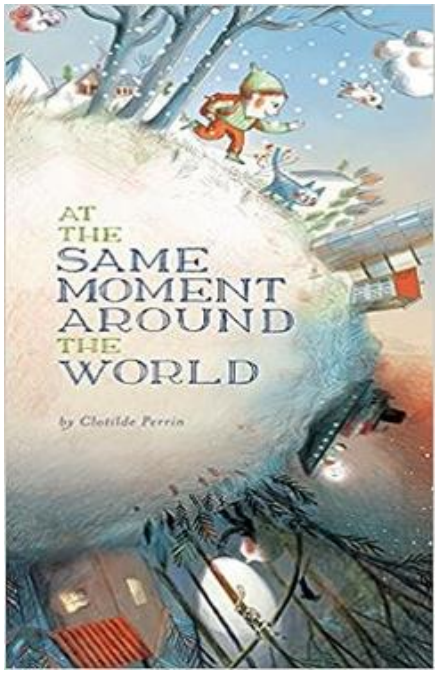


Images 17 & 18: On a beam of light: A story of Albert Einstein

Discipline: Science

Following one of the PLC sessions, Catherine, Class Teacher found a picture book which she felt would greatly enrich her classes understanding of scientific concepts that she had been trying to teach but had found quite difficult them being so abstract. See Appendix 33 (j). The book, *On a Beam of Light*, as shown in Images 17 & 18 above, details the life and workings of Albert Einstein.

Catherine's point of consideration around UDL and how picturebooks may appeal to a particular child or learning style is something which was reflected in the nationwide survey where participants saw value in using picture books for diverse learners. This correlates with Grace, SET Teacher's view that picture books can be used with children who have different learning styles.See Appendix 33 (k).



Images 19 & 20: At the Same moment around the world by Clotilde Perrin

Discipline: Geography

"This is one of the books I found for teaching disciplinary literacy. It looks at different time zones around the world so it picks the time, so say it's 6:00 o'clock in the morning in Senegal and then it talks about what the person is doing in Senegal and then it goes at the same moment in time in Paris, France and it goes through all these different countries around the world where it's the same time in all of them. But it's different time zones and at the very end then it has like this beautiful world map and you take it out and you have a look at all the different characters doing all the different things. So if you do that with your class and then you wanted them to do some Atlas work in a textbook or, you know, do a bit of work on time like, I still think there's a place for the textbook along with doing beautiful looks like that."

(Kieran, Class Teacher)

Kieran's choice of picturebook, *At the same moment around the world*, seen in Images 19 & 20, shows how the language of the time zones and the mentality of the geographer as they navigate through the time zones is brought to the fore. His analysis of the diverse array of places chosen as well as the vivid illustrations which capture the culture, climate and people of those countries was thought to greatly enrich the opportunity for DL through the use of this picturebook.

5.5.11 Planning for teaching diversity through picturebooks : The language of inclusivity

In the interview with Jane, NCCA, she mentions the capacity for picturebooks to be used for inclusivity in Irish primary classrooms. *"There's so much scope with picturebooks to delve into the big topics like inclusivity and diversity, especially considering how our classrooms have transformed in recent years."* Delving deeper into this proposal in the PLCs, the group's first

explored the infographics portraying the percentages of picturebooks used across diverse backgrounds . Diversity and inclusivity in picture books for primary school children were seen *as "essential for fostering a more equitable and empathetic society."* (Sean, EAL teacher). Upon review of some titles provided by the researcher, it was decided that "*these books serve as powerful tools to reflect the varied experiences and identities of all children, including those from different racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as those with disabilities."* (Eabha, Principal). Agreeing with Naidoo (2014), Tom, Principal felt that in presenting a wide range of characters and stories, picturebooks help young readers see themselves represented, which can boost their self-esteem and sense of belonging (Naidoo 2014). Additionally, as proposed by Evelyn, Class Teacher, and in line with Bishop (1990) 'exposure to diverse perspectives encourages empathy, understanding, and respect for others who may be different from themselves' (Bishop 1990, p.1). Inclusive picture books also provide opportunities for discussions about social justice, equity, and acceptance, laying the groundwork for children to become open-minded and compassionate individuals (Thomas 2016). Similarly, as Eddie, SET Teacher outlines, "*ensuring diversity and inclusivity in picture books is not just about representation; it is about shaping a more inclusive world from a young age*".

5.5.12 Moving forward: How can DL become a reality in school based planning?

When asked in the nationwide survey, participants outlined that professional development followed by the provision of resources are necessary for DL to become a reality in schools. See Figure 92 in Appendix 33. For recommendations in relation to this question, see Chapter 6.

5.5.13 Moving forward: Using Moje's 4E's model for DL in classrooms

In the exploration of the application of DL to TPPTL, Moje's heuristic for disciplinary literacy using the 4E's model was explored. See Figure 93.

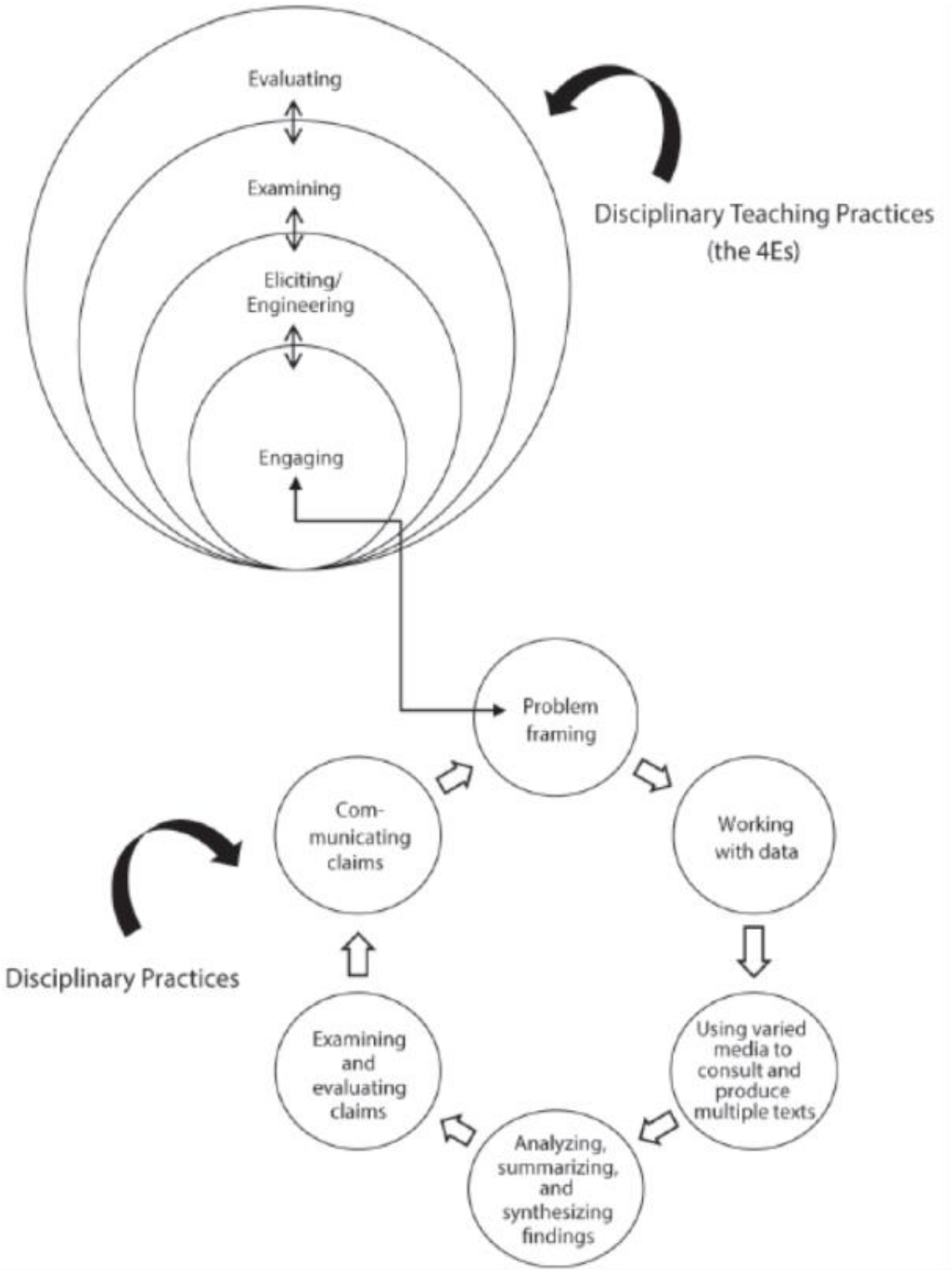


Figure 93: Moje (2015) Heuristic for Disciplinary literacy-4E's model

Moje (2015) offers a "4 Es" heuristic that can be used across subject areas: engage, elicit/engineer, examine, and evaluate. The 4 Es model is based on 1) authentic, discipline-specific activities, and 2) scaffolded, explicit instruction about the literacy practices within that discipline. When asked if such a model could be applied in the primary setting, participants of the professional learning community compared the model to similar practice that was already happening in classrooms. In Moje's 4E's model, a key aspect involves examining the language of the discipline, including technical terms and discourse practices, to understand why they are used (Moje 2015, p. 268). While the participants saw merit in using the language of the heuristic within their planning and concurred that such language was applicable across a range of subjects, they felt that it would be only through whole school or even national professional development that such models would be meaningfully transferred to actual classroom practice. Such structure would, as Hirsch's *Core Knowledge Sequence* mirrors, bring a structure to the planning for DL in a large scale manner. However, this would serve to question the advocation of teacher agency if such a structure was put in place on a national scale.

5.5.14 The shared reading experience

Teachers and pupils need time to engage in sustained shared reading (Roche 2014). Throughout all four phases of this research study, time was identified as an inhibiting factor in the effective engagement of picture books. Siraj-Blatchford (2010) says that sustained shared reading of a text is 'when teacher and pupil work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc.' (Siraj-Blatchford 2010, p.157). Such is the

case with using picturebooks for DL, teacher and pupil need to work together to evaluate the language and vocabulary of the book and the use the images to extend that narrative and clarify concepts within a particular discipline. Dickenson (2014) argues that when conversations are limited or when teachers remain in strict control, pupils do not hear or practice the kinds of extended structures required to fuel language learning. Such is the limitation of core text books where teachers initiate the topic and seek predetermined answers. Findings of attitudes toward text books in the primary classroom, which is a topical debate in the educational sphere in Ireland currently, shall ensue in Section 3 of this chapter-Agency. .

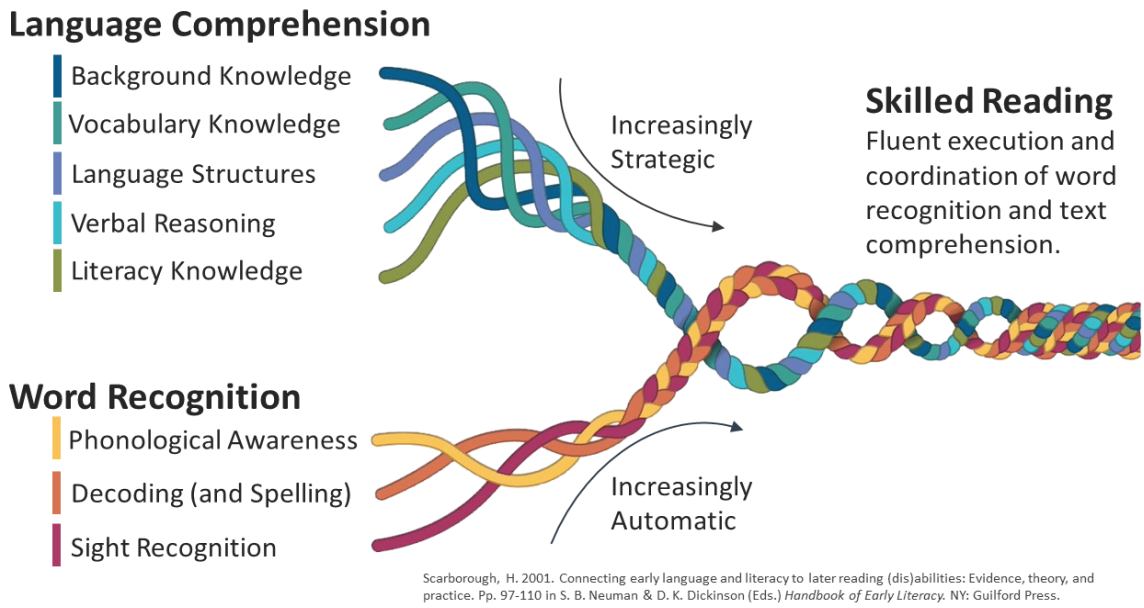


Figure 94: Scarborough's Reading Rope

Concurrent with findings from this study which serves to discourse a model for understanding the components of DL and PBs, Scarborough's Reading Rope provides a model for understanding the components of skilled reading. The upper strands of the rope or the language comprehension section which can be seen in Figure 94 above, were a focus of conversation in one of the

professional learning community meetings. The lens of disciplinary literacy was used to observe the reading rope. The component of 'literary knowledge' was identified as a direct link between disciplinary literacy and the reading rope. The vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge components were further identified as tools for DL which were available within particular picturebooks. Evidence of this can be seen in the language cards as detailed above in Section 5.5.9 and in the discourse around the importance of building background knowledge. In terms of the literary knowledge, participants queried a direct link between the genre writing frameworks which they are used to using and the extension of this to incorporate disciplinary literacy. Further recommendations around such a model can be seen in the final chapter of this thesis.

5.5.15 Challenges facing educators in effective school based planning

Participants of the PLCs collectively denoted that the use of Croke Park[14] hours for collaborative teaching has been both a positive and negative element in their planning profiles. See Appendix 33 (l) for Sean, Liam and Michael's comments in relation to Croke Park hours.

Given the recent treaty in 2024, whereby Irish primary teachers reached a new agreement as part of the broader Public Sector Pay Agreement, covering the period from January 1, 2024, to June 30, 2026, it would seem that Croke Park hours are now embedded within the Irish primary

[14] Circular 0008/2011 constitutes the Croke Park Agreement arrangements for schools which oversees that during the course of the primary school year, there be an additional time provision of 36 hours. These hours are outside of teaching time and used for school planning - continuous professional development - induction - pre and post school supervision - policy development - staff meetings - nationally planned inservice - school arranged inservice. The Croke Park Agreement (officially known as the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014), was significant in that it marked a collaborative effort between the government and public sector employees to navigate a period of economic difficulty, emphasising job security and gradual reforms over drastic cuts. Subsequent agreements, such as the Haddington Road Agreement and the Lansdowne Road Agreement, built upon the foundations laid by the Croke Park Agreement, continuing the trend of public sector reforms and cost-saving measures.

education system. Interesting to the findings of this study, this agreement includes commitments to cooperate with various educational reforms, including changes to the primary curriculum, literacy and numeracy strategies. Given the fact that the *Primary Language Curriculum* is now considered to be implemented in schools, it serves to question how this agreement will work to strengthen the components of the language curriculum, such as that of disciplinary literacy.

In contrast, there is substantial evidence, such as declining recruitment, that the extra workload is resented by many Irish educators. The issue is not the extra work itself, but its perceived lack of purpose. When the PLCs were asked if, outside of Croke Park hours, teachers were given the opportunity to plan collaboratively, participants from the PLC indicated that this was "*minimal*" or "*conducted for a specific initiative, but not consistently*". One participant who taught in the UK for a time spoke of how in the UK system, PPA (Planning, preparation and assessment) time constituted 10% of the working hours, so if a teacher worked 30 hours, 3 of those hours would be assigned to PPA. See Appendix 33 (m)

Reactions from the group were very positive toward such a system with further deliberations on how a Rota system may operate using the class SET teacher to come in to teach the class for this time. See Appendix 33 (m). The challenges associated with sourcing texts can be seen in Appendix 33 Figure 95 which reinforces the issue of time as a key challenge.

However, participants from all PLC's cited the lack of a solid whole school literacy plan or approach as one of the main reasons for teachers uncertainty and lack of confidence in their teaching of literacy and thus in the *"proper implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum."* Grace (SET teacher) denoted that while there is a plan in place it is *"very dated and*

needs reviewing but it is not part of our current SIP[15] *so it has become a bit forgotten and as well as that the literacy postholder has been out on mat. leave and no one is acting up so we are just driving on with the plan that's there or some teachers are trialling new programmes."* The majority of participants described practices which lacked coherence between classrooms and teachers. Further to this, the impact of Covid 19 as well as the interrupted nature of the dissemination of the Primary Language Curriculum were noted as factors which have interfered with the a more successful and confident whole school planning system for Literacy. Moreover, the lack of literacy leaders/postholders within schools was perceived as a "*major reason why the whole thing is a shambles*". Teachers from the PLCs believed that a whole school approach was a necessity for improving literacy instruction in their schools. They felt it would lead to cohesive, collective and collaborative action. This is concurrent with the vision held by the Teaching Council of Ireland in their *Cosán Framework* (See Literature Review Section 2) which serves to recognise teachers professional learning and reflection on learning as an integral part of the profession. Despite the PLC participants relative positivity toward Croke Park meetings being utilised for planning time, results from the questionnaire saw an outpouring of feelings of overwhelm with workload, planning, reform and post covid learning gaps. Of the 323 teachers surveyed, 71.29% felt burn out by the demands of the teaching profession while 16.40% felt somewhat burn out and 12.30% did not feel a sense of burn out from the demands of the teaching profession. A collation

[15] The School Improvement Plan (SIP) concept was formally introduced in Ireland's primary education system as part of broader educational reforms over recent decades. The exact timeline of SIP implementation may vary across different regions and individual schools, as the adoption of school improvement practices often occurred gradually and in response to changing educational priorities and policies. Key milestones in the development of SIPs in Ireland's primary school setting include the introduction of quality assurance frameworks, such as the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, which encouraged schools to assess their performance and identify areas for improvement.

of comments regarding the effects of teacher burnout can be viewed in Appendix 2. This correlates with findings from the *INTO Teacher Workload* publication (INTO 2022).[16]

Evelyn, (Class teacher) from the PLC appeared to be taking a more measured approach to planning, while Harry (SET teacher) proposed that some of the paperwork was being done for the accountability factor and '*just to have something on paper'*.

> *"I feel with the planning, I'm just trying not to get overwhelmed because there is lots of change and we're all still learning together as a staff and there is a lot more to come. So I'm just taking it month by month with my class standard and just putting in and establishing different objectives, but not to put myself under pressure to try and pick up loads of objectives and just do it gradually to ease myself into it so I'm comfortable with my planning process for my learning and teaching."*
>
> *(Evelyn, Class Teacher)*

This correlates with findings from *The Buckingham Report* (Buckingham 2024, p.35) which reported that 'the density of the curriculum was seen as presenting a challenge to teachers in terms of time'. Combined with this challenge is the pressure of accountability which teachers reported.

[16]The 2022 INTO report on teacher workload highlighted several critical issues, including excessive workload, with 90% of teachers feeling overwhelmed and stressed. Teachers faced a growing administrative burden, leading to time-consuming paperwork that detracted from teaching quality. Principals worked an average of 15 extra hours weekly, negatively impacting their well-being. Teacher supply shortages and lack of substitute cover further aggravated these issues, contributing to dissatisfaction and health concerns among educators.

> *"That's exactly it {*response to accountability*}. And that's certainly that's the buzzword that comes up in any SET meetings, it's like we have to be able to stand over what we're doing. We have to be accountable for the work you're doing. So you're just constantly entering dates, it's just completely meaninglessly to say targets still not achieved will continue."*
>
> *(Harry, SET Teacher)*

Throughout these discussions, the participants awareness was drawn to the NCCA's *Guidelines for Planning and Preparation for Teaching and Learning*[17] It was evident that none of the PLC participants were aware of the documents existence, which is a stark finding. Despite this, the participants welcomed the move toward a more balanced approach to planning.

[17] The guidelines, launched in April 2021, emphasise reducing the focus on paperwork and recognising the invisible aspects of preparation. They clarify how teachers can demonstrate their preparation and highlight the supports available to them (NCCA). Key points from the guidelines include:

Purposeful Preparation: Encouraging teachers to engage in preparation that directly impacts classroom teaching and learning, making it more meaningful and practical (NCCA).

Flexible and Concise Documentation: Reducing the amount of paperwork required and focusing on flexible and concise documentation to avoid administrative overload (NCCA).

Supportive Resources: Providing various resources and practical examples through scenarios to illustrate effective preparation methods in different school settings and contexts (NCCA).

These guidelines are designed to support all primary and special school teachers in planning and delivering effective teaching and learning experiences. They aim to make the preparation process more intuitive and supportive, ensuring that it aligns closely with classroom needs and outcomes (NCCA)).

> *"I actually wasn't aware of that {*Guidelines for Planning and Preparation for Teaching and Learning*}, but it's great to hear because sometimes I feel a lot of the workload is increasing-you have your own daily notes and then preparing lessons, there's so much paperwork. It would be great to be to have that {*pointing to an image of visible, invisible and recorded preparation for teaching and learning*} come in and to kind of reduce the paperwork and then your paperwork will be shorter and more concise, rather than trying to get reams and reams, just to kind of get it on paper."*
>
> *(Mary, Class Teacher)*

Mary (Class Teacher) further noted that there needed to be more uniformity in what is expected of teachers across the board and that hearing about publications like these (Guidelines for Planning and Preparation for Teaching and Learning) "*by chance*" was "*simply not good enough*" and "*defeats the purpose of the work gone into it*". Participants noted the excellent work of the NCCA and its counterparts in the creation of curricular documentation, however, criticized the delivery of same. Participants highlighted that delivery of key messages, such as those set out in Webinars 1-8 to support the Primary Language Curriculum, needs to come from the top down and in a uniform way. Arguably, this is exactly what was done by the department, however observations from recipients of the information appeared not to see it this way. One participant suggested that "*it should go back to the way the 1999 curriculum was implemented"* whereby teachers were gathered in hotels across the country for curricular in-service days, as "*at least then you felt that you had received training and everyone was getting the same messages, not just our schools own*

take on the day"[18] Despite frustration amongst participants, findings from the interviewee with Jane, NCCA would suggest that this frustration is a very normal part of the process of curricular change.

5.5.16 School Based Planning: A positive note

To conclude Section 1: School Based Planning, it is worthy to note that participants from PLC's, INTO, PDST and NCCA acknowledged that the curriculum in Ireland encourages an integrated approach to teaching and learning. There was an agreement that it further emphasises the importance of connecting different subjects to provide a holistic educational experience. By creating cross-curricular links, teachers felt that they can help students see the relationships between concepts in various subjects, which promotes deeper understanding and retention of information. Reflective of Beane (1997), thematic planning encourages students to explore topics deeply, making connections between their prior knowledge and new information. This method supports vocabulary development (Mehigan 2010; 2009), as students encounter and use new words in multiple contexts, which reinforces their understanding and retention-as posited in this section through the presentation of findings on the use of the language of DL in picturebooks. Furthermore, and aligning to Marzano (2004), teaching vocabulary within themes such as that proposed by the example shown in this section on *Paper Planes*, helps students to see the relevance and application of new words, making them more likely to retain and use them. Finally, research by Fogarty (2009)

[18] The implementation of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum in Ireland included in-service training sessions where teachers gathered in hotels and other venues across the country. These sessions were part of a coordinated effort by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) to provide comprehensive training and support for teachers. This approach allowed for large-scale professional development, ensuring that all teachers could participate in the training and receive consistent information about the new curriculum.

highlights that integrated curriculum approaches improve student engagement and achievement. When students see the interconnectedness of subjects, their learning becomes more meaningful and cohesive.

The first section in this presentation and discussion of findings chapter has shed light on School Based Planning. Part I presented findings on collaborative planning, and the role and impact of professional development services for teachers with regard to planning. Part II detailed specific planning for DL and PBs, showcasing language cards for DL across four subject areas. The next section shall move forward to present the understanding and attitudes toward DL and PBs from participants across the spectrum, from librarians to class teachers to educational stakeholders.

5.6 THE SMALL FRAMEWORK: "M" MY UNDERSTANDING

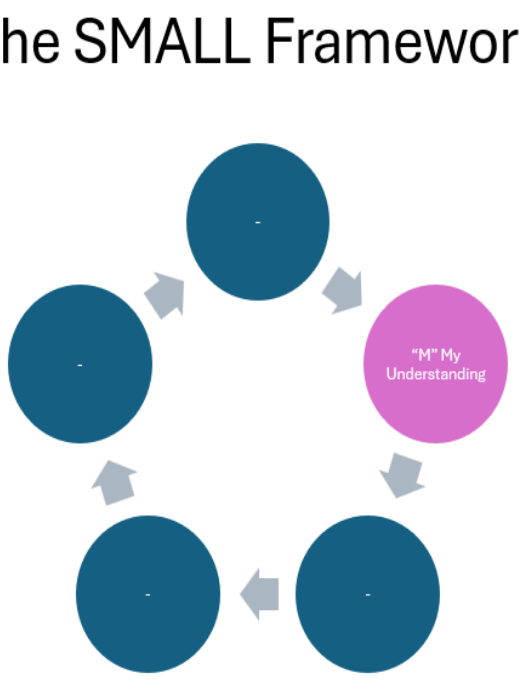


Figure 96: The SMALL Framework Component 2 "My Understanding"

The second theme in this chapter serves to illustrate the findings in relation to practitioners and stakeholders attitudes and understanding of disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks in the primary classroom. This section shall take two parts-Part I shall focus on attitudes and understanding in relation to DL and Part II shall present findings from participants attitudes and understanding of PBs.

PART I

5.6.1 Attitudes, opinions, awareness and understanding of disciplinary literacy

Data, consistent with the literature review, revealed that disciplinary literacy, is regarded as somewhat of a new concept at primary level with 55% of respondents to the nationwide questionnaire reporting to not have heard of the term.

> *'Just heard of it today during sustained support from the PDST.'*
>
> *(Kieran, Class Teacher)*
>
> *'Unsure, I know the next PLC seminar is on it'*
>
> *(Questionnaire participant)*
>
> *'I've heard of it but actually unsure what it means!'*
>
> *(Questionnaire participant)*

This is uniform with the nationwide survey response illustrated below where 55% of respondents reported to have not heard of the term. See Appendix 33 Figure 97.

This finding is stark as it illuminates the fact that many practitioners are unaware of this concept, and so, its transfer into practice cannot be assumed. As Scott *et al.* (2016) in their book on *Policy Transfer and Educational Change* denote, improving education through policy learning is an important notion for countries in need of educational reform. However, identifying a successful set of practices and transferring them from one national setting to another is a complex exercise. Such is the case with this finding which serves to inform the policy makers in Ireland, who, as Gilleece and Clerkin (2024) denote, are placing increased focus on evidence-informed policy-making, accenting the need for robust evaluation in order to provide casual evidence of policy impact. Whilst the policy makers have ensured that the Irish curricula, in terms of disciplinary literacy, is founded upon research-based best practice (Shanahan's NCCA publication, 2019), the dissemination and the evaluation of how this is translating into practice on the ground warrants further investment and investigation. It may be argued that the term has only emerged (DL is notably a long standing term at second and third level), however, given the fact that the *Primary Language Curriculum* in its first iteration (DES 2015) is now nearing ten years old, and the publication from Shanahan for NCCA on disciplinary literacy in the primary classroom is also aging, it begs to be questioned whether DL is in fact going to translate into practice, and, with further curricular developments on the agenda, will it be diluted or magnified? (See Recommendations Chapter with suggestions for further research).

5.6.2 DL- a confused term?

A cohort of participants from both the survey and the PLC depicted that DL was similar to practice that is already being undertaken in the classroom, namely integration of topics across subjects, but believed it is simply being presented under new terminology. See Appendix 33 (n).

From the 312 participants who answered question 27 in the nationwide survey (see Figure 98 below), it is clear that there is a high level of uncertainty as to whether DL is a new concept. Given the fact that the first mention of DL in the Irish primary school curriculum came with the publication of the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA 2019), this finding serves to equip the NCCA and Oide in their dissemination of the key messages of the curricula. Taking into consideration the fact that curricular reform has moved toward Mathematics and the *Primary Curriculum Framework* as this thesis is being written, it begs to question whether concepts such as DL have missed their opportunity or been lost in translation.

> *'I didn't know about this until now.... teaching principal.... I need communication from Dept re new initiatives!'*
>
> *(Questionnaire participant)*

The comment above, from a questionnaire participant, highlights a communication issue perceived by a teaching principal on the dissemination of new initiatives such as that of DL. From analysis of questions 27, 36 and 37 in the nationwide questionnaire, seen in Figures 98-100 in Appendix 33, it is clear that there is a strong sense of confusion about the term DL and what it actually entails. More than half of the respondents to the survey said that they had not heard of the term disciplinary literacy (55.28%). 38.20% had heard of the term while 6.52% were not sure. 42.39% of participants were not sure whether they viewed disciplinary literacy as a new concept. 31.39% did view it as a new concept while 26.21% did not. 60.33% of teachers felt that they were unsure whether disciplinary literacy was similar to practice that they are doing already in the classroom while 35.74% stated that yes it was similar. 3.93% reported that disciplinary literacy is not similar to practice that they are already doing in the classroom. 42.59% of partakers said that they were

unsure whether disciplinary literacy is similar to cross-curricular planning. 32.32% stated that it is somewhat similar, while 22.81% felt that it is similar and 2.28% stated that it is not similar. Almost half of participants (48.09%) were unsure whether disciplinary literacy was similar to content and language integrated learning (CLIL). 20.23% felt that it was somewhat similar, while 21.76% said that it was in fact similar. 9.92% of respondents felt that DL was not similar to CLIL.

Such findings are consistence with Burke & Lehance (2023a) in their large scale study which reported that definitions for the term DL were inconsistent.

5.6.3 Oide Webinar on DL fostering understanding

At the time of survey 65.94% of participants had not watched the PDST webinar on disciplinary literacy while 26.93% had. 7.12% were not sure whether they had watched the webinar or not. Of those who saw the webinar, 24.62% said that it was beneficial to their teaching while 18.46% said it was not. 56.92% were unsure. Furthermore, 60.77% of practitioners were unsure whether they would be altering their planning as a result of the webinar while an equal percentage of participants said that they would/would not. 54.30% of respondents said that they were unsure whether the webinar has it led them to review their approach to teaching literacy across the curriculum while 22.52% that it did and 23.18% said that it did not. See Appendix 33 Figures 101 and 102.

Consistent with the timeline for the national rollout in Term 3, 2023 of Webinar 7 by Oide, entitled The PLC and disciplinary literacy, data reveals the emerging perceptions of practitioners of this teaching approach and the possible transfer into planning and practice of this methodology. At the time of survey, more than 200 of the participants had not seen the webinar on DL, with some members of the professional learning community displaying confusion as to which webinar

it was, mixing it up with one on critical literacy and another with the transfer of skills and a third with content language integrated learning (CLIL). As practitioners become more familiar with the language of the curriculum (through SSE, whole school planning, professional development, input from Oide), as proposed in the interview with Jane, NCCA, such confusion is envisioned to be alleviated. In the interview with Jane, NCCA, it was noted that there was an expectation that practitioners would go through "*a period of confusion*" as such is presenting and consistent with findings of this study. Nonetheless, from conversations with the professional learning communities, feelings of frustration and disparity were more in line with what teachers were experiencing as they grappled to make sense of the new curriculum and its terminologies. One participant noted that:

> *'It would be great if it was communicated to us that there was an expectation that we would go through a period of confusion and that that was ok. Instead I am left feeling inadequate and inept and am questioning what I know at all about how to teach literacy or should I just continue as I am doing and hopefully pick up a few new things along the way?'.*
>
> *(Evelyn, Class Teacher)*

From analysing the results of these comments and statistics, it is clear that the webinars held by Oide are a vital part of the dissemination of information to practitioners. Despite this, from those who watched the webinar, a significant portion of participants denoted that they were unsure or that they did not find it beneficial to their teaching. Further research in this regard is warranted as to ascertaining why this may be. Given the fact that a large percentage of participants had not heard of the term and had also not seen the webinar on DL, it can be assumed that the hearing of the

concept would predominantly occur through these webinars for teachers designed by Oide. One participant of the PLC denoted, "*the problem is if someone is out on maternity leave, career break or any other leave or misses that webinar day, will they ever know about DL?"*. This is a valid concern. Such concern was echoed in the interview with Jane, NCCA when she cautioned the trend of becoming a profession of "*tips and tricks*", whereby practitioners pick up items of knowledge or practice ad lib, and there is no uniformity in the quality of practice being accumulated.

5.6.4 Teacher's understanding enriched through PD

Positively, data indicated that a small cohort of participants from the nationwide questionnaire had engaged in some professional development in the area of DL with one teacher reporting to have used DL in their teaching in Scotland (see comment 1 below), another reporting to have used the methodology for a number of years (see comment 2 below), and a third teacher reporting that they are currently completing a masters in the area (see comment 3 below). The understanding and appreciation of DL among such practitioners was more pinpointed to definitions such as those outlined in the literature review (See Chapter Three, Section 3)

Comment 1: 'Literacy which filters through and incorporates other areas of the curriculum. It's called interdisciplinary learning in Scotland and I still refer to it as IDL in my short-term planning documents having taught there for a decade.'

(Questionnaire participant)

Comment 2: 'I have engaged with this practice over the last few years and was so excited to engage with the webinar, however colleagues are not convinced as it as perceived as a big departure from comfort zones '

(Questionnaire participant)

Comment 3: 'I'm currently complete a thesis for my masters investigating the impact of a disciplinary approach on student ability to read like a historian. D.L. refers to the specific skills and strategies needed to read, write, speak and critically think within academic disciplines like history, Maths or science.'

(Questionnaire participant)

Given that such professional development and enriched awareness of DL reflects a small cohort of the respondents who represent teacher voice in these findings, contrasting findings reveal that the understanding of key educational stakeholders toward DL was more defined and in line with the definitions as posed by researchers in the field of DL, outlined in Chapter Three (Gabriel 2023; Lent & Voigt 2018; Brozo 2017; Lent 2015). This suggests that those working in organisations such as NCCA and Oide have a richer understanding of concepts such as that of DL. See Clare and Niamh's comments below.

'Disciplinary literacy refers to the unique set skills, competencies, vocabulary etc. linked to specific subject areas. Disciplinary literacy goes beyond learning about a topic and allows children to work and think like historians, scientists etc.'

(Clare, PDST)

I would think of this as a specialised or particular way of reading, and I know that relates to something that Shanahan wrote previously when he was talking about the potential for disciplinary literacy in primary at primary level as opposed to second and third level. But I think of it as how you read across different subject areas and subject matters. And how you engage with text, as opposed to maybe the word reading itself might be a bit too specific, you know? But how are you engaged with text and how it leads into the broader sense of what exactly is a text, and so just for argument sake, if you're looking and responding in art or in music or something like that, you're engaging with text in a the specific way. And it's not necessarily reading, but it is.

(Niamh, PDST)

Building on this understanding of DL, the PLC groups added some unique perspectives which supported the view that the building of content knowledge is an essential component, which was also identified by Jane, NCCA in their interview.

'that children have the literacy skills to deal with knowledge, content, and challenges across areas outside of traditional literacy.'

(Liam, SET Teacher)

'It's about building content knowledge in other areas using literacy skills.'

(Seán, EAL Teacher)

'Reader knowledge, experiences and critical thinking combined to gain a holistic literacy experience and awareness.'

(Eabha, principal)

Such rich insights into disciplinary literacy and its ability to assist in building content knowledge came about after the PLCs engaged in readings and discussions on the topic (See PLC Slides in Appendix 7 for list of readings which the PLC groups engaged with). This serves to show the necessity of balancing PD with informative pieces of research in order to enrich understanding amongst teachers on the intricacies of the topic (Syphard 2021).

5.6.5 Practitioners understanding of the language of DL

Researchers in the field of DL, such as, Shanahan & Shanahan, Moje, Fang, Coatoam,, Lee, Spratley and Ippolito, denote the explicit language, vocabulary and terminology required to effectively teach DL to students. In the nationwide survey, 40% of participants reported to feel somewhat confident at teaching the language associated with disciplinary literacy across different subjects while 41.96% are not confident. 18.04% feel confident at teaching the language associated

with disciplinary literacy across the different subjects. 58.3% of participants said that it would be beneficial to have language cards for teaching the language of disciplinary literacy while 39.27% stated that it would be somewhat beneficial to have language cards and 2.43% reported that it would not be beneficial. Further in-depth analysis of the term DL by one PLC, included reference to tiered language which is reflective of exemplars from the *Primary Language Curriculum* in their support material for teachers entitled *Developing Vocabulary Within a Balanced Literacy Framework* (NCCA, 2019).

> *'Tier 2/3 language that can require explicit instruction to acquire and to use meaningfully'*
>
> *(Seán, EAL Teacher)*

Through discussion and exploration of the literature in the PLC set up, teachers reported that they were able to forge links with the curriculum in terms of DL and tease out its meaning and application to their practice. Grace, Class Teacher reported that following the PLC on DL she could see that "*the key to the success of this is the explicit teacher modelling and the explicit use of language".*

5.6.6 Factors that inhibit DL being taught in classroom settings

Time, resources and professional development were noted across the data collected from all sources as being key factors identified in the dissemination of DL at primary level. In the nationwide survey it was noted that, in order for disciplinary literacy to become a reality in Irish classrooms, the following items are essential:

Factor	Percentage (%)
Professional development	24.75%
Provision of resources	20.10%
Time allocation	15.20%
Collaborative practice	15.93%
Leadership	11.03%
Professional learning communities	11.03%
Other	1.96%

This summarises the key factors identified in the nationwide survey as essential for the dissemination of disciplinary literacy (DL) at the primary level in Irish classrooms. Similarly, participants in the professional learning communities echoed the same requirements.

> *'impossible for teachers to get around to all of the different things. It's the one thing we hear all the time. What's the big barrier with the primary language curriculum? It's time because it's not just the curriculum subjects. It's the green schools. It's the active schools, it's the confirmation. It's the communion. It's. It all the other initiatives that go along besides the primary school curriculum.'*
>
> *(Grace, Class Teacher)*

Concurrently, a comment from a key educational stakeholder indicated that time for PD and time for reflection are lacking in the Irish education system.

'I think we are a long way off it in Ireland. And that is not blaming teachers, it's blaming that time and the time given to professional development and the time given for reflection to teachers and the time given for staff to work together to support each other as opposed with this idea of disciplinary literacy across the curriculum not just for literacy. So while it is a central part of the primary language curriculum I suppose a lot of work needs to happen to see it becoming central in classrooms is what I'm trying to say.'

(Niamh, PDST)

Similarly, another key educational stakeholder drew on the starkness of resourcing in schools upon their observation of visiting schools. They spoke of teachers spending time sifting through boxes looking for resources or resources being stored away in cupboards suggesting that they are underutilised. See Appendix 33 (o). Here Clare from PDST outlines the imperativeness of proper time and supports being afforded to teachers.

5.6.7 Correlation between the findings of this study and the Children's Lives Study 2024

Such findings as aforementioned in the previous segment, correlate with results from the *Children's School Lives* longitudinal survey 2024, which revealed several key findings related to time, professional development, resources, leadership, and teacher competence. Due to the fact that the results of this longitudinal study emerged as this findings chapter was being written, it serves to highlight the similar sentiment reported by those participants who part took in this study.

Time: The CSL study highlighted that teachers often struggle with time constraints. They face challenges in balancing the extensive curriculum demands with the time needed to address individual student needs and implement innovative teaching practices effectively (NCCA 2024). This finding is also evident in the comments presented by Grace, Niamh and Clare above. Similar to the results of this study, professional development was identified as crucial for teachers. Teachers expressed a need for more structured and ongoing professional development programs to enhance their skills and keep up with educational best practices.

Resources: Adequate resources were found to be a significant concern. Many schools reported a lack of sufficient materials and technological tools, which hampers the ability to deliver a comprehensive and engaging curriculum. Ensuring equitable distribution of resources across schools is essential for fostering an optimal learning environment (NCCA 2024). As revealed in this study so too through the CSL study, access to appropriate curriculum materials and resources was seen as crucial. The study identified a gap in the availability of high-quality, discipline-specific literacy resources, suggesting that more investment is needed to support teachers and students in this area (NCCA 2024).

Leadership: Effective school leadership was recognised as a vital factor in creating a supportive educational environment. Principals and school leaders who actively promote collaboration, support teacher development, and foster a positive school culture contribute significantly to student and teacher success. Findings relating to this component can be found in Section 5 of this Chapter.

Teacher Competence: The study accentuated the importance of teacher competence in student outcomes. Competence in this context includes not only subject matter knowledge but also pedagogical skills and the ability to create inclusive classrooms. Teachers who feel competent and supported are better equipped to meet diverse student needs and implement innovative teaching strategies (NCCA 2024).

Another key finding in the CSL study in relation to pupils attitudes toward English indicates that many children feel a sense of boredom and repetition with the subject. This correlates with observations from teachers in the PLC who felt that some of the material across subjects and plans was repetitive. This illuminates the necessity of DL as a tool to overcome this obstacle which can serve to delineate these deficits through more rigorous and systematic planning. The CSL study further emphasises the importance of disciplinary literacy and the need for teachers to develop students' abilities to engage with texts and problems as experts within specific disciplines. Similar to the findings in this study, the CSL study shows that effective implementation of disciplinary literacy requires robust professional development for teachers. The study found that teachers need ongoing training to develop the specific pedagogical skills required for teaching literacy within their disciplines (NCCA) which coincides with the evaluation of participants from the PLCs within this study.

Finally, the CSL study depicts that disciplinary literacy can enhance student engagement by making learning more relevant and meaningful. When students understand the purpose behind reading and writing tasks within a discipline, their motivation and interest in the subject can increase (CSL 2024). Although beyond the scope of this study, it would be imperative to gain

student feedback on just how motivating and engaging the use of DL as a teaching tool is for pupils learning experiences.

These findings, similar to the findings uncovered through this study, emphasise the need for systemic changes in how time, professional development, resources, leadership, and teacher competence are addressed in Irish primary schools to enhance the overall educational experience for students and educators alike.

5.6.8 An understanding of how disciplinary literacy may look in the primary school

This study, following the guidance of Charner-Laird *et al.* (2016), enabled participants to consider what DL may look like in their school setting. Comments from Liam, Mary, Evelyn, Sam and Harry show how teachers view DL as a change to the norm (See Appendix 33 (p), however there are clear reservations as to how this concept would be consistently used across schools nationally. With Sam's view that the management team holds responsibility for DL becoming a reality there leaves questions as to the use of teacher agency in this regard while the use of resources such as Lent's grid as mentioned by Mary and Harry was deemed a useful tool but one which may only reach a certain number of schools.

5.6.9 An overarching understanding of DL

Overarchingly, the data from the PLC reveals that the premise of DL is advantageous. This follows professional development in the area as part of the PLC model. Practitioners presented a number of reasons why DL would enrich their teaching:

"where language and literacy are developed in a thematic approach across many curricular subjects, this is surely the way forward"

(Catherine, Class Teacher)

Secondly, practitioners disclosed how DL would impact on their planning, declaring that there would be a need for *"a restructure to current planning tools*" which would, in the short term create more work, however it was viewed that this could be advantageous in the long run when planning became "*more refined and defined".* Finally, practitioners identified a series of influential factors that may impact on the use of DL in their teaching repertoires:

'as children advance through school, literacy instruction should shift from general literacy strategies to the more specific or specialised ones from each discipline.'

(Kieran, Class Teacher)

Variation occurred, however, regarding the intended approaches being taken by practitioners to implement DL in the primary classroom. According to Niamh, PDST advisor:

'Another way of doing it is with disciplinary literacy- get them to pick one subject and one subject only, and starting as a whole school go through that. So go through SPHE, go through science, through history, through geography, through art. And support each other through that and kind of comeback maybe once a month and tweak how does that look in your plans? What does a whole school plan look like for this? What supports do we need as a whole school to start using disciplinary literacy through one subject because sometimes it's easier to start with something small and then the following year build on it than kind of trying to climb Mount Everest all in one go.'

(Niamh, PDST)

This finding is consistent with Fang's (2012) series of pedagogical recommendations to develop content area literacies. Although focused at second level, there is scope for the development of Fang's model at primary level, as evidenced by the results of this study.

5.6.10 Concluding comment on My Understanding of DL

To conclude this section on attitudes, opinions, awareness and understanding toward DL, I will draw on an observation from a key educational stakeholder who situates DL within the historical context of the three Irish primary curricula (1972, 1999, 2019) and in doing so, seeks to highlight pathways and assurances for teachers as they grapple with understanding this term and its application to the classroom setting. Anne, INTO summarises well when she highlights

that given time to reflect and piece together curricular developments over the years, there is already a strong foundation at primary level for disciplinary literacy. See Anne's comment in Appendix 33 (q). This segment of the chapter shall now progress to Part II by outlining participants attitudes toward picturebooks.

PART II

5.7 Attitudes, opinions, awareness and understanding of picturebooks

Results from the nationwide survey show that a clear majority of those surveyed (97.83%) like picture books. This is a very positive finding. Curiously, it is almost divided in that 42.72% of teachers say they read picturebooks for pleasure, whilst 47.99% report not to read picturebooks for pleasure. This finding serves to illuminate the work of Teresa Cremin, a prominent UK scholar in literacy education, who has extensively researched the benefits of teachers reading picture books for pleasure. Cremin's studies highlight that when teachers engage with picture books outside of instructional settings, it can positively influence their teaching practices and foster a love of reading among students. According to her research, 62% of teachers who regularly read picture books for pleasure reported increased creativity and enthusiasm in their teaching methods (Cremin *et al.* 2014; Cremin 2014). Additionally, this practice helps teachers become more familiar with contemporary children's literature, enabling them to recommend books more effectively and create a richer literary environment in the classroom.

Interestingly, findings from this study report that 91.98% of teachers use picturebooks in their current teaching practice. There is variation in the frequency in which practitioners report to use picturebooks in their classroom teaching with 31.29% reporting to use them a few times a week, 18.39% saying they use them every day, 15.48% using them once a week and 12.9% once

a month. This high statistic (91.98%) shows that this small scale sample from Ireland is higher than that of the UK which, according to a survey by the *UK Literacy Association*, approximately 75% of primary school teachers use picture books in their classrooms on a weekly basis. Nonetheless, and in recognition of the variation in scale of both surveys, this widespread use underscores the recognition of picture books as valuable resources for developing literacy skills, enhancing comprehension, and fostering a love of reading among young students (UKLA 2017).

The confidence levels in teachers using picturebooks in the classroom ranges from somewhat confident (55.11%) to confident (41.49%). This is a significant finding and one which suggests the impact that confidence in using picture books can have on the effectiveness of their use in the primary classroom. Similarly, research in the UK indicates varying levels of teacher confidence in using picture books in their teaching. Cremin's studies reveal that while many teachers appreciate the value of picture books, only about 60% feel highly confident in integrating them effectively into their lessons (Cremin *et al.* 2014; 2008a). Similar statistics were noted by Irish primary school teachers in this study. Additionally, a report by the *National Literacy Trust* found that 55% of primary school teachers feel confident in selecting picture books that align with curriculum goals and student interests (Clarke and Teravainen-Goff 2018). However, the same report highlights that newer teachers often require more professional development to build this confidence, as they may lack exposure to the wide range of available picture books and strategies for their use in the classroom. In this study it is unclear whether NQTs feel similar sentiments as the majority of participants did not fall within this bracket of teaching experience. Nonetheless, there is opportunity for further research in this regard amongst NQTs in Ireland and their confidence in using PBs in the classroom.

The survey yielded the response that 50.93% of teachers use a framework for planning their picturebook lessons. Of this cohort, 35.11% of teachers say that the framework they currently use is the *Support Material for Teachers* from the *Primary Language Curriculum* whilst a further 38.17% declare that they use a self-made framework. 14.50% of those surveys report to use a framework provided by a publishing company. Such frameworks have, amongst the literature, proved useful to teachers in the application of picturebooks in the classroom. Several frameworks assist teachers in effectively planning the use of picture books in the classroom (Beck & McKeown 2001; Serafini 2004; Short *et al*. 1996; Fountas & Pinnell 1996; Cremin *et al.* 2014). By utilising such frameworks, teachers planning and preparation for the use of picturebooks may be enriched.

Results from the nationwide survey show variation in the views of teachers toward the importance of using picturebooks in teaching, with 33.54% reporting them to be very important, 26.09% moderately important, 20.50% extremely important, 15.84% slightly important and 4.04% not at all important. Ness (2023) declares that reading aloud with picturebooks should be a daily non-negotiable. Data from this study revealed that the vast majority of teachers, librarians and other key educational stakeholders have a positive outlook toward the use of picturebooks in the classroom and welcome their increased usage across subject areas. Despite the literature review acknowledging the central positioning of picturebooks within the *Support Material for Teachers* in the *Primary Language Curriculum*, results from the survey and PLC discussions point to a variation in the application of the use of picture books amongst teachers, with some noting that they would use them on occasion while others noted that they did not feel confident in using them effectively and were unsure where it sat in their planning documentation.

In the PLCs, when asked whether picture books could be used as a tool for the teaching of DL, there was a noted variation in responses. While some participants noted that picture books

could be a valuable asset to the teaching of DL, others were uncertain toward the linkage. See Figure 103 in Appendix 33 which shows which subjects teachers use picturebooks for, highlighting the subjects of Langugae, SESE and SPHE as the predominant subject areas. This suggests that further research is warranted in ascertaining the value of using picture books across subject areas, particularly in the areas of PE and Religion which were the least used in the results of the survey. Moreover, the data suggests that while many participants are using picturebooks, they are not using it as a component of a DL approach to their teaching and learning or indeed their planning and preparation for teaching and learning. The data reveals that the beginnings of using picture books for different subject areas as a stimulus to lessons or as a basis for project work are the only components of DL being utilised, but not in a metacognitive or explicit manner. No interview participant using picturebooks revealed the use of disciplinary literacy or mentioned giving pupils' opportunities to make links of a disciplinary literate nature independently.

5.7.1 Teachers given the opportunity to explore PBs alters their own self-image

Findings from this study suggest that when teachers are afforded the time, opportunity and resources to explore PBs, their own self-image alters. Prior to the PLC participants involvement in this study, participants noted that they lacked confidence in their perception of their abilities when it came to picturebooks.See Appendix 33 (r).

Such comments from Catherine, Grace and Harry indicate that teachers, when given the time to engage with materials, can enhance their self-perception of their own capabilities.

5.7.2 Using Randomised Control Tests to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and teaching approaches

In education, the lack of methodologically rigorous evaluation of policies and initiatives has been highlighted in Europe (European Commission Directorate-General for Education Youth Sport and Culture 2022). Comments by PLC participants in relation to how policies are evaluated, or lack thereof, further correlate such findings. Regarding the use of research or evaluation findings in Irish education specifically, one critique has contended that policy makers:

> want answers, solutions, and to know 'what works' or to be told that what is already in play is working, and researchers that do this, regardless of how devoid of context their research is, are more likely to be valued by the makers of policy.
>
> *(*Skerritt 2023,Q4] 10, cited in Gilleece and Clerkin 2024*)*

As evaluations of the implementation of the *Primary Language Curriculum* in Ireland are still in their infancy, partly due to the knock-on impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is worth considering that in these subject evaluations, rather than a checklist approach, the use of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) may reap clearer and more consistent data. In this way, the statistics revealed from the nationwide survey delineated from this study could be correlated and a more robust analysis of the impact, both pedagogically and experientially, toward the use of PBs and the teaching of DL in the classroom can be assessed.

By comparison, Pontoppidan *et al.* (2018), say that the historical and current state of education experiments in Scandinavian countries (i.e., Denmark, Norway and Sweden) is exemplary and these countries and their large epidemiological datasets are the envy of the world. Recently, their educational peers are beginning to develop a culture of experimentation in the field of education through the development of educational RCTs, which Styles and Torgerson (2018) outline, echo the more longstanding experience of American and UK education researchers. In Ireland, at a time when answers are sought to questions of efficacy and effectiveness of education

policies and practices, RCTs can obtain unbiased estimates of the average effects of these policies and practices on children and young people's education and wider outcomes. Furthermore, they serve as a useful introduction to contemporary issues, such as the teaching of disciplinary literacy in the primary school classroom as delineated through this study.

5.7.3 Librarians in Ireland and the UK attitudes and understanding of picturebooks

(P1, P2, P3= Irish librarian responses, D1, D2, D3= UK librarian responses)

There was similarities in the responses given to librarians understanding of what a picturebook is and attitudes toward same. All were in agreement that the imagery was an important feature of the text. See Appendix 33 (s) for comments.

This concurs with the views of Lambert (2015), Lewis (2001), Kiefer (1995) and Roche (2014) in the importance of the picture in a picturebook and indeed in answering the central research question presented in this research: Is a picture worth a thousand words?

5.7.4 What makes a good picture book?

Jane, NCCA, says that a picturebook should be "*visually appealing or thought provoking and something that makes you want to open the cover and turn the page*" (Jane, NCCA). She goes further to say that when choosing a picturebook, as a teacher, the type of thing she would be considering is "*what's the type of things that we can crack open here, what's the type of things we can explore here, what's the type of questions and answers and conversations we can have in this space*." (Jane, NCCA). Similarly, librarians from Ireland and the UK provided articulate answers

to what they considered to be a good picture book. Excerpts in Appendix 33 (t) convey the interpretation of what constitutes a good picture book.

Bishop (1990) famously suggests, a good picture book should function as a window, mirror, and sliding glass door (Bishop 1990), offering readers both reflection and access to diverse experiences. Nikolajeva (2002) emphasises the significance of narrative depth and emotional resonance, advocating for stories that resonate beyond the surface. Additionally, Nodelman (1998) highlights the importance of illustrations that engage young readers, sparking their imagination and inviting them into the world of the story. Ultimately, as findings from this study suggest, successful picture books seamlessly intertwine text and imagery, fostering a captivating and enriching experience for its audience.

5.7.5 Associating PBs with particular age groups

Consistent with the research which indicates that picture books help enhance vocabulary, comprehension, and narrative skills in young children (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006), comments from librarians outlined in Appendix 33 (u), suggest similar. For children in preschool picture books serve as an essential tool for fostering a love of reading and supporting cognitive and emotional development (Pantaleo 2008). This is further echoed by librarians comments, explored in greater detail in Section 4. So too, and consistent with the research (Beckett 2013), librarians identified the need for picture books to be used with older pupils. Studies have shown that picture books can effectively support the development of critical thinking and visual literacy in these age groups (Serafini, 2014). They provide opportunities for older students to engage with complex themes and diverse perspectives in an accessible format (Sims 1982).

Associating picture books with specific age groups requires consideration. Teachers from the PLC groups said that they would like recommended picture book lists associated with the various class levels. However, PDST interviewees were reluctant to provide such lists as they feared these would become the only lists that teachers worked from.

5.7.6 Subject areas for picturebooks

In the nationwide questionnaire, when asked which subjects practitioners use picturebooks for, it was Language, S.E.S.E, S.P.H.E and Wellbeing that were the dominant subjects reported to use picturebooks for teaching and learning. The effectiveness of using picturebooks to support the teaching and learning of EAL pupils is predominantly reported as being very effective (52.37%). This finding supports the work of key researchers in this particular field such as Susan Halliday, Susan D. Jung, Lynn Columba, Lawrence Baines, Carole Cox). See Figure 104 Appendix 33 for a breakdown of statistics in relation to teacher's considerations for using picturebooks across the curriculum.

Over half of participants (52.19%) reported that picturebooks are a very effective teaching tool to support the teaching and learning of pupils with additional needs. This supports the work of authors such as Joanne Deppeler, Dawn Adams, Janice V. Kristo, Susan M. Bruce and Molly Ness, which draws on picturebooks to support pupils with various learning needs.

Almost half of participants (46.73%) reported that picturebooks are a very effective teaching tool to support the teaching and learning of pupils with higher abilities. A predominant 77.40% of teachers said that there is opportunity to use picturebooks right across the curriculum with 17.34% considered that there may be scope for this. A proportion of the cohort of participants

(62.23%) said that they would use or may consider using (23.84%) picturebooks as a core text across the curriculum. The results of where teachers source the picturebooks that they use for teaching and learning is almost quartered evenly between library (23.22%), bookshop (20.30%), online (27.41%) and school (25.89%).

While the perspective of policy-makers in the New South Wales, Department of Communities and Justice (2020) indicate that evidence derived from a source near the bottom of an evidence hierarchy, such as a case study or expert opinion, can support conclusions in the vein of 'there are signs that …' or 'experts believe …', in this case, there are signs of picturebooks being used as a central teaching tool in Irish primary classrooms, and if teachers are to be seen as experts or curriculum makers as set out by curricula visionaries, then the survey results presented as part of this study are significant. And 'while evidence in this category cannot establish the effectiveness of programs, it can provide an indication of what might work when there is a lack of more robust research evidence' (New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice 2020 p.3). As this unique study merges two contemporary educational concepts, it serves to conjure up the real possibilities of DL and PBs in the Irish primary classroom. There was a vast response to the naming of a picturebook that teachers like to use in the classroom. The results of which can be seen in the padlet shown in Appendix 28 that I have compiled to illustrate the picturebooks that are being used in Irish classrooms currently.

Teachers reported that they did not (45.82%) or somewhat (35.51%) find that the *Primary Language Curriculum* enhanced their teaching of picturebooks. A fifth (21.67%) of those surveyed say that it did, however. Of those who felt that the *Primary Language Curriculum* had enhanced their teaching of picturebooks, 26.86% said that it was their frame of thinking which was enhanced by it whilst 20.39% acknowledged that it was resourcing which had been impacted by the PLC

with a further 17.15% say their planning and 12.94% their preparation was enhanced. Of note, there were 36 respondents (11.65%) who felt that their professional development and 21 (6.80%) who felt that their collaboration had been enhanced with regard to picturebooks through the *Primary Language Curriculum*.

The NCCA, INTO and PDST posits that active learning should be a significant feature in supporting teachers to learn and develop. This involves use of high quality teaching resources and varied teaching approaches and methodologies which can lead to profound, highly contextualised professional development (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2017). This study posits that picturebooks are one such high quality teaching resource with responses from participants aligning this position.

5.7.7 Picturebooks and assessment, picture books and EAL, picturebooks and the picture

Jane from NCCA highlights the significance of picturebooks as a way to "crack open conversations" with EAL pupils. She speaks of how the texts can give pupils the opportunity to express themselves and connect with their heritage. In this way teachers can feel confident in their effort to enrich linguistic diversity in the classroom setting. See Appendix 33 (v). The publication of evaluation frameworks such as those proposed by Gilleece, Surdey, and Rawdon (2023), would be a useful step towards more robust and informative methods of evaluating policies and educational innovations, such as the use of picture books in Irish classrooms. Of course these would need to be supported by the DES to plan and resource these evaluative efforts at an early stage in the lifecycle of initiatives as they are introduced, such as is the case with disciplinary literacy in the primary school setting and the use of picturebooks to support the teaching of this. While this study lays the groundwork for such a framework, it would be important to add more layers to this endeavour, from a range of perspectives, including

effectiveness, efficiency, and improvement. For, as Gilleece and Clerkin (2023) denote, it is imperative that policy makers and school leaders can have access to the most reliable evidence that can be provided in order to suitably meet the needs of pupils, their teachers, and their families.

5.7.8 A repetitive trend

Resources (34.90%) and time (31.14%) were noted as the biggest challenges in using picturebooks in the classroom with planning (14.07%) and knowledge (13.88%) identified as further challenges. Golden (2020) refers to the need for resources and guidance as key considerations for evaluation efforts. It is clear that further resourcing as well as professional development is imperative to the success of picturebooks in Irish classrooms. 187 (58.26%) respondents said that picturebooks features in their preparation for teaching and learning while 94 (29.28%) said they feature somewhat and 40 (12.46%) teachers said they do not feature. 141 (43.65%) of teachers reported to have engaged in professional development around the area of picture books while 173 (53.56%) of practitioners had not. 288 (89.16%) of survey goers detailed their desire to engage in professional development in the area of picturebooks.

Alongside the writing of this thesis, the DES has written and published the *Towards a New Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy A Review of the Literature* (DES 2023). In it a series of 28 systematic reviews are present. These reviews explored pedagogical strategies, approaches and methodologies to support literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in primary and secondary schools. One of the systematic reviews focussed on disciplinary literacy. The very fact that the title of this review section contains the word ‘disciplinary literacy’ is evidence of the

transition toward this concept taking a central stage in the Irish education system. [19]To this end, while further recommendations are made around the concept of DL at secondary level, pertaining to the primary sector, it is recommended that:

> Professional development should recognise that supporting the integration of literacy with various disciplines is challenging both at primary and post-primary level; it is best achieved with supportive school structures, collaborative approaches among teachers that include observation of practice, the provision of appropriate supporting materials and resources for teachers, and time to plan amongst other factors.
>
> (Hasni *et al.* 2016; Kallinowski *et al.* 2019; Scott *et al.* 2018). [Report B1.5]

The New Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy (DES 2024) will provide the overarching framework connecting many Department of Education policies, strategies and developments at curriculum level. This is a welcome step in the endeavour to place disciplinary literacy in the primary setting. However, the transfer of this information and ideology to practitioners, as evidenced by this study, is still very much in its infancy and requires substantial investment in professional development, awareness amongst practitioners and school leaders and time for collaborative planning.

5.7.9 My Understanding: Using picture books for teaching and learning

Roche (2014) in her staple publication, *Developing Children's Critical Thinking Through Picturebooks*, emphasises the significance of introducing children to collaborative meaning-making through thoughtful discussion. She advocates for the use of carefully selected picturebooks to stimulate dialogue, demonstrating their potential as accessible, multimodal tools for enhancing literacy skills and fostering a deeper literary comprehension among students. By encouraging

[19] The full title of systematic reviews pertaining to literacy is: Pedagogical Strategies to Support Oral Language, Emergent Literacy, Literacy, Digital Literacy and Disciplinary Literacy Development) and contains a review by Dwyer, Burke, and Kennedy (2022) entitled, Pedagogical strategies, approaches and methodologies to support disciplinary literacy at primary and post-primary levels. A review of the literature.

reflection on both images and text, followed by classroom discourse, Roche's approach facilitates the development of children's oral language proficiency, critical thinking, and visual literacy. Additionally, it serves as a valuable resource for nurturing children's overall literary appreciation. Awareness of Roche's works and indeed her segment in the *Support Material for Teachers* in the *Primary Language Curriculum* was known by the vast majority of participants in this study. This is a promising finding.

Mary Roche's *Critical Thinking and Book Talk* is a staple feature of the *Teacher's Toolkit* in the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019). So too, PDST, through their abundance of resources and presentations, Education Centres through their webinars and face to face courses and teaching programmes such as *Over the Moon*, have enriched teacher's knowledge of using picturebooks in the classroom. While it is commendable that evidence used to inform Irish educational policy, using systematic reviews to inform recent curricular and policy developments (French and McKenna 2022; Kennedy *et al.* 2023; Hourigan & Leavy 2024), this study highlights the necessity for a rapid extension and expansion of such systems. Such systematic reviews rely on bringing together an existing body of evidence. While the focus of this study is primarily on generating new knowledge on the effectiveness or otherwise of educational policies or teaching methods in Ireland, where primary research is typically required, it recognises the need for a systematic review of exactly how picturebooks are being used on a much larger scale and how disciplinary literacy can be taught using such a support tool.

5.7.10 Attitudes toward using picturebooks for disciplinary literacy

The *Primary Language Curriculum Support Material for Teachers* (NCCA 2019), says that picturebooks can also be used in conjunction with many other areas of the curriculum. They are

ideal for acting as springboards for discussion in SPHE, SESE, drama and so on. It goes further to outline three examples of picture books that can be used to support particular components of Mathematics (as shown in the Literature Review). Picturebooks are lexical reservoirs (Ness 2023) and by reading one picture book per day to children, they are exposed to 78,000 words per year (Logan *et al*.2019). If a portion of that vocabulary was targeted toward disciplinary literacy in a structured manner, then the tiers of vocabulary (Beck, McKeown, Kucan 2002) would be enriched. Reading aloud to children, as alluded to by Biemiller & Boote 2006; Bravo, Hiebert & Pearson 2007, provides a powerful context for word learning and it brings children closer to developing sophisticated lexicons. Despite this research, results of the nationwide survey which saw 35.91% of participants unsure how picture books could facilitate disciplinary literacy in the classroom while 35.91% felt that picture books could facilitate DL a lot. Just 23.94% said that picturebooks could facilitate DL somewhat while 3.47% said a little and 0.77% stated not at all. Notwithstanding this, 57.75% of participants could envisage picture books being used as key texts in the teaching of disciplinary literacy while 37.21% were not sure and 5.04% said they could not.

These results are both consistent and inconsistent with the vision of the ILA, in the discipline-specific focus captured in the definition presented by the *International Literacy Association*, refers to literacy as: 'The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using **visual**, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context' [emphasis added] (ILA website).

5.7.11 Linking DL and PBs with the language of the aims of the Primary Language Curriculum

The *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) sets forth a vision of children as communicators, readers, writers and thinkers. The aims of the curriculum are presented in three groups: children and their lives, children's communications and connections with others, and children's language learning and development. DL and the use of PBs have an important role in the fulfilment of each of these sets of aims. Particular to the findings of this study, the third series of aims, children's language learning and development will be highlighted. Taking the action verb at the beginning of each of the aims (promote, broaden, enable, encourage, support, nurture), the professional learning community groups explored a series of picture books to tease out the language and the possible links with DL and the aims of the curriculum. Responses to *Vincent Can't Sleep* can be viewed in Appendix 33 (w).

Raiyn (2016) speaks of the role of visual learning in improving students higher order thinking skills. I would argue that such visual learning can also strengthen practitioners higher order thinking skills as evident in the application of the language of the curriculum above through the use of PBs.

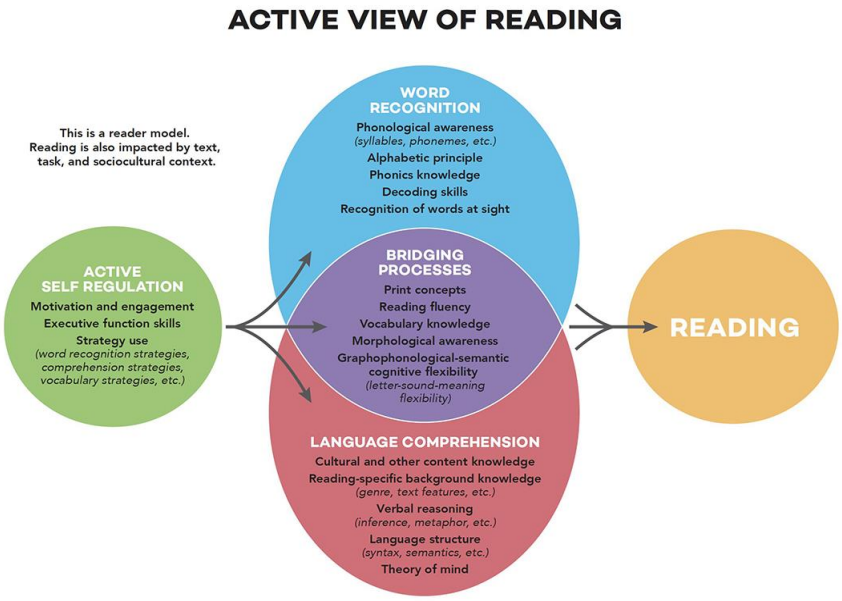


Figure 105: Active View of Reading: Duke & Cartright, 2021

In the professional learning community, we explored Duke and Cartright's active view of reading (See Figure 105 above). There was much discourse around how this model could be and is being achieved in the various school settings. Honing in on the use of picture books specifically to achieve this view, the teaching of comprehension strategies was identified as a key teaching tool, however, discrepancies arose in the way in which this was being taught with some practitioners reporting to use particular picture books for particular comprehension strategies and teaching those in isolation, while others were not using picturebooks as a whole school at all. By comparison, the nationwide survey revealed that 92% of teachers report to use picturebooks in their teaching, with 30% saying that they use them a few times a week. Motivation and engagement were seen as positive factors in utilising picturebooks for teaching and learning. However, consistent with the discourse from the professional learning communities, confidence levels amongst teachers

indicated that they feel somewhat confident in their knowledge and comfort with picturebooks which is perhaps an impinging factor in their effective development in the classroom. See Appendix 33 Figure 106.

Other text types which could be utilised to teach disciplinary literacy included the following breakdown: Information: 15.55%, Graphic novels 13.13%, Narrative: 12.92%, Recount: 12.92%, Descriptive: 13.13%, Argumentative: 9.35%, Procedure: 12.08%, Anecdote: 8.30%, Other 2.63%. The challenges associated with sourcing key text pieces again included Time: 37.66%, Knowledge: 25.75%, Resources: 33.93%, Other: 2.66%.

5.7.12 Concluding comments on Section 2: My Understanding

Part II of 'My Understanding' has presented participants understanding, attitudes, opinions and awareness of PBs in the primary school setting. It has illuminated teachers desire to use picture books in their PPTL across subject areas. It has highlighted the need for further investment in resources and professional development in this area. It further shows that PBs and DL are topics that can be intertwined and taught concurrently.

The recently published *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy* (Government of Ireland 2022) highlights the importance of research and innovation to addressing Ireland's societal, economic and environmental challenges. The innovation evident through the results of the Qualtrics survey in this study serves to complement this through its illumination of the fact that a large cohort of teachers are using picturebooks across the curriculum and are keen to engage in professional development to examine how disciplinary literacy can become a reality in Irish classrooms. The fact that disciplinary literacy features in the PLC and within the *Primary*

Curriculum Framework, promoting the integration of subject content, the language of disciplinary literacy in the classroom has never been more timely or necessary. While the Department of Education, further emphasise the need for evidence-informed policies, it is highlighted in the results of this study that more informative dissemination of knowledge needs to occur to ensure that disciplinary literacy becomes a reality in Irish classrooms. For example, in the *Action Plan for Education 2018*, a commitment was made to developing a research-based framework for the evaluation of the impact of teachers' professional learning in Ireland (Government of Ireland 2018). While the consultation process by the NCCA on the recent curriculum developments has been thorough and robust, there is a growing gap in the evaluation of policy to practice, as highlighted by this study. As such, this requires a more substantial commitment to the evaluation of teacher's professional learning in Ireland and the needs of teachers to ensure that the work done by policy makers in ensuring research based best practices is transferred effectively on the ground. Building on the works of Burke, Dwyer and Kennedy 2022, this study serves to highlight the need for not only more systematic reviewing to take place but also to engage many more teacher researchers in this process so that the gap between the dissemination of this knowledge to practice is curtailed. Finally, and to conclude this section, from the NCCA perspective on DL and picturebooks, it was reported that:

'I definitely see them working very well together and in terms of curriculum approach, we (NCCA) would support that stance. Picturebooks would fit really well in terms of the type of curricular development being undertaken currently. I would say you're right in your exploration of these concepts and probably as you get further into the research we will all see the value'

(Jane, NCCA)

Here Jane, NCCA is noting the importance of my work as a researcher in this field amidst curricular reform in Ireland where these topics are an important aspect. Further to this, Jane, NCCA, outlines:

"I think sometimes there's not so much of a conversation about mathematics and picture books. I suppose what we're trying to do with the new Math curriculum, is open up Maths talk in classrooms. So speaking about Maths, speaking about your thought processes and I think picture books can do some of that. When you look at, I'll just go back to Oliver Jeffers in space and time and the way in which he bends both in his illustrations in particular and the way in which you might be able to invite conversations with children around some of that. And so I'd see that as being in picture books is opening up conversations that are linked to disciplines or curriculum areas or subjects. And arrange it so it's actually a central part of the lesson."

(Jane, NCCA)

The above quote outlines the centralisation of picturebooks and the opportunity for such rich dialogic classroom talk to occur, not only in literacy lessons but in Mathematics, and with the rollout of the new Maths curriculum occurring at the time of writing this thesis, the significance is apparent.

5.8 SMALL FRAMEWORK "A" AGENCY

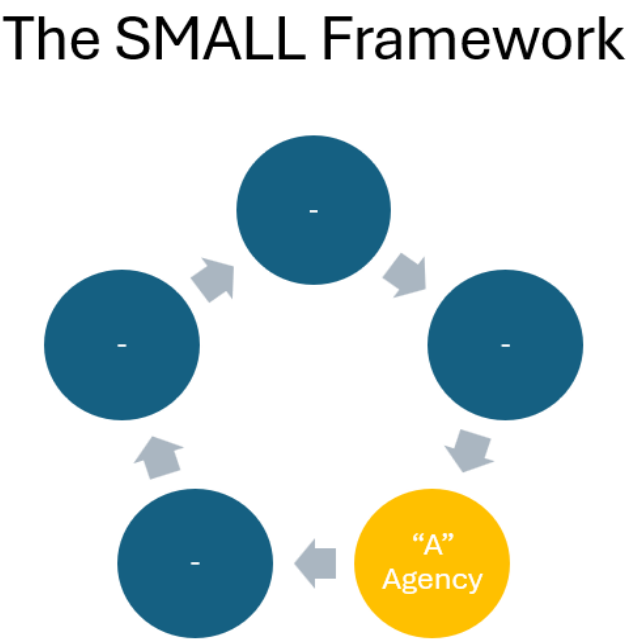


Figure 107: The SMALL Framework Component 3 "Agency"

The third theme in this chapter explores the concepts of agency and accountability within the Irish primary sphere. Arising from the data, set amidst a period of drastic reform in Irish primary curricula, conversations around teacher agency and teacher accountability rose to the surface. Biesta and Priestley *et al.* (2015b) illustrate how a detailed understanding of teacher agency and the conditions under which it is achieved offer considerable potential in enabling teachers to

engage with curricular policy in more meaningful ways. Teacher agency, considered by participants of the professional learning community as the new '*buzz word'* in the Irish education domain, is embedded in curricular reform. It's premise flows from other parts of the globe where similar ideologies have been centralised within curricula. For example, Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* can be seen as an example of modern curricular reform in which teachers are explicitly positioned as agents of change (Biesta *et al*. 2015). Jane, NCCA notes, however that such agency is a difficult concept to enact.

> *"It is wonderful to have the experience of those bodies. But for teachers it is when do I get the next bit? And what comes after that bit? So there has to be a sustained support for teachers and school leaders during this curriculum change. Now all of these conversations I know because I have them with the department that these things are moving forward in a direction, whether how, how far we move in that direction Lorraine is sort of a big question. But I would say one of the pieces I know the support for the primary language curriculum has been challenging and particularly with the interruption of COVID but the sustained school support that was provided for schools who opted into it again. I think that's a model that can make a real difference. So for many schools who opted in, I think it's between four and six visits a year from an advisor in their school context with the staff discussing local issues, but also looking at the curriculum and trying to move things forward. And it very much comes from the school and looking at their priorities and needs, which I think is a more empowering model than other ways and there is a place for seminars and there is a place for all of the suite of supports, but I think that's definitely a whole lot more of an empowering model than some others that have been used in the past, you know."*
>
> *(Jane, NCCA)*

Bruner, emphasised the crucial role of teacher agency in the educational process. He believed that teachers are not merely conveyors of information but active participants in shaping the learning environment and facilitating student understanding. Bruner contended that educators should act as guides who scaffold learning, providing the necessary support and gradually transferring responsibility to the students as they become more competent (Bruner 1996, cited in

Porath 2000). This approach requires teachers to exercise professional judgment, creativity, and adaptability, thereby playing an active role in designing and implementing educational experiences that are responsive to students' needs and interests. As noted by Sugrue (2004) in their evaluation of curriculum experiences and perspectives in Ireland, the level of ownership afforded to our teachers resulted in professional buy-in. In the face of a new curricula and with the centralisation of teacher agency within the PCF, in the nationwide survey conducted as part of this study, 48.11% of participants felt neutral toward the new curricula coming on stream while 33.65% felt positive toward it and 18.24% felt negative toward the new curricula. Such findings suggest that if teachers are, as Bruner suggests to be active participants in sharing student learning, more ownership of the new curricula needs to occur.

5.8.1 The role of text books and teacher agency

Stará *et al.* (2017) in their study on the role of textbooks in primary education noted that even though the teachers believe that textbooks have a major influence on their teaching, they disagree with the idea that textbooks should determine the content and methods of teaching. Mary, however raises the point that "*without text books I would have more work to do with very little resources to do it."* Adding to this, Mary denotes:

> *"I know in our school, if all the textbooks were taken away, I would have so much work to do because our school isn't resourced enough with other things for me to have to hand."*
>
> *(Mary, Class Teacher)*

Grossman and Thompson (2008) highlight that pedagogical advisors often recommend reducing textbook use due to their lack of quality, suggesting instead that practitioners develop their own

teaching materials. However, Ball and Feiman-Nemser (1988) point out that this approach may not be feasible, indicating a need for the creation of high-quality textbooks tailored to teachers' specific needs and values. Applying this to the Irish context, it is important to guide practitioners to identify suitable textbooks and use them effectively. Kieran, Catherine and Sam, like Mary above are dubious about the removal of textbooks as core texts. Nonetheless, Catherine points out that:

> *"I would find that completely draining [*removing textbooks*] and I don't know if the quality of my teaching would improve or not. If the textbook is the textbook that I have chosen for my class and that I like to use it, I often find the teaching of it is quite good, you know, and like you say with the maths textbook, there is no way I could imagine teaching maths without a math book."*
>
> *(Kieran, Class Teacher)*
>
> *"You don't have to be a slave to the textbook."*
>
> *(Catherine, Class Teacher)*
>
> *"I think it's unfair on textbooks, but they get this, you know, this idea that it's lazy teaching like you're still teaching, you know, it's just that you have the textbook. I think it's one of your support and like I said, you don't have to do every single bit of the textbook from start to finish."*
>
> *(Sam, Special Class Teacher)*

t

teachers do not have to adhere to the text book page for page. Textbooks need to be linked and

integrated with other resources (Horsley 2010). Harry posits that teachers can feel under pressure to complete all of the pages of the text book. He also tells of his teaching time in Scotland where there were no textbooks and how difficult he found this approach. See Appendix 33 (x).

From analysing the above comments from Mary, Kieran, Catherine and Sam, it is clear that practitioners are not in favour of removing text books. This links back to the conceptual framework of this study with Hirsch's *Core Knowledge Sequence* and the concept of giving teachers time to think about *how* they teach not *what* they teach.

The analysis of comments from Evelyn, Eabha and Liam outlined in Appendix 33 (y), further show how factors such as class size, multi-grades, teacher confidence and subject knowledge all impact on why teachers perceive text books as a good and viable option for teaching in Irish classrooms.

Such findings arising from this study, as of many other former studies (Stara *et al.* 2017; Peacock and Gates 2000; Grossman and Thompson 2008), serve to validate that textbooks are still deemed essential in the Irish primary classroom. Nonetheless, INTO in their *Primary Review and Redevelopment* publication (INTO 2022, p.19) say that 'the influence of textbooks was highlighted by some teachers who feel that there should be greater emphasis on project work rather than the pressure of completing workbooks which can sometimes dictate the pace of teaching and learning.'

5.8.2 The role of standardised testing and the new curriculum in teacher agency

When speaking of teacher agency, standardised testing and its role was discoursed. Mary, Class teacher ponders as to how the role of standardised testing may change with the new curriculum

framework, with suggestions from Mary, Sam and Grace that the reality on the ground, in classrooms is often quite different from policy recommendations. See Appendix 33 (z).

If standardised test score are to continue to be key leading points in Irish schools, it begs to question how, as Mary queries, collaborative and active learning, such as that employed by the pedagogy of using PBs for DL will materialise. Biesta *et al.* (2015) highlights the role of beliefs in teacher agency. It is imperative that teachers beliefs in the role of standardised testing lead to reform and not a continuation of what has gone before, simply because it is what has gone before.

5.8.3 The role of the teacher as an active agent: An observation from a European teacher on Erasmus in Ireland

A unique finding from this study came through the PLC when one of the participants, Michael, spoke of the observation that an Erasmus teachers visiting Ireland from a European school had in relation to the way Irish teachers teach. Such comments posit that teachers are giving too much at the top of the classroom with less expectation for children to complete 'work'. The Erasmus teacher stated that this is the opposite case in Germany where pupils are expected to write more. Tom makes the point that there needs to be a balance struck. See Appendix 33 (A).

Such comments from Michael, Eddie and Tom depict that there is a disconnect in the balance of teacher V pupil teaching, learning and engagement. Spoken about in Section 5, the topic of teacher burnout is highlighted, perhaps with this finding that teachers are using a lot of energy through their teaching styles and with such active learning being promoted in the PFC, one must question the means as to which this is being delivered and the knock on effect it is having as a result.

Echoing Swick (2003), findings obtained in this research would suggest that effective communication is not only about the passing of information from one stakeholder to the next, it also occurs when individuals work together in shared decision making to enhance the process of achieving goals (Bush and Grotjohann 2020). The discourse in the professional learning communities shed the spotlight on the lack of time given to teachers for such interactions. Grace highlighted that there is simply too much to do and collaborative planning gets pushed to the bottom of the agenda despite the acknowledgement that collaborative planning has been very effective in the past. Mary, on the other hand, said that she does her best to check in with her colleagues and this can be enough although she also recognises the need for more formal approaches. Though Grace and Mary's collaboration was informal, they both emphasised the importance of regular communication and collaboration to reflect on and analyse their existing practices. They both agreed that such collaboration was essential to the effectiveness of the PLC and indeed the PCF to come. Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) concurs, suggesting that such informal conversations can evolve into authentic learning experiences for educators. Kieran and Michael, both Special Education Teachers (SETs), echoed similar sentiments when discussing their collaborative practices, further highlighting how concepts like disciplinary literacy and teaching approaches like that of using picture books to evoke critical thinking, require collaborative planning and in depth discussion in order to be successful across the board. While some participants, including Sam, Harry, Catherine, and Evelyn, perceive such informal collaboration as adequate, the transcribed data highlights the frequency and speed of interactions. Participants collaborate quickly, often taking just a couple of minutes whenever possible. However Bush and Grotjohann (2020) argues that such brief consultations do not constitute effective collaboration. While participants believe their consistent efforts will yield positive outcomes, Bush

and Grotjohann (2020) caution that this approach may reduce collaboration to a mere checkbox exercise.

> *"I think the fact that change is coming that I think concurrently running support, whether it be workshops or maybe summer courses around disciplinary literacy. To kind of, I suppose it's almost kind of forearming teachers, you know and kind of like we were talking about the potential for a picture book to kind of introduce a concept. You know, those courses could help them when the curricular areas become more integrated as opposed to kind of specific subjects that they could see that potentiality, you know from day one really rather than kind of feeling. OK, here's another new thing that we need to add on to these changes that we're doing already. And the sustained support is a great mode of support and you really get time, I think to explore things in depth, but different schools will have different priorities. So for some schools, yes, disciplinary literacy would be top of the list or high up there. And then other schools, it won't be, you know. "*
>
> (Jane, NCCA)

5.8.4 Teacher agency and self-efficacy

Change in teachers' beliefs depends significantly on the extent to which they have reflected on those beliefs. When existing beliefs are deeply entrenched and not examined, they become challenging to alter (Girardet, 2018; Martell 2014). Research indicates that teachers' reluctance to change is also linked to their self-efficacy beliefs, specifically, their perception of their ability to

effect necessary improvements (Aelterman *et al.* 2016; Gregoire 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy 2001). Findings from this study suggest that teachers perception of their own self-efficacy was inferior to others, for example school leaders, PDST/Oide, NCCA, and so there was an expectation that those "*more knowledgeable others*" would tell them what to do and how to do it. Such belief inhibits the growth of teacher agency which is a core vision of the new curricula. This sense of dependence on external authorities, as outlined by participants of the PLC's, reinforced by low self-efficacy, not only undermines teacher autonomy but also stifles professional growth. Teachers in the professional learning community expressed frustration at feeling confined to externally dictated practices, which, in turn, limited their creative and innovative contributions to their teaching. Building self-efficacy is therefore crucial for enhancing teacher agency, and this can be achieved through collaborative reflection, peer learning, and creating a culture of trust where teachers feel confident to take risks and experiment with new approaches, such as that provided by this formulation of the PLC's for the purpose of this study. By addressing both self-efficacy and agency, teachers can shift from passive recipients of policy to active agents of change, capable of shaping and refining educational practices to benefit student learning outcomes.

5.8.5 Conditions of the system and its impact on teacher agency and the transfer of policy to practice

The transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills between teachers and key educational stakeholders is a central component of this study and was deemed to be one of the major benefits of effective collaboration by all participants in this study. Considering the participants' responses, as well as current literature, it became clear that teachers and stakeholders have different but complementary skills in developing students' linguistic capabilities. Coinciding with Nousala

(2005) and Mulholland and O' Connor (2016), participants, in this study, emphasised the value of sharing knowledge between professionals and thus, voiced their desire for more practical advice along with *"tips and tricks"* to support teaching and learning. Most of the professional learning community participants and questionnaire recipients, reported wanting increased knowledge in how to support pupils in disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in the classroom. Such findings were clearly depicted in both Jane's interview, NCCA and Clare, a PDST advisor, responses which can be seen in Appendix 33 (B)..

From analysing the responses of Jane and Clare, it is clear that PDST advisors have a clear understanding of *The Guidelines for Planning and Preparation for Teaching and Learning* (NCCA 2021), and they are endeavouring to facilitate schools in their transfer from policy to practice of this document. So too, advisors are aiming to assist schools to discover what DL will look like for schools in each subject area. This is a very positive finding. Jane draws further attention to the need for conversations and communications with colleagues as well as experimentation and risk taking. Such comments highlight the need for such messages to be transferred to all schools and practitioners, not just those in receipt of sustained school support.

5.8.6 Factors affecting teacher agency and the use of picturebooks

The Director of Education research and learning in Ireland in her *Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment publication* (2022) acknowledges the role of teacher agency as a central component to the revised curriculum. She warns however that careful conversations need to be had in schools around this somewhat new ideology. Findings from conversations with teachers in the professional learning communities in this study suggest that this term has not reached ground level and requires a much more streamlined approach to disseminate such a philosophy which is

considered central to the success of the curricula by policymakers. The NCCA declare that fundamental to the new curriculum is the image of teachers as agentic professionals. They say that this is a relatively new concept to some teachers. They further depict that it is crucial that the very important conversation around agency takes place to prepare teachers for the implementation of a new primary school curriculum which relies on them being agentic. The INTO further acknowledge and endorse this which is reinforced in the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023). Arising from the conversations around teacher agency in the professional learning communities, teachers raised the point that, in order to be agents of change, they needed to be upskilled systematically. Such findings indicate that collaborative practice allows for different perspectives to contribute to the development of strategies, such as the metacognitive awareness of DL, to support student learning (Whitmire 2002; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Wilson *et al.* 2015). The challenges, however to achieving effective collaboration were strongly voiced by all participants in this study. It was evident from the PLC groups in particular that, 'what appears in theory to be a simple knowledge swap, within inter-professional practice, leading to a plethora of benefits, in practice can be difficult to achieve' (Quigley 2018 p.71). It is evident from the PLC participants comments, that teachers value the knowledge and skills that PDST/Oide and NCCA have and therefore, long to develop effective collaborative practice with these stakeholders to enhance teaching and learning. Aidan, a principal, asserts that developing inter-professional collaboration is vital and that schools need to be provided with more sustained support, such as current Oide models advocates. While Aidan fully supports the implementation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, he attests that further work on teacher agency in achieving the aims of the PCF are vital.

"And agency for me as a leader to be able to sit down with my staff and for us to decide, this is how we as a school are planning and yes, we're covering off everything we need to cover, this works for me and also the agency to be able to say right, this is the suggestion, but Mary, you might plan in a different way and off with you, because that's what works for you. And I think we have a long way to go within our system before that can become reality."

(Aidan, Principal)

5.8.7 Teacher agency and CPD

Continued Professional Development (CPD) holds the potential to enhance instructional practices, pedagogy, and student outcomes (Day and Leitch 2007) and has emerged as a key policy priority nationally and internationally (Banks and Smyth 2011). In Ireland, current education policies underline the importance of teachers engaging in CPD to enhance teaching practices, boost teacher confidence, and optimise resource utilisation. With the introduction and implementation of the *Primary Language Curriculum (*NCCA 2019), CPD has been facilitated by Oide. This CPD initiative aimed to assist principals and teachers in effectively implementing the PLC within a three-year framework (Circular 61/2015). Drawing from the research of McGarry (2017 p.198), detailing the support and training provided to schools by the PDST concerning the rollout of the PLC, data from this study support that the majority of teachers observed the delivery of CPD, provided by the PDST, to be inadequate however (Smith 2015; Welch *et al.* 2016; McGarry 2017). The following quotes will outline the participants' experiences and observations of CPD regarding the *Primary Language Curriculum*.

"Was that actually it, is that all we are getting? Those webinars were good but are we expected to implement it all now. My head is in a spin".

(Catherine, Class Teacher)

"I quite enjoyed the webinars and would have liked to have been given time to make some changes to my planning in terms of the progression continua and inclusion and that, but sure now I am straight into Maths and the new Maths curriculum and Literacy is something I will just have to park for a while.".

(Sam, Special Class Teacher)

It is clear from the comments above that teachers feel that they need more time to digest the content of the webinars and to implement changes to that effect without diving straight into another subject area. In this respect, as Butler *et al.* (2014) advise, more collaborative inquiry and distributed agency would be welcome in this time of educational change.

5.8.8 Teacher agency and the Inspectorate: fostering compliance over innovation

Inspections can create a high-stress environment where teachers feel constantly under surveillance. This pressure can lead to anxiety, reducing their ability to teach creatively and responsively. According to Perryman (2009), the high stakes associated with inspections can result in performative behaviours where teachers focus on what will be inspected rather than on genuine student learning. PLCs provide a supportive environment where teachers can collaborate, share experiences, and reflect on their practices. This collaboration fosters a sense of shared responsibility and professional growth, which can buffer the stress of inspections (Stoll *et al.* 2006). Mary, from the PLC says that teachers are afraid of the inspectorate and posits how this

has impacted the curriculum and the use of schemes and indeed the focus on the teaching of things like DL. See Appendix 33 (C).

Evelyn from the PLC outlines how the inspectorate jump ahead and expect teachers to have embedded practices that are in their infancy and this puts pressure on teachers.See Appendix 33 (D).

The constant threat of inspection was reported to undermine teachers' professional identity, making them feel more like technicians who deliver pre-packaged lessons than as autonomous professionals (See Liam's comment in Appendix 33 (E). Sachs (2001) highlights that such pressures can erode teachers' sense of professional agency, making them feel less competent and valued. Liam strikingly outlines how teachers plan for the inspector, a comment which was agreed with by fellow participants. He further posits how the roll out of the PLC coming before the PCF has been confusing and frustrating for practitioners.

However, Jane, NCCA, more positively outlines how teachers can make sense of the new cuticulum and draw on the supports of the PDST and NCSE to assist them in this process. See Appendix 33 (E).

This study illuminates the factors beyond teachers' control which can impact their ability to implement changes in their practices. Similarly, Buczynski and Hansen (2010) and Girardet (2018) argue that even when teachers are eager to apply new knowledge and skills, they can encounter obstacles such as insufficient time for daily reflection, the system's focus on mandated curricula and programmes, lack of resources, and the diverse range of pupil needs that demand specialised skills in specific school environments.

5.8.9 Concluding comments on Section 3: Agency

To conclude this section on teacher agency, the PLC and PCF embrace teacher agency and centralise the concept in the reformed curriculum. Teacher agency refers to the capacity of teachers to make choices and enact those choices in the classroom (Priestley *et al.* 2012). It encompasses the ability of teachers to exercise autonomy, make decisions, and take actions that influence their professional practice and the learning experiences of their students. As described by Hargreaves & Rolls (2020), teacher agency involves the professional capacity to make a difference in the lives of students, emphasising the active role teachers play in shaping educational outcomes. Teacher agency is not only about individual empowerment but also about collective action, as teachers collaborate and advocate for change within educational systems (Sachs, 2016). The findings from this research suggest that the concept of teacher agency is far removed from the reality currently experienced by practitioners working in classrooms in Ireland. Teachers expressed frustrations at the broad sense of agency and the confusion in relation to their role and duties to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum through an agentic modality. The chapter moves forward with the exploration of the fourth theme in this chapter, 'library' and its role in the landscape of disciplinary literacy and picture books.

5.9 THE SMALL FRAMEWORK “L” LIBRARY

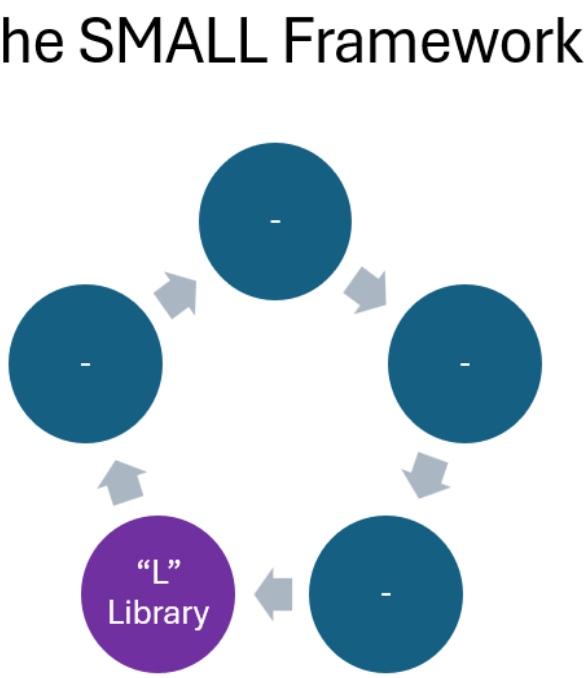


Figure 109: The SMALL Framework Component 4 “Library”

The fourth theme in this chapter shall present findings from a unique series of perspectives which serve to exhibit the role that librarians play in schools and the capacity to develop this within the Irish primary school system. Arising from the interviews with key educational stakeholders, held in phase one of this study, which failed to name or identify librarians as a key piece to this DL and PB jigsaw, the study progressed to interview and engage in a series of open ended questionnaires with librarians in Ireland and in the UK. Discourse around partnership with libraries and librarians also featured in the subsequent professional learning community which shall be intertwined in the proceeding discourse.

5.9.1 The teacher-librarian relationship

To begin with, in the national survey, teachers identified libraries as one of the key places from which they source picture books from. See Figure 110 in Appendix 33.

In the professional learning communities, teachers spoke positively of the availability of the library as a service, if and when they needed it. Some teachers identified strong relations with their local librarians, while others had no relationship whatsoever. In the focus group interview with Irish librarians it was outlined by librarian, Alma that:

> "*In some instances, you'd have to bring the library to the school. I know a colleague has gone out with laptops and has done memberships and distributed books at a school location. She was kind of bringing Mohammed to the mountain or whatever so she took the bull by the horns and said she'd go to them, you know? It would be kind of very subjective to the openness and personality of the librarians and their values. But it is something we do.*
>
> *(Alma, librarian)*

Librarians noted that in schools where there was a HSCL teacher or a literacy link teacher, relations were stronger or more frequent. Additionally, another librarian, Aideen, remarked that "*the strength of the relationship comes down to the individual teachers and librarians and the desire from both parties to engage and collaborate*". In a case study by Batool and Webber (2017) on the conceptions of school libraries and the role of school librarians in Pakistan, they pointed toward a dire need to develop school libraries. The development of school libraries would require

a drastic overhaul in the relationship between teacher and librarian. Concurrent with this view, Amie, librarian noted:

> *"There's nothing stopping an enthusiastic teacher and an enthusiastic librarian in their own remission-joining forces. Now obviously there is the constraints on time and energy doing something like that on the ground level. It does depend on a teacher who cares as well. If they're not interested in libraries or books particularly, then you're wasting your time, really."*
>
> *(Amie, librarian)*

It is clear from the responses of librarians that there needs to be a mutual desire to enable a relationship between the school and the library and indeed between the teacher and the librarian. Catherine, Class Teacher from one of the PLC's spoke of the library resources being there but being underutilised or forgotten about. She denotes how important it is to get the books out, share them amongst colleagues and expose children to as many texts as possible.

> *"There's so many books that you could have available for all ages. And it's just about getting down to the public library. You can engage in book swapping with your colleagues, swapping even with the person in the room next door. Books are there to be shared and for many people to use. And it's just actually remembering to do that. Yeah, we're all guilty of having a big stack of lovely books and building bridges books, but maybe not actually sometimes taking them out and swapping along with colleagues and it's just important to have as much exposure to as many books as possible."*
>
> *(Catherine, Class Teacher)*

Aligned more with reading for pleasure endeavours, the DES *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life strategy* document outlines initiatives to improve literacy in schools, including the promotion of book swapping among teachers to share resources and encourage a culture of reading. So too, *Book Trust UK* organises book swapping events for schools while Education Scotland discusses various strategies for promoting reading for pleasure in primary schools, including book swapping initiatives among staff as a way to share resources and recommend good reads.

5.9.2 The role of the librarian in schools

Singh (2021) asserted the significant role of school libraries in raising awareness, providing information access, and fostering essential information skills within the school community from an early stage. Bingham (1989), characterised school libraries as learning laboratories and emphasised the role of librarians as consultants to teachers. Findings from this study would disagree with this ideology, with evidence that while there are partnerships with schools and libraries, there is not a consultancy service for teachers or availability of curricular support materials. Nonetheless, librarians from Ireland outlined that they were in fact drawn upon by the Department of Education in the roll out of a series of webinars aimed at supporting teachers and schools in developing students reading proficiency. A willingness to collaborate with teachers and schools was also exhibited. The DES circular 0018/2022, in its Section 12 on Public libraries Support for Schools, outlines that the growth and development of the collaborative approach for educational and leisure reading support and materials between schools and public libraries is an objective of the *Public Library Strategy 2018–2022*. Whilst findings from this study uncovered various initiatives conducted by libraries and its affiliations e.g. CBI, the educational support

component remains something which PLC members were unaware of, and, when asked, considered such support to be more at a more "*surface level*" whereby the librarian can assist the teacher to find suitable book titles for their class. However, encased in the broad objective of the *Public Library Strategy* are a series of key objectives, one of which is: 'Providing :Reading and curriculum support materials.' The findings from this study suggest that the latter is an objective yet to be established, with none of the librarians interviewed reporting to collaborate with teachers to provide curriculum support materials. Concurrent with the circular, librarians report that the impact of Covid 19 has halted such collaboration and the success of this initiative lies in the hands of individual librarians and schools. See Aideen's comment in Appendix 33 (F).

Aideen draws awareness here to the need for teachers and librarians to communicate their needs with one another in order for such supports to be effective. It is positive to note that the DES recognise the need to engage librarians to support schools, however the level to which this features nationally, given the lack of awareness when the question was raised with PLC groups, remains questionable, warranting further research.

5.9.3 Libraries as separate entities

Importantly, in this study, Irish librarians signalled to the importance of the library and the school being separate entities and a space of sanctuary and disconnect from the school building and system.

> *"I suppose the flip side of that thinking is then we're encouraging reading for pleasure and maybe you're better off not associating it with education but that it is a disconnect from school which is actually a great thing within itself. They [children] don't see it as, you know, a continuation of school or anything."*
>
> *(Aideen, Librarian)*

This is a worthwhile consideration. While this study explores the partnership between schools and libraries it must also acknowledge the value of the library as a centre of escapism and disconnect from the educational environment of school. Amie, librarian, makes the point that, as librarians they do not teach the skills of reading but rather strive to make reading fun and enjoyable for children. See Appendix 33 (G).

On the other hand, Famer (2019) and Brage *et al.* (2014) in their respective Swedish case studies on school librarians highlight the importance of school libraries and the school library's curricular role. As reported in the focus interview with Amie, Aideen and Alma, the position of Irish librarians is very much outside of school buildings rather than within them, dissimilar to the findings of that in the UK system where findings show a central role which school librarians play in many schools across the UK nation. Funding and staffing are considerations for the continuity of this service for schools in the UK, similar to *The Swedish Library Act* of 2013, which mandated school libraries, but failed to address staffing, a lesson which, if recommendations from the findings of this study are to be negotiated, would be a factor for consideration in Ireland.

5.9.4 Libraries using picture books with parents

When questioned about their experiences of using picture books with children and with parents, the following excerpt serves to highlight the power of the picture book, the connectedness, the engagement and the closeness it can offer. Amie, librarian speaks of an initiative launched by the Dolly Parton Foundation, which sees the distribution of a picture book per month to each child from birth to aged five, within a particular area. See Appendix 33 (H).

It is clear from Amie's response, the recognition of the picture book as a key tool to promote family reading. Such connectedness, as described by Amie echoes the work of Styles, Arizpe and Noble (2023) who advocate for picture books to be a shared experience. So too, Bader (1976, p.1) suggests that picturebooks are 'the perfect size for an adult and child to read together, offering the drama of the turning page' (Bader 1976, p.1).

5.9.5 Librarians and The Primary Language Curriculum

Throughout the discourse with librarians from Ireland, I drew the librarians awareness to the *Primary language Curriculum* and provided a brief overview of the aims of the document. Consistent with the aims of *Librarians Ireland*, the librarians spoke of the list of services to primary schools, as outlined on their website. Within this list, the segment on the provision of reading and curriculum support materials was discoursed, as aforementioned in Circular 0018/2022. The librarians affirmed that while there would be a willingness from librarians to work alongside teachers in the formulation of support materials, there were no plans for this that they were aware of.

The conversation steered toward picture books as a resource, and in particular the provision of picture books for older readers. Surprisingly, librarians reported that there were few of such books in their stock, with graphic novels being seen as more popular among such a cohort.

> *"The graphic novels are more popular titles with the older children. That visual medium, that kind of link between text and the imagination at that age is great, they're not going to be looking at kiddies titles you know at that age, so it seems that it's the graphic novels they are leaning towards."*
>
> *(Alma, librarian)*

It appears that there is a disparity between the supply and stock of picturebooks for older children in libraries compared with CBI, who in their interview, place picturebooks for older children as central to their vision and support materials.

5.9.6 The role of Children's Books Ireland in supporting schools and in promoting picturebooks

Concurrent with the focus group interview with Irish librarians and librarians from the UK, I conducted an interview with Anne from *Children's Books Ireland*[20], given the collaborative nature between CBI, libraries and schools, in order to ascertain their view on partnerships between the entities. Anne, CBI, denotes that "*one of our strategic aims is to share our expertise and enthusiasm with the adults who guide children's reading, and creating a positive culture of reading*

[20] Children's Books Ireland is a national organisation dedicated to promoting and supporting the development of children's literature in Ireland. Its mission is to inspire a love of reading and to ensure that books for young readers are accessible, diverse, and of high quality.

for pleasure in schools is very much part of this." (Anne, CBI). Despite this enthusiasm and positivity, in the PLC's when asked if teachers were aware of this entity and it's support services, there was an overwhelming unawareness, with all but one teacher stating that yes they had heard of the organisation but had "*no idea what they did*". This is a disappointing result, given the level of work conducted by CBI and its efforts to engage with schools. Positively, the one member of the PLC's who had an acute awareness of CBI, noted that she had used the resource materials provided by CBI in her planning and came to know them due to funding her school had received to expand their school library.

Through discourse with Anne, it is evident that CBI places a huge emphasis on picturebooks and on the use of picturebooks as a resource for teaching children of all ages, with a particular emphasis on using picturebooks with older classes. She further highlighted the training and resources that are available through the organisation for schools. Anne denoted the very positive relationship the organisation has with schools across Ireland, as well as the book gifting endeavours they have adopted to assist schools in their resourcing of a wide range of picturebooks. Interestingly, when Anne was asked about the types of training seminars provided by CBI, there was no request by schools to facilitate a session about picturebooks specifically.

"Training is usually provided to the schools we select for book-gifting as part of our Every Child a Reader project. As well as receiving a library of books and a series of visits from a writer or illustrator, the school identifies training needs in relation to books and reading and we try to accommodate them, from engaging reluctant readers to how to physically set up and organise a library. No one has yet requested a session specifically about picturebooks but we always give a broad overview for all class groups."

(Anne, CBI)

Positively, the inclusion of picturebooks in the donation of books to schools by CBI is a finding which will assist the goal of this study which is to promote awareness amongst practitioners of picturebooks as a key teaching resource. This donating, along with the Dolly Parton[21] project in conjunction with Library Ireland, is a positive step in the direction of resourcing classrooms with PBs.

[21] Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a worldwide book gifting program that mails free, high-quality books, including picturebooks, to children from birth until they begin school. It was launched in Ireland in December 2019 and has since expanded its reach after starting in Dublin. It's aim is to promote early childhood literacy and foster a love of reading among young children.

When we choose the books to donate, we always include a wide range of picturebooks, as well as graphic novels, some wordless picturebooks where available, and heavily illustrated books. In this way we can introduce range and variety of books into schools which may have previously only had donations from their students' families, leaving them with a library composed of mostly bestsellers and not much variety.

(Anne, CBI)

Anne, CBI, agrees with Jane, NCCA when she denotes that:

"There is a picturebook for everything, so in the best environments, picturebooks are tied to themes across the curriculum, whether that's to learn about the seasons, or shapes, or animals or places, for English and Irish and drama, or as a jumping off point for art."

(Anne, CBI)

This showcases the thought that there is potential for PBs to be used across subject areas, this finding further echoed by teachers of the nationwide questionnaire, as seen in Figure 104 above. Anne goes further to outline how picturebooks can be used for wellbeing and PE.

"Picturebooks can be relaxing when read aloud at the end of the day, or energising and interactive for PE."

(Anne, CBI)

Anne outlines the vision of CBI which includes the expansion of picture books into the middle and senior classes in schools, which is an interesting premise and one which Anne is very passionate about achieving, having delved in depth into a multitude of picture books for older classes and

seeing the worth and potential for them in the classroom setting. She further mentioned the use of comprehension strategies while engaging with picturebooks as a key methodology for discussion and dialogue between teachers and pupils. This aligns with the vision held in *Building Bridges of Understanding*[22], which has been utilised by schools across the country since its launch in 2009.

> *"We would love to see children noticing the little details, and the moments when the best picturebooks are telling a different story with words than they are with pictures. We would love to see children predicting what will come next, what will happen at the end, what did happen at the end where the ending is ambiguous (e.g. Chris Haughton's Oh No George! Or Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen's shape trilogy). We would also love to see them being used right through the school, not just the infant classes."*
>
> *(Anne, CBI)*

When speaking of CBI's resource packs which predominantly feature picturebooks along with videos for teachers, Anne drew particular attention to practitioners using these amongst senior classes with a critical lens, aligning with Roche's (2014) critical thinking and book talk approach.

[22] "Building Bridges of Understanding" was introduced in 2009. It is an Irish educational initiative developed by Martin Gleeson and Ann Courtney. The programme was primarily funded by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland. It was designed to enhance comprehension and critical thinking skills among primary school students with the aim to improve literacy through a structured approach that encourages deep understanding and engagement with texts, primarily picturebooks.

> *"In these resources in particular, we encourage the older class groups to read not just the books aimed at their age groups, but to critically engage with the picturebooks. We believe very strongly that picturebooks have merit at every age, not least as works of art."*
>
> *(Anne, CBI)*

Similar to comments in discussions held with INTO, PDST and NCCA Anne illustrates how there is a relationship building between the reader and the picturebook. This further highlights the keen understanding that such personnel have in their knowledge of picturebooks. This relationship, she describes, can be "*a bonding between the child and parent as they explore the texts together".* Anne speaks about the bonding nature of picutrebooks with parents and children and how picturebooks can be a "*lens to the world*". Anne further highlights the attention afforded to the visual elements of picturebooks and the power of the picture as an artform, allowing the reader to be an active participant in the telling/reading of the story. She further highlights how picture books can expose children to different cultures, a point which was also considered by members of the PLC groups. Overarchingly, Anne points out how picturebooks are fun and engaging and with their different formats and features, they are an enjoyable tool for all. See Appendix 33 (I).

A further development in the interview with librarians highlighted the multi-culturalism in Irish society and how this is feeding into the library system. Librarians spoke positively about the influx

of a multitude nationalities and efforts made by Librarians Ireland to embrace their languages through books. This is a very positive and transformative finding. See Appendix 33 (J).

Such findings through this study's discourse with Anne, CBI, serves to equip practitioners with the awareness of this entity and the high quality of expertise and resources available to practitioners who wish to extend their knowledge of using picturebooks effectively in the classroom.

5.9.7 Vision of The School Libraries Group

When discoursing the list of services provided by librarians to schools, it was identified that there is a necessity for further collaboration to occur between schools and librarians so that librarians are informed of curricular developments including research based best practices around reading and the resourcing of same. The *School libraries group*, a subsection of *Library Association of Ireland* through their mission statement declare that:

> We believe that every school in Ireland should be provided with resources for a school library run by a qualified librarian, where each school child will have guided access to a wide and diverse range of material for pleasure reading, research, learning and literacy.
> (SLG Mission Statement 2021)

If such a statement is to become a reality in the context of the *Primary Language Curriculum* and its aims in terms of learning and literacy, then a significant leap in the amalgamation of the two entities needs to be forged. While the LAI SLG provide guidance for schools on how to set up a school library, they do not position themselves within that domain. This is in contrast to the role of the librarian in out neighbouring country, the UK. To delve further into this insight, I conducted a series of follow up open- ended questionnaires with a group of librarians in Ireland and in the UK.

5.9.8 The role of school librarians in the UK

The following section presents findings from Irish librarians and UK librarians to the open ended questionnaires. The comparative nature of this component of the research project serves to highlight the similarities and differences between the Irish and English education systems in terms of the role of the librarian within the primary sector. One of the questions in relation to the librarians favourite picture book has been culminated in the Padlet that has been created in response to the collective suggestions from librarians, teachers and key educational stakeholders (Lawrance 2024).

(P=Participant, P1, P2, P3 (Ireland), D1, D2, D3 (UK))

On the *Skills for Schools* website, called *Unison,* the role of the librarian in the UK school is outlined:

> Librarians are responsible for the day-to-day running of the school's library or resource centre. They acquire, organise and maintain resources that support the learning needs of pupils and the needs of the wider school community.
>
> (Skills for Schools, Unison, website)

Furthermore, it outlines how they 'help pupils and teachers to access all the materials they need to help them learn and teach. They play a central role in supporting literacy initiatives in schools and make an important contribution to schools achieving their overall learning targets'. The primary school library guidelines UK, serve to breakdown in detail the role of the librarian and how this role operates within the school setting. Particular to this study, which sought to highlight the possible role that librarians could have in schools to support and assist teachers, children and parents in the use of picture books, there is evidence here to support the call for librarians to be situated within Irish primary schools.

5.9.9 Partnership with schools: Librarians in Ireland compared with UK

When asked what the role of the librarian was in relation to schools, Irish librarians identified the following key areas: Class visits, author events, provision of resources, provision on setting up a library, teacher membership and the promotion of library supports. The comments from the Irish librarians suggest a supportive and facilitative role. By comparison UK librarians were identified by title as 'school librarians', with all three participants working within school buildings.

D1: "I am a school librarian at a Junior (Primary) school."

D2: "I work as a school librarian in a very large secondary school in England with 2100 students"

D3: "I work in two large (1800+ pupils) secondary schools in the West of Scotland as their school librarian."

When asked how important their role is in the literacy development of children, Irish librarians perceived this as "vital" and "extremely important", detailing how they provide support, guidance and literacy resources for students.. Similarly, UK librarians saw their work as important and central to the development of children's literacy development. Reading for pleasure and making book choices was identified as key to their role. See Appendix 33 (K). D3 noted that his role is not as big as he would like it to be, suggesting a limitation to the capacity of the role which is something that should be explored further. See Appendix 33 (K).

5.9.10 Types of initiatives between libraries and schools

When asked what types of initiatives libraries had with schools, Irish librarians reported issues with space and noise. It is clear from P1's comment that space, capacity for follow up visits and using the library facility for multiple purposes and peoples are inhibiting factors. A further inhibiting factor is noted by P2 who highlights the difficulty for schools who require transport to visit their local library. P3 outlines what types of picturebook workshops in different subject areas worked well, sparking connections to disciplinary literacy and its capacity to be linked within the library-school systems. By contrast, UK librarian, D1 denoted that schools and libraries work best when they are intrinsically linked. D2 speaks of student agency and how librarians have a different approach to teachers in sparking children's reading for pleasure. Another point of note from D3 is how he always makes sure that he models reading aloud to the pupils, a factor which aligns with Roche's (2014) CT&BT approach. When asked if they have ever had a picturebook author host workshops in the library, Irish librarians reported that they did not while UK librarians said they had. The fact that Irish librarians reported not to have had a picturebook author host a workshop identifies scope for such collaboration between PB authors and libraries in Ireland.

When asked if they had ever facilitated workshops for children in the library and/or in the school setting, Irish librarians said they did not while UK librarians said: When asked how a workshop could work in the Irish primary setting, P1 said there would have to be clear communication between the librarian and the teacher on what was required. D2 from the UK said that her workshop gave children agency. Book choice, giving the pupils autonomy and space for exploration were identified as key components of an effective workshop. D3 from the UK advises that how the book is delivered, the ability of the reader to answer questions and giving pupils the time to speak are further factors which an effective workshop should exhibit. Furthermore, D1 from UK adds that

having an end goal or choosing one thing that you want the students to learn from the reading makes a beneficial workshop. Finally, D3 makes the statement that such workshops brings the room alive and pupils are afforded a space to illustrate their thoughts in response to the text being read. See Appendix 33 (L) for the comments outlined in this section.

5.9.11 The role of the librarian enhancing teaching and learning in schools and communities

Findings from this study suggest that librarians play an important role in enhancing teaching and learning in schools and communities. Librarians spoke of the importance of parents being made aware of the set-up of the library and also the identification of ways to draw in the reluctant readers. They make the point that a parents role does not end by bringing the child inside the library building. Furthermore, librarians suggest that staffing is an issue, and so this curtails the amount of time that they can spend with individuals. See Appendix 33 (M).

The informal setting of the library was noted as a positive factor in enhancing literacy development while having access to more resources than the school may have was also a positive point made. The budgets for hosting events which librarian, P3 spoke of may be something which schools can collaborate with librarians on. The use of picture books in the Irish language was further noted as something which librarians are focussing on which would be a very positive way of enriching children's literacy development in the Irish language. Finally, as D3 from the UK points out, the librarians role in as an enabler and as D1 posits that her role is so vast and so fluid, interchangeable depending on needs and support, that the job specification is wide. See Appendix 33 (N).

5.9.12 How might libraries/librarians engage with teachers in the use of picturebooks in the primary classroom?

When asked how libraries and librarians might engage with teachers in the use of picturebooks in the classroom, librarians identified that an increase in visits and read aloud sessions, the provision of picture books for loan and offering suggested booklists for teachers would be some of the ways that they could engage with teachers in their use of picturebooks. See Appendix 33 (O).

By contrast (see comments in Appendix 33 (O)), D2 UK librarian spoke of the need to show teachers how picturebooks can support learning in the classroom. They also made note of reservations they had with regard to picturebooks in terms of curriculum delivery and how this may in fact set limits on their impact. D3, similar to P1 suggests that they offer book lists but adds that they could offer lesson plans for teachers. D1 goes on to say how the successful organisation of workshops is key to the engagement with classes. This finding sits with the comment made by Anne PDST when she notes that giving teachers pre designed book lists can take away teacher agency and accountability.

5.9.13 Factors inhibiting PBs in the UK

D2 makes the point that picturebooks for older readers in the UK are limited to more traditional types.

D2: "I feel that the UK is still limited when it comes to picture book publishing. It's still quite traditional and averse to "risky" subjects, with a few exceptions. I think this in itself really limits the power that picture books can have one readers, particularly as they get older."

Time and funding was noted as obstacles to effective school library systems.

D3: "But cost and lack of time limits all of this. I love picture books and have a collection from all over the world that I share with pupils. Often think teachers shy away thinking they are for younger children when in fact they are a great leveller in the class and should be used more."

A number of studies have delved into the multifaceted aspects of school libraries, including their role, challenges, and impact on students' learning (McNichol, Ghelani, & Nankivell 2002; Bikos, Papadimitriou, & Ginnakopoulos 2014; Hughes 2014). Notably, much of this research has been centered on secondary and higher educational levels (Pors 2008; Bikos, Papadimitriou, & Ginnakopoulos 2014), leaving a gap in understanding at the primary educational level, which the current study aimed to address.

5.9.14 Concluding comments on Section 4: Library

This section has presented findings in relation to the library and librarians and their role within primary schools. It has highlighted the differences between library systems in Ireland and the UK through its comparative dialogue with librarians across both nations. Adding to the existing literature, this studies reveals the pivotal role of school libraries in enhancing students' academic

performance and learning outcomes (Hughes 2014; Williams, Wavell, & Morrison 2014). Hughes (2014) fused findings from Australian and international research, indicating that student outcomes improve with increased library use and access to learning resources. Similarly, a study on Scotland's school libraries highlighted their positive impact on students' academic achievements and cultivation of favourable attitudes toward learning (Williams, Wavell, & Morrison 2014). Additionally, the active involvement of school librarians in promoting reading, fostering information literacy, and collaborating with teachers in educational activities emerges as a significant factor in strengthening students' academic success (Tilley 2013; Johnson 2011). Given the positive impact reported globally with school libraries, this study serves to highlight the opportunity for government to enrich this partnership within Irish primary schools.

The chapter shall now progress to detail findings in the final component of The SMALL Framework:- leadership.

5.10 THE SMALL FRAMEWORK “L” LEADERSHIP

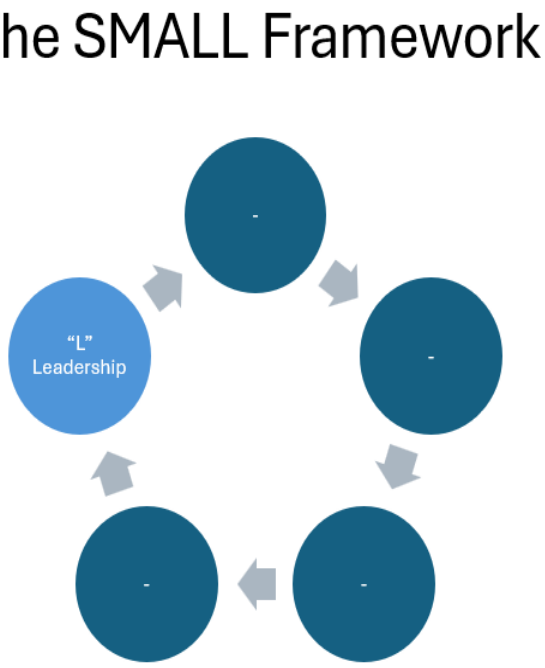


Figure 111: The SMALL Framework Component 5 “Leadership”

The fifth and final theme presented in this findings chapter centralises on what leadership in the primary school looks like and how this is perceived by teachers, with a specific focus on literacy leadership. Misneach, Tánaiste, Forbairt and Meitheal are an umbrella of supports run by Oide for new and established teacher leaders in Ireland[23]. Interestingly, participants of the PLCs who were

[23] Misneach provides mentoring and professional development for newly appointed principals. Tánaiste supports deputy principals in enhancing leadership skills and preparing for principalship. Forbairt offers both principals and deputies leadership development through reflective practice and peer learning. Meitheal fosters collaboration among principals for peer-led development. Cosan, developed by the Teaching Council, promotes continuous professional development for all educators, including leaders. The Teaching Council also sets professional standards and offers leadership resources. The INTO advocates for quality leadership training and offers support services for professional growth.

not in leadership roles reported not to know about these support programmes. Nonetheless, those in leadership positions acknowledged the extensive investment in teacher leaders professional development which has been afforded by the DES. Participants of the PLCs in this study denoted an all-round awareness of the *LAOS* document (DES 2022; 2016), which is a positive finding. Some participants noted that they use the 'statements of effective practice' in the creation of their literacy targets for SSE/SIP plans, while others reported not to have used these statements themselves but were aware that they were there, with Evelyn, Class Teacher, assuming that "*the management team of the school knew more about that"*. One participant, who is a post holder for literacy, commented on how the *LAOS* documented was used to structure the interview for her position to ensure that she had the necessary capabilities within each domain to effectively lead literacy in her school. This correlates with interviewee commentary from Jane, NCCA who spoke of how structured systems are in place in Irish primary schools to ensure a high calibre of appropriately trained leaders are positioned into these roles. Notwithstanding this, Evelyn's comment above highlights the supposition that those in leadership positions within schools are driving the SSE process. This serves to show the effectiveness of the LAOS document in leading school improvement but also questions the role of the teacher who is not in a leadership role in the creation of these plans.

5.10.1 Domain 1: Teaching and Learning

Domain 1 of the LAOS document emphasises the importance of effective teaching practices and engaging learning environments to support student achievement and well-being. The findings from this study, particularly in its exploration of picturebooks and disciplinary literacy, offers valuable insights for enhancing teaching and learning in this domain. Noted by all participants, picturebooks

can be powerful tools in fostering literacy and critical thinking skills across various subjects. Participants evaluated that picturebooks engage students visually and contextually, making complex ideas more accessible and stimulating. Collaboratively the study's four phase of participants denote that incorporating picturebooks in the curriculum can help develop students' inferential thinking and comprehension abilities, aligning with the curricular goal of creating engaging and meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, the focus on DL, assessed by participants underscores the need for subject-specific literacy skills, which can deepen students' understanding and improve their ability to communicate within different disciplines.

5.10.2 Domain 1: Teachers' Collective/Collaborative Practice

Aligned with comments from participants of this study, principals are thought to play a significant role in facilitating professional development and in particular in collaborative communities of practice (Opfer *et al.* 2011). Teachers from the PLCs highlighted the roles of the principal and members of the in-school management team as being "*influential*" and "*vital*" in leading the process of developing professionally and, in terms of literacy, in implementing the *Primary Language Curriculum* effectively. All participants agreed that principals who established committees within schools to progress teaching practices was "*advantageous*" and those who further used staff meetings as a forum for spotlighting new approaches to particular aspects of the curriculum they were focussing on was deemed a positive approach. However, there were mixed feelings as to the efficacy of such systems as well as reservations around the knowledge base of those leading particular subject areas. Sam, Special Class Teacher, reported on how he trained and taught in England for a number of years before moving to Ireland. He illustrated that in his school in England, he had to meet with the principal at the start of the year and identify three objectives

for his own professional development, for example "*addressing challenging behaviour"*. Sam and his principal would then discuss how these objectives could be achieved and evaluate them at two points in the year. The principal would encourage attendance at relevant courses for the identified areas and the teacher would share their "*new knowledge*" with other staff members. Sam felt there was scope for such a system in Ireland which was a positive experience in his teaching career abroad. Eabha, Principal, said that this was certainly "*food for thought*" and "*something worth considering*".

5.10.2.1 Domain 1: Teachers' individual practice: Leading through teacher reflection

Reflective practice is crucial for teacher development, fostering cognitive changes in beliefs and practices (Barnett 1991; Kaasila & Lauriala 2010). In line with the literature, teachers from the PLCs engaged in reflective collaboration to share best practices and implement recommendations from each other within their professional learning communities. This collaborative approach is vital for professional development and is a core principle of adult learning theory (Vescio *et al*. 2008; Knowles 1970). As the PLC participants identified, learning together enhances information retention and problem-solving skills (Mews, 2020). Thus, professional learning communities in this study suggest that collaborative learning positively influences and advances teaching practices. Reflective practice is a core component of the *Cosán* framework (Teaching Council of Ireland 2016). Teachers are encouraged to regularly reflect on their teaching methods, student interactions, and professional growth to identify areas for improvement and development (Teaching Council 2016). Reflective practice, which is crucial for professional growth, was reported by participants of the PLCs to be "*diminished when teachers are preoccupied with inspections*". The need to constantly prepare for inspections aligns with Ball (2003) outlook that

this can leave little time for teachers to reflect on their practice and engage in meaningful professional development (Ball 2003). Furthermore, comments from INTO interviewee and NCCA interviewee attest the importance of professional reflection as a tool to accelerate teaching, leadership and learner experience, summarising that "*reflection is a key tool within a teacher's repertoire*" and "*perhaps something that needs to be further utilised*". For example, for trainee teachers and NQT's engaging in the process of Droichead, they are encouraged to engage with Taisce, an e-portfolio of their development along the continuum of teacher education. As the Teaching Council in their *Post-qualification Professional Practice Procedures and Criteria* 2023/2024 denote, 'a professional learning portfolio is developed over time by teachers undergoing Droichead, to support the process of reflection on their practice. The portfolio may provide a focus for the professional conversations which are central to Droichead and allow the NQT to identify areas in which he/she may need support or guidance'. However, for experienced teachers there is no such portfolio or space for teachers to identify areas for support or guidance or indeed reflection. A recommendation on this point can be viewed in Chapter Six.

5.10.3 Domain 2: Being led by others and teachers leading their own learning

The Cosán framework provides guidance on how teachers can document and receive recognition for their professional development activities. This includes creating the aforementioned personal learning portfolio that captures evidence of professional growth (Teaching Council 2016). When asked, the PLC participants did not keep such a record of their professional growth but felt it was a great idea and something they wished they had done to date in their teaching career. As Grace, Class Teacher depicted, "*if I had a portfolio of every type of professional learning development I have engaged in since I started my teaching career, I think it would be quite robust but also very*

affirming and something I would take great pride in, because you do forget all that you have done in this career as it is just so busy and you are always learning and engaging in professional growth but have no real record."

Half of schools reported to be in receipt of school support for Literacy from the PDST. Evidently, teachers in the professional learning communities perceive collaboration with the PDST/Oide as essential. One highlighted that the PDST advisor is the "*expert*" in the field and therefore, has the ability to educate teachers in the areas of disciplinary literacy and picture books to support student learning (Mitchell 2008). Such findings build on the advice of Larsen et al. (2015) and McGee (2004) who advocate the importance of sharing specialist knowledge and skills and engaging in ambitious teaching to support student learning. Likewise, Mary, a class teacher stressed the importance of working with the PDST "*to gain specific knowledge to support teachers with their planning for literacy effective instruction"*. Tom, principal further identifies that any PD that his staff engage with "*must align with the school context and where we find ourselves at a given moment in time.*" This finding regarding school context highlights the importance of understanding how adults learn, particularly in the development of teachers. According to the principle of orientation to learning within adult learning theory, adults are more likely to embrace change when actions and recommendations are relevant to real-life contexts. This aligns with the literature on teacher professional development, which indicates that programs are most successful when tailored to the specific needs of the learners (Merriam 2001). The findings from this study posit that customising professional development to the unique environment and challenges of each school context ensures that teachers are more engaged and likely to apply what they learn effectively.

5.10.4 Domain 2: Teachers practices: Teacher planning and leadership

Findings from this study suggest that teachers who are passionate about a particular subject area can bring that subject and staff from strength to strength, if enabled. So too, participant responses suggest the need for recognisable qualifications to lead teaching and learning in specific areas with expertise in particular fields seen as admirable and satisfying to teachers being led by those post holders/leaders. Where teachers did not have such qualifications or expertise, there was less confidence in the abilities of that teacher to lead the subject area and a feeling of them not having anything "*extra*" to offer which suggests that qualifications are held in high esteem by practitioners and where this is absent, the need for externs with expertise is warranted.

A comment from Kieran, Class Teacher, (See Appendix 33 (P), further depicts the lack of structure and systematic nature of primary schools in Ireland in how post of responsibility are perceived, allocated and delivered. With findings from this study's nationwide questionnaire being representative of a wide range of school settings and teaching experience (See Figure 112 in Appendix 33), it is clear from the result of question 24, that leadership in literacy is not or may not be conducted in almost half of schools surveyed. This finding is stark when one considers the expectation by NCCA to implement a *Primary Language Curriculum* in an effective manner. Concurring with Di Domenico *et al.* (2018), further coaching to support teachers in DL instruction for sustained teacher change is essential.

Strikingly, although not surprising, 91% of participants identified as female, reflective of the female dominated teaching career.

Just as Hargreaves (1995) and Hopkins (1994) argue, findings from this research project agree that strengthening a school's organisation is crucial for school improvement. They contend that enhancing pedagogy without establishing effective organisational structures and supports yields limited benefits. Conversely, developing an efficient organisation that does not focus on the core activities of teaching and learning is a futile endeavor (Sammons 2006).

5.10.5 Domain 3: Teachers Collective/Collaborative Practice: Leading through community

48.25% of participants of the survey reported to have had participated in a professional learning community while 44.44% had not. 7.30% were unsure whether they had or not. 61.71% of schools did not operate communities of practice while 22.15% did. 16.14% were unsure. A resounding 91.80% of participants felt that there is benefit in teachers being part of a professional learning community while 7.89% were unsure and 0.32% felt that there was no benefit. 73.10% of respondents would be interested in joining a professional learning community while 19.30% said that they may be interested and 7.59% stated that they would not be interested. In the establishment of the PLCs for the purpose of this study, reflection was identified as a central principle of transformative learning theory, which is foundational to this research. This theory posits that individuals transform their perspectives by critically examining and revising their assumptions through reflection (Kelly, 2017; Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019). Such transformative learning involves scrutinising and acting upon revised practices, leading to changes in meaning and context as was the case with the PLCs conducted for the purpose of this study where practitioners reported that their knowledge of DL and PBs had not only enhanced but their reflections on their own practice had also seen a notable transformation (Cranton 2006).

5.10.6 Domain 3: Managing the Organisation: Leading through resourcing

Within the PLCs, practitioners reviewed the Teacher's Toolkit which supports the *Primary Language Curriculum*. Participants were astounded at the array of support material available to them and commented that "*it's a shame that the leaders in my school do not use these in Croke Park hours to stimulate our thinking and enrich our professional development*". Another teacher who is a post holder attested that *"the duties of their post are simply unattainable and not worth the money. On top of it, I don't really have the expertise to lead using these exemplars, it would have to be an outsider with more knowledge of the subject area."*

This, however was not the intention of the toolkit and indeed the curriculum, which, as Jane, NCCA depicts in Appendix 33 (Q), was to be "*an enabling structure, with signposts and big ideas*" and the support material was "*not gold standard*" or exemplars of best practice, but did admit that they were "*quite polished pieces showcasing excellent teachers*". She goes further to outline how the role of the NCCA then ends and it is up to the teachers as the curriculum makers through their teacher agency to implement these structures. Interestingly, she mentions professional learning communities as a means to achieving this.

This statement depicts the strong onus on school leaders to effectively plan for and implement the vision of the curriculum makers.

5.10.7 Domain 2: Developing leadership capacity

In the nationwide questionnaire, when asked if their schools held posts of responsibilities for the area of Literacy, the response rate for this question signalled that almost three quarters (73.37%) of participants had a school leader/AP1/AP2/ post holder/teacher leader in their school with

responsibility for Literacy (See Figure 114 in Appendix 33), while 18.05% did not. Interestingly 8.05% of respondents replied that they were not sure whether their school had a school leader/AP1/AP2/ post holder/teacher leader with responsibility for Literacy. Of those who responded yes to the previous question, 164 or 58.36% of teachers said that yes, this person lead the staff in literacy development in their school, while 26.69% reported that they did not (See Figure 115 in Appendix 33). 14.95% declared that they were unsure whether this person lead the staff in literacy development. Such uncertainty or lack of literacy leadership portrayed from 41.64% of participants is a significant finding and one that requires further in depth research. If Ireland is to maintain its standards at PISA and continue to provide high quality literacy education to its young, then leadership in literacy needs to be strengthened.

5.10.8 Domain 4: Developing leadership capacity: Leading T & L by enabling teachers to lead T & L

For teacher learning to be effective, it necessitates that educators engage in self-exploration and question their own ideas, while also allowing others to interpret their practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999; Fullan 2014). Findings from this study suggests that teachers develop by challenging their assumptions and identifying key areas for improvement in their practice, as evidenced through the professional learning community evaluation sheets which participants completed following the PLCs. Effective teacher change requires modifications in both cognition and behaviour (Clarke & Hollingsworth 2002; Tam 2015). This cognition encompasses a collection of beliefs, knowledge, theories, assumptions, and attitudes related to teaching, subject matter, pedagogy, and self (Calderhead & Shorrock 2003). Teachers need to be stimulated to reflect on these cognitive aspects (Tam 2015). Professional learning communities, such as that provided by this study, provide a platform for teachers to challenge their individual beliefs and assumptions,

exposing them to multiple perspectives and fostering new understandings of their practices (Hord 2009). Evaluations from the PLCs in this study show a strong increase in both cognition and behaviour toward DL, PBs and TPPTL.

5.10.9 Domain 4: Leading learning through outside agencies

> Teachers are bright and dedicated, and while there are some supports available in implementing the curriculum, they are not always sufficient to address the needs of teachers.
>
> Dr Jennifer O'Sullivan (Buckingham, 2024, p.37)

From one PLC there was a yearning to move away from the traditional model of CPD, which focuses on the transmission of knowledge through information-giving sessions whereby teachers sit passively and listen (LeTendre and Wiseman 2015; Welch & Plaxton-Moore 2018). From another PLC there was a desire to attend more such face to face training days and to hear the messages "*directly from the horse's mouth*". A third participant highlighted the convenience of attending online webinars in their own time while another remarked that "*it is frustrating that these webinars occur outside of school hours especially for those with families to tend to in the evenings*." Despite the different positions held by the above participants, they mutually agree that in-school support would be beneficial (Harris and Lambert 2003) and welcomed the sustained support model as provided by Oide[24], however at the same time highlighting that it is "*pot luck whether your school gets support and where do you stand then you're not chosen but need the help*" (Grace, Class Teacher). See Figure 116 Appendix 33. From the perspective of a deputy principal, Liam, believes that there is a need for more in-school CPD to support stakeholders on

[24] Oide Professional Learning Leaders (PLLs) can work with schools through a sustained support model to meet the diverse and bespoke needs of the school. This support is offered over a period of time as part of a deliberately planned process involving the staff working together towards clear collaboratively defined goals.

the ground. Throughout the PLC discussion he described how schools are simply "*reinventing the wheel*" and missing out on the opportunity to collaboratively work on implementing an effective plan for the PLC. Liam identified that greater collaborative practice would be achieved through the implementation of a professional learning community, whereby practitioners and school leaders work alongside a facilitator to support the planning and preparation for teaching and learning.

5.10.10 Domain 4: Leading newly qualified teachers

Darling-Hammond *et al*. (2012b) in their *Teacher preparation and teacher learning: A changing policy landscape* posit that new teachers are expected to learn to teach alongside more experienced teachers who plan and work together. Concerningly, the findings of this study report a depiction of little time for such collaborative planning and despite the introduction of the Droichead model in the schools of the PLC participants, whom are scattered across the nation, participants felt that, despite the best efforts of teachers, there was no clear system in place for such collaborative planning to occur. Within the four domains of the LAOS document, leading teaching and learning and leading school development are components of the duties of the management team of a school. If a model such as that posited by Darling-Hammond et al., were to be realised in an Irish primary context, participants from PLC 1 noted that "*a serious rethink in the time afforded to collaborative planning and the structures under which this is led and guided need to be addressed".*

5.10.11 Domain 4: Leading through the sharing of knowledge

From analysing the PLC participant transcripts, it was evident that the transfer and sharing of knowledge and skills was hypothesised as a priority in supporting pupils acquisition of disciplinary literacy and indeed in the effective utilisation of picture books. Data, presented in this chapter,

appear to coincide with findings presented by Glover *et al.* (2015) and Loughran (2010), which demonstrate that shared knowledge is powerful. Teachers and stakeholders who work collaboratively were found to mutually share knowledge and skills. This aligns with Lave and Wenger's theory of CoP, which encourages educationalists to collaboratively 'look at practice in new ways, ask questions and develop new criteria for competence' (Wenger 1998, p.218). Most participants in this study, communicated the benefits of such practice asserting that it allowed them to *"bounce ideas off each other"* and *"mirror strategies"* which were happening in the PLC sessions.

5.10.12 Leaders experiencing burnout

Participants of the nationwide survey supplied an extensive list of responses to alleviate the pressures of teacher burnout. These are represented in full in Appendix 2. Although beyond the scope of this project, such findings serve to illuminate the level of burnout experienced among teachers which aligns with findings from the INTO *Teacher Burnout* study (INTO 2022). A contributing factor identified by this stud was "*the constant fear of the inspectorate*" and the feeling of "*not doing things right*" or "*not being good enough*", evident from multiple questionnaire respondents. The finding that evaluation induces stress, fear, anxiety, tension, and pressure is well-documented, with many researchers noting this phenomenon (Davies & White 2001; Griffin 2010; Grubb 1999; Ladden 2015; Mathews 2010). This supports the conclusions of Dobert (2004) and the DES (1999) that being observed by an external inspector is inherently stressful. So too, evidence supporting Klusmann *et al*. (2023) in their study on teachers' emotional exhaustion during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study saw widespread levels of exhaustion still evident in the post pandemic teaching profession. Positively, the findings displayed in the

appendices offer solutions to alleviate such issues. The voice of practitioners is well presented here, offering tangible opportunities for round table discussions with key educational stakeholders.

5.10.13 Concluding comments on Section 5: Leadership

The section of the findings chapter has presented the theme of leadership by examining the four domains outlined in the LAOS (2022) document: *Teaching and Learning, Teacher Practices, Leadership and Management,* and *Developing Leadership* Capacity. It has integrated data from professional learning communities, the nationwide questionnaire, and interviews with key educational stakeholders to provide a comprehensive overview of leadership and in particular of literacy leadership in Irish primary schools. The findings underscore the necessity of a rigorous approach to ensure robust literacy leadership across all schools. This approach must be spearheaded by competent leaders who are committed to continuous professional development and who actively lead communities of practice within their schools (Whitlock 2021). By highlighting these elements, the section emphasises the critical role of skilled leadership in fostering an environment conducive to high-quality teaching and learning, ultimately driving school improvement and student success.

5.10.14 Concluding comments on Chapter 5

This chapter presented and interpreted the findings of this research study, which investigated the relationship of disciplinary literacy and picture books amongst teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning in Irish primary schools. Thematic analysis of data from a nationwide questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with PDST, INTO, NCCA, CBI, librarians (also including an open-ended questionnaire for librarians) as well as the rich dataset collected from a series of professional learning community participants in varying roles, served to capture a realistic

representation of the contemporary position of DL and PBs in Irish primary schools. Five major themes were presented and discussed in this chapter under “The SMALL Framework”. These themes represent a broad spectrum of opinions and insights into school based planning and the attitudes and understandings of DL and PBs from a wide range of sources. The participant data allowed me to establish what is actually happening on the ground in Irish primary schools and how effective PPTL for PBs and DL can be developed and sustained. The five themes serve to bridge the gap between theory and practice, so that I can draw conclusions and make recommendations in the following chapter. In case study research, typically, no hypothesis is explicitly formulated, but rather "*general ideas"* or "*expectations"* serve as guiding principles for empirical research (Mouton 2001, p. 150). The insights derived from case-based theory building research, such as is the case with this study, can subsequently function as hypotheses or propositions in succeeding studies. Consequently, case study research holds significant importance in the progression of a field's knowledge base (Merriam 2009), such as the field of disciplinary literacy in the primary setting and the intricate use of picture books to support this. These findings will prove useful to educational policymakers as well as practitioners as it uniquely describes the Irish primary teaching setting in which new curricula and policy is currently being implemented. As the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) evolves into a reality in Irish classrooms, these findings will serve as a key addition to the Irish educational knowledge base and in the formulation of subsequent planning, resource and support material for teachers going forward as they navigate their way through curricular change in Ireland. The thesis shall now draw to a close by presenting the conclusions and recommendations which have emerged from this study.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

‘Please be good enough to put your conclusions and recommendations on one sheet of paper in the very beginning of your report, so I can even consider reading it’

(Winston Churchill, 1940)

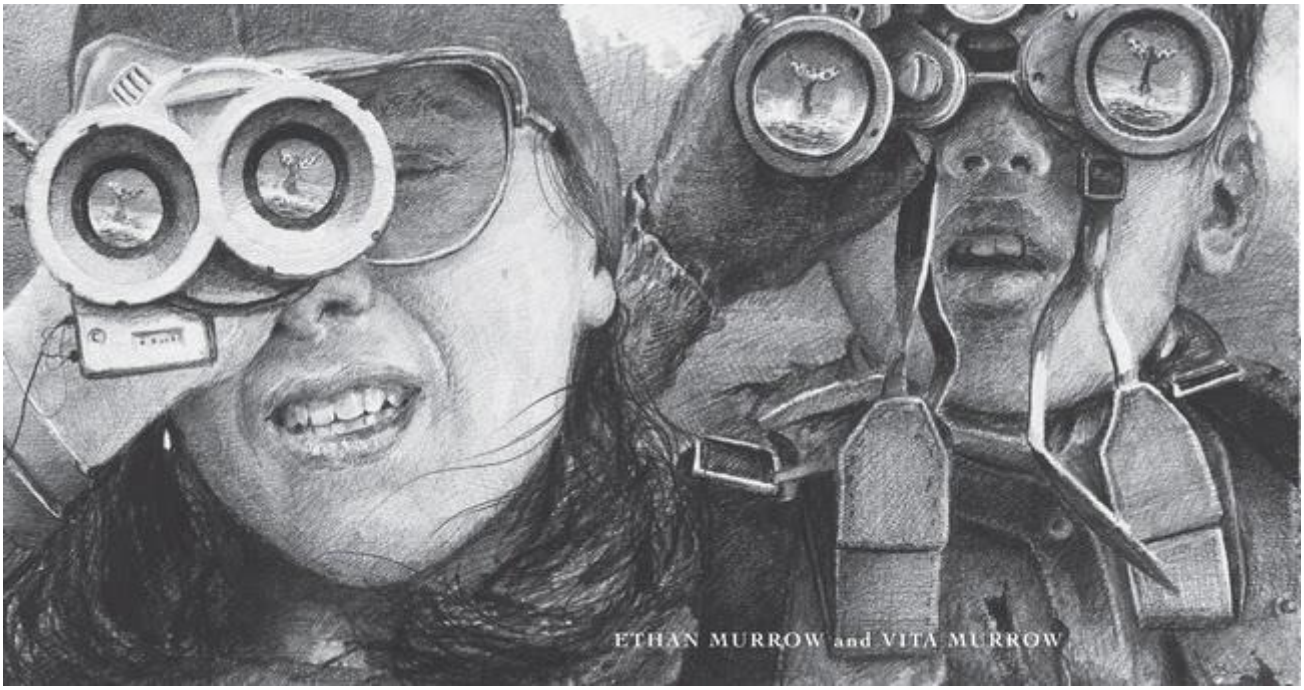


Image 21: The Whale by Vita Murrow, Illustrated by Ethan Murrow

6.1 Introduction

The quality of teaching and learning is central to effective practice, and, in order to achieve this, the preparation for teaching and learning is of the utmost importance. A disciplinary literacy approach requires that the literacy needs and methods of each subject be planned for and studied in unison. In this thesis, I examined the capacity for 'tightening up' the curriculum, in so far as this study allowed, in order to demonstrate that disciplinary literacy is the most effective way forward in terms of functional, purposeful and effective planning and preparation for teaching and learning. The *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2019) and *Primary Curriculum Framework,* (NCCA 2023) served to guide this research. As a teacher-researcher, I elected the task of researching ways to maintain and enrich high standards of teaching and learning, as outlined in the *Cosán Framework* (Teaching Council of Ireland 2016) and in the *Looking at our Schools 2022* (DES 2022) document. Through such example, as outlined through the research presented herein, educators can play a vital role in the creation of a standard of teaching and learning which teaches children higher order thinking skills, such as those necessary for working with DL and PBs.

This research was a viable means of fusing current policy and practice in order to investigate the effectiveness of teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning in a particular area of *foci*. Centering on the capacity for using picturebooks across the curriculum, propelled for the teaching of disciplinary literacy in the primary setting, such practical planning is concluded as essential for the effective delivery of high quality teaching and learning, as without it, the 'overcrowded curriculum' (NCCA 2010), and effects of curriculum overload, as seen in the 1999 curriculum, and, as detailed in Chapter Three's literature review, are highly likely to be relived. Research, upon which the reformed Irish curricula is founded, has emphasised the need for teacher planning and preparation to be embedded across the disciplines. With Irish educational

researchers, such as, Bowe (2010), Burke (2024; 2022; 2018), Dolan (2016), and Roche (2014), bringing the topics of picturebooks and disciplinary literacy to the forefront of educational research, this study served to marry the two concepts, uniquely highlighting the central position that picture books can take in the teaching of DL at primary level. Disciplinary literacy is a relatively recent phenomenon within the primary setting. As a result, its application at the Irish primary level is the focus of continuing research which this study has endeavoured to contribute to.

6.2 Exploring the Central Research Question in Literature, Policy and Theory

This research sought to explore the position of disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks within the Irish primary setting. Through its extensive literature review, it explored four themes: (i) curricular reform, (ii) teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning, (iii) picture books and (iv) disciplinary literacy. It primarily focussed on the theory of using DL and picturebooks as tools for teaching and learning in language and across subjects in the primary curriculum. It examined how changing policy, namely the Irish *Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2023) and *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA, 2019), can be used and platformed through a DL lens. It explored the theory behind the concept of DL at primary level, and further unravelled the strength of a picture as a tool for teaching and learning, deciphering whether 'a picture is worth a thousand words', using picturebooks for the purpose of disciplinary literacy teaching, which was a central aim within this research.

6.3 Inquiring into the Central Research Question

Through its literature review and four-phase data collection research study, this body of work inquired into the central research question in a comprehensive manner. It queried the central and embedded research questions through the modes of inquiry. See Appendix 33.

The study spanned over a four year period which allowed ample time for planning and inquiry. The researchers background knowledge, experience and expertise (as outlined in the Introductory Chapter) served as a strong foundation in launching the research. The researchers innate interest in the topics being researched, utmost dedication to the project and desire to add to the Irish educational knowledge base further aided the depth of inquiry afforded to the research. Her development as a researcher, through the doctoral programme, further served to enrich the manner of inquiry which was relinquished to this study.

6.4 Answering the Central Research Question

Through the data collected by the four-phase study, the central questions were enabled to be addressed. The central aims of the study were turned into questions and the data was examined, presented and discussed in light of each question. See Appendix 34 for a comprehensive summary. Through the presentation and discussion of the key findings outlined in Chapter Five, the research questions were responded to, ensuring rigor in the study. The conclusions and recommendations set forth hereafter is further evidence of the researcher's achievement in answering the central questions of this study.

6.5 Reconstructing the Narrative around the Central Research Question

The birth and growth of this study has allowed the narrative in the area of disciplinary literacy and picturebooks, amidst Irish curricular reform, to be reconstructed. Through its four-phase study, this research platformed the concepts of disciplinary literacy and picturebooks through the following modes of inquiry:

Nationwide survey	Sent to 3,200 primary schools
Semi-structured interviews	Interviews with members of PDST, INTO, NCCA, librarians, LAI, CBI
Open-ended questionnaires	Distributed to a cohort of librarians in Ireland and UK
Professional learning communities	A series of groups consisting of 20 practitioners and school leaders across a variety of primary school settings in Ireland

Table 20: Modes of inquiry for this case study

Through the researchers related international paper publication (Lawrance, 2023) and conference presentation proceedings (LAI, Dublin, 2023; IAFOR, Barcelona, 2022), this study has positioned the research topic on a national and international forum. Through its impending professional development provision at local education centre level (CESC 2025), it will reach a multitude of Irish primary practitioners. Through its creation of a Padlet resource for practitioners by practitioners, launched through social media, it has further gained momentum in the Irish primary professional development stage. Through its Intouch publication (in print), this study shall be brought to the forefront of teachers awareness on a national level. Lastly, through its postdoctoral plans for individual and collaborative academic writing pursuits, this research continues to gain momentum and awareness on both a national and international basis.

6.6 Concluding Synopsis

The conclusions drawn from this study are multifaceted. The overarching conclusions answering the research questions can be viewed in detail in Appendix 35. The conclusions drawn are founded in the researchers reflection and analysis of the data and literature review consistent with this study.

Teaching is an intricate skill which requires consistent professional development, reflection and evaluation in order to maintain effective and highly effective standards, as envisioned by *Looking at our Schools* 2022 and *School Self-evaluation: Next Steps 2022-2026*. Current Irish policy presents an understanding of primary classrooms as places where children are enabled to progress at their own pace, in environments and through relationships that are supportive, engaging and inclusive. The variables associated with the achievement of this vision for the promotion of children's literacy development, within the context of twenty first century classrooms, has been outlined in this research. Professional development, professional learning communities, explicit and integrated teaching practice, the use of high quality text pieces and disciplinary literacy are the key variables which have been explored and discussed through this four-year study. With continued support, it is hoped that literacy leaders, principals, teachers, librarians and key educational stakeholders will continue to lead and support schools from strength to strength in achieving this vision.

6.7 Concluding Synopsis: Roles and Actions in Education

In light of the findings which emerged from this study, the founded, necessary and emerging roles and actions in education are apparent. In order for disciplinary literacy to become a reality in Irish primary classrooms, further support for teachers needs to be provided. Professional development in this regard is vital. Following the PDST's webinar 7, which was rolled out to schools nationwide

in Term 3 2023, the Oide service must continue to ensure that the professional development provided for practitioners continues to evolve with a DL focus. Furthermore, as seen in the results of the nationwide survey, the teachers represented are willing and wanting to participate in a professional learning community model. They are eager to develop their skillset in both DL and in the area of picturebooks. Action in this regard must be taken by educational stakeholders to ensure that a PLC model can function and operate effectively in the primary setting- this may be through a remodelling of Croke Park hours or through a revisioning of timetabling within schools. Furthermore, the role of the literacy leader within schools must be enriched through supportive measures which must include specific training and professional development which can then be imparted to all staff and empower a collaborative learning model. Further exemplars, like the initial PDST video on DL (Oide 2023), need to be created by teachers and for teachers in a functional teachers toolkit as envisioned by the *Primary Language Curriculum* in its primary toolkit for teachers (NCCA 2019). These exemplars should also include planning grids for teachers, which are adaptable to particular school settings, but contain an outline and examples of what DL planning and the use of picturebooks looks like, so that practitioners can trial this, converse on this and adapt this in their planning and preparation for teaching and learning. Through such real and operational changes, DL can become a method through which effective practice is met. Further to this, the toolkit may be enriched by taking E.D. Hirsh's approach of a *Core Knowledge Sequence*, whereby a scope and sequence or topics and themes are chosen for each class level for each subject which would prevent overlap and allow teachers the time to focus on the "*how*" of teaching, rather than the "*what*".

6.8 Concluding Synopsis: Policy

Recent Irish educational policy and curricula is cutting edge in the primary education field, particularly with the introduction of disciplinary literacy. The vision of embedding picturebooks across subjects and class levels with a DL focus in the primary setting, was examined through this study. The conclusion is that policy and curricula can be viewed and utilised with this vision in mind. With the first introduction of the concept of DL featuring in the PLC, 2019, the DES have ensured that this ideology has and will reach discussion and dissemination by primary teachers nationwide. Furthermore, with the PDST webinar 7 and the embedding of a DL approach in the PDSTs literacy in-service provision for schools, the efforts by policymakers to ensure that the transfer from policy to practice is reached is a promising reality. The exemplars provided in the *Primary Language Curriculum Teachers Toolkit* on *Critical Thinking and Booktalk* which promotes the use of picturebooks in the classroom is a promising start to the journey that picturebooks should take in the provision of support materials for teachers. Such steps by policymakers makes clear the importance of these models in the primary education profile of students. Further policy reformations must ensure that the language of disciplinary literacy not only features but is centralised in order to maximise the effectiveness of this approach. There is scope within the PCF dissemination over the coming years to further centralise DL and indeed PBs. Collaboration amongst researchers, departmental stakeholders and practitioners must ensue to enrich policy in this forum. As the INTO in their *Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment* publication (INTO 2022) advise, it is imperative that new curriculum ‘fits into’ the overall education structure. DL has a central place in this structure.

6.9 Recommendations for Practice, Policy and Research

The Department of Education's *School Self-Evaluation Next Steps September 2022-June 2026* highlights that to be truly rights-respecting, authentic, impactful and inclusive, SSE processes must actively pursue and take due account of the opinions of the students in the school and their parents. This may be in the form of surveys or focus groups. In light of this research, the next step would be to engage in detailed collaboration amongst these cohorts in order to strengthen the position of the research. Therefore, further research could focus on evaluating the impact of picture books on students' disciplinary literacy across various demographics, ensuring inclusivity and addressing the diverse needs of learners. Engaging students in discussions about picture books can also help develop critical thinking, empathy, and higher-order literacy skills across different subjects. Furthermore, it is essential to develop professional development programmes for teachers, focusing on the selection and effective use of picture books that align with subject-specific literacy goals. This can help educators make more informed decisions about integrating picture books across different subject areas, supporting students' comprehension of both content and literacy. Finally, policy initiatives should continue to embed interdisciplinary approaches into the curriculum, promoting picturebooks as versatile resources that connect literacy with subjects like science, history, and geography. These approaches will foster deeper engagement with disciplinary content.

6.10 Recommendations for Practice

The recommendations for practice shall be outlined using the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, outlining components which are relevant to this and future research and practice.

Microsystem: Classroom Environment

1. Vocabulary development through Direct Instruction: Findings from this study, highlighting the work of Mehigan (2010; 2009), illuminate the need for explicit vocabulary instruction when it comes to DL. When we consider that the rate at which children learn words in primary school varies from 2,500 to 3,000 new words per year, with sixth class students expected to have a vocabulary of 25,000 words, reaching 50,000 by the time they leave secondary school (Anderson & Nagy 1993), it is a reasonable recommendation that emphasis be afforded to how vocabulary is developed at primary level. Students need at least 15-20 exposures to a word in order for acquisition and application. This means that not only do teachers need to make sure that they are creating these opportunities to engage with the identified words, but they also need to reduce the amount of words they target for instruction. The recommendation is that only 6 to 10 words be taught directly and in depth, emphasising quality over quantity. Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013) assigned words to one of three tiers (which we see replicated in the PLC, mentioned in the Literature Review). McKeown advises that rather than choose words from a list, practitioners should look to the text students are working with as these are the words of most utility. Therefore, when choosing texts, including picturebooks, practitioners can choose 6-10 words for direct instruction, providing multiple opportunities for consolidation and application both orally and in the pupils' written compositions. These chosen words may have a DL focus depending on which discipline and for what purpose or learning outcome they are chosen to achieve.
2. DL Language Cards: This study recommends the collaboration between stakeholders and teachers to create a series of DL vocabulary rubrics per class level, to facilitate teacher

planning and instruction for DL across the class levels in Irish primary schools, taking consideration of varying settings, is essential to the success of DL. Drawing once more on Vygotsky's theory of language development, such language cards would assist both teachers and pupils in the effective target and acquisition of DL language across subjects. As shown in this study, through the use of DL Language Cards exhibited in Chapter 5, PBs are a viable and highly effective resource for teachers to use when creating such language cards. Concurring with Burke & Lehane (2023a) in their recommendation for the development of exemplars and instructional materials by practitioners and researchers, this study recommends that exemplars in the area of DL language cards be made.

3. Collaborative timetabling: The findings of this study draw attention to the timetabling issues facing practitioners across the nation. Therefore, the assignment of concrete time for teachers within their own schools to collaborate, plan, converse, evaluate and consider what they are teaching, how they are teaching it and why they are teaching it is indispensable. Such reform, requires commitment and re-envisionment from schools and school leaders and could be employed through a school self-evaluation model which monitors the approach over a three year cycle.
4. Assessment for DL: As with all aspects of literacy education, an effective assessment tool is an essential companion to any literacy model employed by a school and by practitioners. With this in mind, it would be important for educationalists to collaborate to discuss what sort of assessment tools can be created to assess DL in the primary context. This may include a literacy portfolio showcasing samples of students work on PBs and DL, or a vocabulary assessment to ascertain vocabulary development over a CKS, as proposed by Hirsch.

5. Enriching background knowledge amongst pupils: Returning to Scarborough's Reading Rope, this study recommends the importance of background knowledge in the application of DL at primary level. This is more than simply having information on a topic. An aspect to consider in this recommendation, is the social inequities caused by background knowledge gaps. Neuman (2006) expressed concerns about the effects of poverty on young children and their access to resources and experiences that build background knowledge. E. D. Hirsch (2016) has warned that the gains that can be made through effective decoding instruction in the early years can be undone by differences in access to background knowledge in later years, leading in part to "the fourth grade slump". Both call for practitioners and policy makers to think differently about our curriculum, and perhaps particularly those who work in DEIS school settings. Hirsch's *Core Knowledge Curriculum* (a core component of the conceptual framework for this study outlined in Chapter Two) focuses on content, instead of moving from topic to topic, instead students spend several weeks reading and writing as they learn about the subject area. Recent studies have shown that curricula of this type can both boost comprehension and close gaps. It is therefore recommended that a *Core Knowledge Sequence* be trialled in the Irish primary school in order to solidify the acquisition of background knowledge.
6. The use of text sets and mentor texts: Practitioners and schools must continue to ensure the balance and supply of fiction and non-fiction text pieces across all class standards in Irish primary schools. Allocating a designated period of time for all schools nationwide to stop and look at the text resources within their classrooms and how these can be spread across the school or what investments need to be made is recommended. Adding to this audit, the provision of text sets and mentor texts, such as picturebooks, should then be organised

within schools. Shanahan (2017) suggests that the answer to building background knowledge and enhancing skill development lies in the use of multiple texts. Rather than focusing on the random acts of knowledge that may come from using texts in isolation, instead practitioners should intentionally plan instruction so that they are using text sets that will engage students deeply in knowledge on a topic.

7. High expectations: Application of Gunning's (2022) *Roadmap to Closing the gap*, involving setting high expectations, setting additional time, providing explicit instruction and effective practice and using high quality teaching materials: An extensive U.S. based study of classroom instruction in grades 3-12, found that teachers' high expectations could actually close the learning gap by up to five months (TNTP 2018). This study therefore recommends that practitioners set high expectations for their learners, eliminating the thought that concepts such as DL are for second and third level students. In terms of time, Gunning (2022) makes the need for additional time very clear when he reminds us that, it is not just that this time needs to be allocated, but it needs to be protected and prioritised, so that no interruptions happen in this time. In analysis of studies, the more time spent in direct instruction, the larger the gains (Hollingsworth & Ybarra 2009; Engelmann 1980). Therefore, this study, illuminating similar findings with regard to time deficiencies, recommends that schools take the time to plan their timings, timetabling and all time aspects within the school day to exhibit ways in which time may be prioritised, accumulated and revived in order to enrich teaching and learning. As rippled throughout this study in both its literature review and findings from the research carried out, explicit teaching of DL is essential to the success of DL. So too, is the provision of high quality teaching materials to enable DL, such as the provision of picturebooks. The Padlet of

picturebooks created from the responses of participants to the nationwide questionnaire within this study (seen in Appendix 28) can be used as a reference point for teachers to accumulate such resources.

1. A picture is worth a thousand words: The Picture Word Inductive Model: This study calls for pedagogical employment and development of questions based on images, such as those contained within picture books. Such pedagogy encourages students to think about the important features in the text and encourages close reading, enabling students to focus on the key elements of questions and the vocabulary associated with answering such. Using pictures from content areas, in a DL manner, can be a great way to develop questioning, activate / retrieve background knowledge and develop sentence level skills. It further promotes active and discovery based learning which is central to the PCF. By further utilising Bloom's Taxonomy of questioning, questions based on pictures can be classified and enriched.
2. Student voice: This study recommends that practitioners consider how critical thinking across the disciplines; using picture books; can give student voice centre stage in classrooms. It calls on school leaders to examine this against the backdrop of the re-envisioned 2016: *Looking at Our Schools*, 2023, which promotes the child's voice as an imperative factor in school self-evaluation.
3. TPPTL: Similar to the INTO, in their recommendations set forth in the *Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment* (DES 2022, p.8) which reported how teachers 'regularly refer to the burdensome paperwork associated with their role and express their dissatisfaction at the diminution of creativity owing to the large amount of time devoted to (in some cases unnecessary) preparation of lengthy documents', this study calls for a

review in how paperwork is conducted in primary schools. To enhance the effectiveness of this review, the NCCA primary planning tool for schools could be further developed. In doing so, consideration should be given to the CKS, as advocated in the conceptual framework of this study. Such a model may prove useful to schools as they grapple to make purposeful changes to their planning to align with the new curriculum and the guidance on preparation for teaching and learning. Again, echoing the INTO (INTO 2022, p.7), this study calls for 'sample templates and guidance developed centrally through collaboration with the Inspectorate…helping to scaffold them as the move towards a new model of preparation and planning.'

Mesosystem: Interconnections between Microsystems

As evidenced through this study, there is huge merit in the creation of a series of professional learning communities within all primary schools nationwide which could serve as a model for school self- evaluation and continuous professional development. This study calls for Croke Park hours to be utilised for PLCs and for teachers PD to be recognised and validated on a more professional basis in terms of career development and acknowledgement of the lifelong learning which teachers engage in as part of this profession. This complements the work of Mehigan (2022) who promotes human flourishing in educational environments. With a similar perspective, the following recommendations are made to enable the success of teacher collaboration:

1. PL and PLCs: PLCs facilitate collaboration among teachers, allowing them to share resources, strategies, and insights. This collaboration directly impacts the classroom environment, enhancing the quality of instruction and student learning experiences.

Similar to the recommendations on PL set forth in the DES publication *Towards a new Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy A Review of the Literature* (2024, pp. 193-197), this study highlights the need for PL to be considered as a continuum, where a teacher's own professional knowledge develops as the teacher moves through a number of learning stages of their career and this learning must be evaluated, reflected and disseminated in order for change and evolvement to occur. The PLC is one such forum for this purpose.

2. School leadership and support: School leaders play a crucial role in establishing and supporting PL and PLCs. They provide the necessary support, resources, and professional development opportunities that enable teachers to engage in continuous improvement and collaborative planning. Through PL, school leaders should support teachers to embed literacy instruction across disciplines. Taking recommendations from Scott (2024), leaders can catapult the urgency for teachers to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to nurture broad-based and subject-specific literacy competencies. As Scott (2024) envisions, by *Cultivating Literate Citizenry Through Interdisciplinary Instruction*, school leaders can assist teachers to revisit established paradigms and pioneer a new vision for literacy education. Scott (2024) emphasises the evolving landscape of content-area and disciplinary literacy in a post-pandemic world where technology, societal shifts, and pedagogical innovations converge. Such innovations will require strong leadership in all schools nationally.
3. Interaction with librarians and other specialists: PLCs could include school librarians and other specialists who can contribute their expertise in selecting appropriate picture books and developing disciplinary literacy strategies. This collaboration would enrich the

instructional resources available to teachers. Just as the New Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy recommends on pgs. 190-193, in their *Pillar 1: Enabling Families and Communities to Support Children's Literacy Development*, with their view on the importance of parental and community involvement in the support of children's literacy, this study calls on departmental bodies and researchers to strengthen the programmes and interaction with the community and other specialists in the realisation of literacy goals.

4. Connecting Home and School: Family and Community Engagement: Through PLCs, teachers can develop strategies to involve parents and the community in supporting literacy development at home. This connection could help alleviate the bridge between school learning and home activities. Again, the *New Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy* (2024) confirms the importance of HSCL representatives, and this study calls for HSCL teachers to strengthen the links between the library, parent, school and child to enable the use of picture books to support children's literacy journey.
5. Enhanced Professional Growth and Reflective Practice: PLCs promote a culture of continuous improvement and reflective practice among teachers. This ongoing professional development would directly influence teaching effectiveness and, consequently, student outcomes. Teacher professional development, after all, is seen as a route to improved teaching worldwide, and thereby improved educational outcomes (Boylan *et al.* 2023).

While the PLCs primarily fall under the Mesosystem, they also have implications for other systems in Bronfenbrenner's model:

Exosystem: Community and School Resources

1. Community Resources and Partnerships: PLCs can extend their collaboration to include community organisations, local libraries, and other external resources, enriching the educational experiences provided to students.

Macrosystem: Cultural and Societal Influences

2. Societal Values and Educational Practices: PLCs help align teaching practices with broader societal values and educational standards, ensuring that literacy instruction is culturally relevant and inclusive.

Chronosystem: Changes Over Time

3. Adaptation and Evolution: PLCs facilitate the adaptation of teaching practices to reflect new research, developments in literacy education, and changes in societal expectations.

The recommendations shall now continue and revert back to the Mesosystem.

1. DL's evolvement in primary schools: Disciplinary teaching should continue to evolve in the Irish primary school setting. The DES must continue to elect experts in this field to work in unison with NCCA, Oide, schools and libraries on the implementation of the new curriculum. Moje's (2015) heuristic for disciplinary literacy teaching may prove a helpful guide for considering what disciplinary literacy teaching could include. This may be adopted by OIDE/NCCA/PLC personnel in the implementation of DL through a professional development for teachers model.
2. Ireland's CKS: Effective implementation of cross-curricular and thematic planning involves careful coordination and collaboration among teachers. Planning sessions should focus on identifying common themes that can be explored across different subjects, as per E.D. Hirsh's Core Knowledge Sequence. Tools such as concept maps and integrated lesson plans can help visualise and organise these connections.

3. School self-evaluation and text usage in schools: The *SSE next steps 2022-2026* could be used by schools to evaluate the text books that are used across the curriculum in respective Irish primary classrooms. Following this, the identification of key pieces that could be used to teach DL, such as picturebooks could be decided upon, used and evaluated through the SSE model. By targeting different curricular areas, the use of PBs could be greater assessed by schools.
4. The evolutionof Droichead: This study calls for a recommendation to be applied to the development of the Droichead programme (Droichead is an integrated induction framework for newly qualified teachers). This recommendation is to include a mentoring module to assist teachers in their planning for disciplinary literacy through a thematic approach. Furthermore, the model of Droichead could be expanded to establish a series of Professional Support Teams for teachers in all schools which would facilitate not only NQT's, but those teachers who require/desire collegial/expert assistance to enhance their planning and teaching.
5. PD and Summer courses for teachers: Currently there is no compulsory obligation for teachers to engage in professional development in Irish primary schools. Teachers are enticed to engage in PD of their choice during the summer with the bonus of EPV days following the completion of a summer course. As INTO, 2022, denote such a model shows the dedication of teachers to progress professionally but also results in inconsistencies in how certain pedagogies and teaching tools are taught and aligned with whole school planning. In order to progress new teaching tools such as DL and the use of PBs, it is vital that the DES define a set of principles for PD for Irish primary school teachers. Furthermore, it is imperative that questions such as the following be considered by the DE

and indeed by practitioners and school leaders: How is teachers PD being monitored/accounted? What is the function of summer courses? How are these being used? How can PD for teachers be restructured?

6. Encouraging Masters and PhD scholars: In order to bridge the gap between research and practice, the DES must encourage the creation a body of teacher-researchers. Further incentive should be put in place to encourage teachers to continue their third level education as their teaching career develops in order to become expert in their area of interest, developing their own career profile as well as sharing their expertise with staff and pupils alike. Structured programmes, such as the Structured PhD in Literacy Education conducted through MIC should be emanated and used to propel teachers to excel as professionals, taking a leading role in the development of education on both a national and international basis. As Burke (2023) denotes, the level of teacher agency is welcome, but it necessitates deep teacher knowledge of how to make research-informed decisions to support the children in their classrooms. It also means that up-to-date research findings must continue to inform the national curriculum and teacher professional development.

Exo and Macrosystem

7. Expanding the role of the local librarian: This study recommends the establishment of the role of the librarian in the school community, as per the English model, with the aim to develop partnership with school representatives and librarians to source high quality texts, initiatives, collaborative seminars and professional development in unison with these key professionals.
8. Teacher Burnout

Collaborative Planning: Create teacher teams to share lesson plans and resources, reducing individual workload and promoting a sense of community.

Streamlining Administrative Tasks: Minimise non-instructional duties through digital tools to give teachers more time for planning and teaching.

Reflection and Sharing: Schedule regular opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and share successes with colleagues, promoting professional growth and reducing isolation.

9. Wellbeing

Focus on Work-Life Balance: Ensure professional development and school activities respect teachers' time, with opportunities for relaxation and recharging.

10. Time

Collaborative Planning: Organise team-based planning sessions where teachers can share resources, lesson plans, and strategies for integrating picture books across disciplines, reducing individual workload.

Professional Development: Offer PD in manageable, bite-sized sessions to avoid overwhelming teachers and to ensure they have adequate time to reflect and apply what they've learned.

11. Resources

Leveraging Digital Platforms: Utilise digital tools like shared repositories, online resources, and curated book lists to provide teachers with easy access to materials, saving time on resource creation and planning.

Shared Resource Pools: Develop a centralised library of picture books and lesson plans aligned to the curriculum, accessible to all teachers. This can help with both resource-sharing and interdisciplinary teaching.

Picture Books as Multifunctional Resources: Encourage the use of picture books in multiple subject areas (e.g., science, history, and geography) to maximise their utility and reduce the need for separate resources.

12. Leadership

Supportive School Leadership: Ensure leaders prioritise teacher well-being and provide time for collaborative planning, reflection, and PD, including their own. Leadership should model a culture of shared responsibility and support for teacher workload management.

Encourage Collaborative Culture: Foster a school culture where leadership encourages teachers to collaborate, share resources, and reflect on practices. This can be through structured professional learning communities or regular check-ins.

13. Competencies

Targeted Professional Development: Provide differentiated PD opportunities that cater to varying levels of experience with picture books and disciplinary literacy, allowing teachers to grow at their own pace.

Coaching and Mentoring: Implement coaching or mentoring systems where more experienced teachers support their colleagues in using picture books effectively to teach disciplinary content, especially in subject areas like science or history.

Build Confidence in Disciplinary Literacy: Offer PD on disciplinary literacy practices, focusing on how to use picture books to teach the specific language, vocabulary, and thinking skills needed in different subjects. This enhances teachers' ability to incorporate them meaningfully into their lessons.

6.11 Recommendations for Policy

The recommendations for policy shall be outlined using the *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory* components which are relevant to this research.

Microsystem

1. Learning Outcomes: This study recommends that curricular learning outcomes provide precision and avoid overlaps/repetition in learning (Souto-Otero 2012). In doing so, the language afforded to the expected learning and development for children at the end of each stage necessitates careful description, and the language of DL should feature across all subject areas. Learning outcomes should be accompanied by exemplars which clearly show how the language of the learning outcomes match with teacher practice and the learning experiences designed for pupils.
2. Following the Secondary school model: The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), based in the UK published its *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools Guidance Report* in 2021. The document is based on disciplinary literacy and in it, through the seven recommendations put forward, there is specific emphasis on the positioning of disciplinary literacy in the secondary school context. A similar publication would be highly beneficial in steering the hand of DL in the primary setting in Ireland, and, in offering clear instruction and direction to practitioners. Furthermore, similar to the IDEAL project: *Improving Disciplinary Literacy through Literacy*, the creation of an Irish based project to support teachers to improve DL through Literacy could be established. In order for either of these recommendations to be fruitful, departmental investment is essential. So too would be the involvement of the LAI/NCCA/Oide.

3. Initial Teacher Education Colleges : Engaging colleagues in third level teaching colleges is essential to the success of disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks in the primary classroom setting. Targeting pre-service teachers through modular work in these areas will have a cyclical effect on future planning and preparation for teaching and learning. Suggested modules would include: (1) Explicit teacher modelling for DL (2) Explicit teacher modelling for using picturebooks across the curriculum.
4. Text-book publishers: As mentioned in the literature review, text-book publishers have a huge impact on what is taught in Irish primary schools. The creation of A Curriculum Support Toolkit per class level which supports teachers in the implementation of DL, along with specific lesson notes on using picturebooks in a DL manner, would be an important text series for publishers to pursue.
5. Literacy leaders in primary schools: Following the culling of posts of responsibility in the economic downturn of the early 10's, the re-establishment of paid posts of responsibility has been making a return in recent years. A continuation of this model, situating literacy leaders in all primary schools, as trained, key personnel, is essential for the dissemination of PD, research and best practice in relation to key areas such as disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks across the curriculum.
6. Policy makers and professional development services: Collaboration with Oide, NCCA and other key educational stakeholders who provide PD services is vital for the creation and dissemination of a series of webinars/seminars showcasing authentic teacher planning and teacher modelling sessions in the area of DL and using picturebooks at primary level. Whilst there has been an accelerated shift in the use of picturebooks by key Irish education influencers on social media and through various courses at local education centres and

webinars, a more universal approach would ensure that such key PD and teacher modelling reaches a wider cohort of practitioners nationwide.

7. Review of policy: In agreement with Burke (2024) when he outlined:

> the effects of new policies may not necessarily have a beneficial impact on literacy, at least as measured in international assessments. For example, the new primary school curriculum reduces the discrete time given to literacy weekly. The effect of this change has yet to be seen.
>
> (Burke 2024, RTE Brainstorm)

This study echoes the requirement for systematic monitoring and review of the new curriculum and in particular the amendments to time allocated for literacy. If DL is to be successful, the evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching time will warrant in-depth attention.

Mesosystem: School and Home Connection

1. Family Involvement: Schools can encourage parents to read picture books with their children at home. Teachers can provide recommendations and resources to parents, creating a bridge between school learning and home activities.

2. School Leadership: School leaders can support this connection by organising family literacy workshops that emphasise the importance of reading picture books and practicing disciplinary literacy at home.

Exosystem: Community and School Resources

1. Librarians and Community Resources: It is necessary to establish a strong partnership with school librarians and local libraries. Librarians can assist in curating a diverse collection of picture books that support disciplinary literacy and provide access to additional resources and expertise.

2. Community Engagement: Schools can engage with local businesses, museums, and other organisations to provide real-world connections to the content found in picture books, enhancing students' understanding and interest.

Macrosystem: Cultural and Societal Influences

1. Cultural Relevance: Practitioners can select picture books that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. This will help in promoting inclusivity and understanding of different perspectives within various disciplines.

2. Societal Values: Educationalists can emphasise the importance of literacy and education in society. Teachers and school leaders can advocate for policies and practices that support access to high-quality picture books and literacy programmes.

6.12 Recommendations for future research

There are a number of recommendations for further research outlined in this section. This is not an exhaustive list but rather a developing agenda. These recommendations arose through the body of this project in its data collection, analysis and reflection, through the researchers networking and conferencing as a doctoral researcher, through the researchers ongoing commitment to the literature around the topics being researched and through the researcher's post-doctoral planning. The recommendations for future research shall be outlined using the *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory* components which are relevant to this research.

Microsystem

1. Partnership with parents: Parental partnership is a central component to a successful education for pupils. The Education Act (1998) Article 22 (c) states that teachers must

collectively promote co-operation between the school and the community which it serves. A course for parents or intervention programme between the school/library based on the topics of disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks may serve to heighten the impact and effect of embedding these components within a child's educational profile.

Mesosystem

1. A future study based on DL for writing to read: Research points toward writing to improve reading (Graham & Herbert 2011) and content-area learning (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley & Wilkinson, 2004). Although beyond the scope of this project, the recommendation for future scholars sets forth that a model of writing to read be explored through a DL lens. This would involve examining the writing process, making direct links to the PLC and ascertaining how this can be used across subjects in a DL manner. In light of the findings from this research in relation to the capacity picturebooks hold for the teaching of DL, picturebooks, amongst other text types could be used in a study of this type to ascertain the quality of compositions created by students, depending on the knowledge, vocabulary and experiences acquired from chosen texts.

Exo and Macrosystem

2. Using an International model for DL: A project, similar to that of the BaCuLit project which is a *Basic Curriculum for Teachers' In-service Training in Content Area Literacy* would be a worthwhile pursuit by Irish educational bodies. This curriculum for teachers involves in-service training and a series of modules which operates by training the trainers through a compulsory professional development model, engaging participants in a long term perspective toward PD in a particular area. Through such a project, practitioners could consider how making the Irish primary curriculum more flexible would impact on teachers

planning and preparation for teaching and learning, as per the BaCuLit model- by developing flexible national versions of the English master version.

3. An Irish Representative on ELINET: The *European Literacy Policy Network* (ELINET) needs an Irish representative to contribute to policy in a European network. This body which aims
    - to improve and advocate literacy policies and practices across Europe to support all European citizens' and residents' lifelong rights to engage critically and creatively with communication and learning
    - to build and maintain a network of literacy experts (researchers, practitioners and policy makers)
    - to provide a communication platform to strengthen and foster collaboration and cooperation between different stakeholders in the field of literacy promotion,

would benefit from an Irish delegate who could collaborate on European policy and bring the results of such policies to the Irish educational sphere.

4. Longitudinal study: I recommend that research is conducted on how a model of teaching DL using picture books through the format of a longitudinal study from Junior infants to sixth class in an Irish primary school, compares to a school not using this approach.
5. A continuation of this research: Phase 5: The PLC groups from this study which formulated Phase 4 of this research could, if willing, could move forward to formulate a Phase 5 research piece, where groups meet with various representatives, as outlined in Table 21 below.

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
PLC groups to meet with internal staff in each respective school	PLC groups meet with NCCA representative	PLC groups meet with Oide Advisor	PLC groups meet with local librarians	PLC groups meet with child representatives from each respective school	PLC groups meet with parent representatives from each respective school

Table 21: Phase 5 Model

This phase would be a robust study which would enable a circle table series of discussions aligning perspectives and enabling forward planning on the topics at hand.

6.13 Returning to the conceptual framework

The conceptual framework drawn upon to lay the foundations for this research was multi-layered, mirroring the multi-layers within this project. Four main frameworks were employed: (1) Vygotsky's theory of language, (2) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, (3) Cultural literacies, (4) Academic literacies. This study was formulated through the researcher's participation in the Structured PhD in Literacy Education at Mary Immaculate College. As language is a key component of literacy, the incorporation of Vygotsky's theory of language seemed innate. Further spurred on by the importance of language in the topics of DL and PB's, the theory was advanced and embedded. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was employed for its acknowledgement that the choices made by teachers, educational stakeholders and other governing adults who have an impact on children's education, effects the child in a number of ways. The microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem were three of the circles which were drawn upon during the focus of this study. Cultural literacies saw the proposal of a structured approach to curricular reform through a supposition of Hirsch's *Core Knowledge Sequence* as a model for discoursing and implementing a pre-planned method of curricular design to map to the NCCA's

Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2023). Finally, academic literacies was a conceptual framework which was drawn upon to acknowledge the prime position that DL takes in the academic literacies forum and its importance which has now and is being transcended to primary school level.

6.14 Contribution to knowledge

This study sought to contribute to the knowledge base of literacy education in the Irish primary setting. The contributions made through the research area, through the innovative methodological approach afforded by the study and through the adoption of a unique interpretive stance shall now be outlined.

This study has contributed to knowledge in the research areas of disciplinary literacy at primary level by:

- exhibiting the language necessary for teaching disciplinary literacy at primary level

- illuminating the resources needed to effectively teach DL at primary level

-showing the capacity for use of picturebooks in the primary classroom and the use of picturebooks for disciplinary literacy

-outlining the place for DL in teacher planning and the place for picturebooks in teacher planning

-exploring the collaborative opportunities for librarians with schools to support DL and picturebooks in the primary classroom

-considering the transfer of policy into practice from the viewpoint of policy makers and that of practitioners in terms of DL and PBs in an era of Irish curricular reform.

The innovative methodological approaches adopted through the studies four-phase data collection model, led to the contribution of knowledge outlined in the discussion of the findings of this research and in the conclusions and recommendations that follow. The case study methodology was used to launch the four phase data collection which uniquely gathered the views of practitioners, librarians and key educational stakeholders on topics which are contemporary in the Irish primary classroom setting.

As outlined in the Introductory Chapter, through the researchers path to the research question and further surmounted in Chapter Two through the outline of the researchers positionality, ontological and epistemological perspectives, this study has contributed to knowledge through the adoption of a unique interpretive stance. This study further positions the *Looking at our Schools 2022* document, *Cosán* framework and *Guidelines on the Preparation for Teaching and learning* (NCCA 2021) in the context of disciplinary literacy and using picturebooks in the primary classroom. It explores the PLC and PCF at a pinnacle point of curricular change in Ireland, contributing to knowledge at a unique interpretative stance amongst its participants. It gives a voice to practitioners, librarians, school leaders, INTO, NCCA, PDST, CBI and LAI in relation to PBs, DL and TPPTL at this point in time.

6.15 Limitations of the Study

As with any study, this study was not without its limitations. The practitioners, key educational stakeholders and librarians largely self-selected themselves to participate in the professional learning communities, survey and semi-structured interviews. This suggests the possibility that they were motivated by the opportunity to express their own views about the topics being researched. Other participants might well have communicated different perceptions drawn from

their own experiences and views. The limitations of these findings include the fact that they were based on what practitioners, key educational stakeholders and librarians reported and their subjective perceptions. A more thorough study of a wider cohort of practitioners, librarians and key educational stakeholders is necessary to more precisely ascertain the extent to which these findings can be objectively confirmed.

Another limitation within this study is the fact that the data was gathered at a fixed point in time eliciting educationalists experiences of disciplinary literacy, the use of picture books and teacher planning at a period of curricular reform in the Irish primary education system. It did not draw on educationalists experiences of other models such as using multi-modal texts or poetry or e-texts for disciplinary literacy. While the data gathered was informing in many respects, a longitudinal study would have permitted the collection of data from a greater number of educationalists over a longer period of time, possibly involving a greater number of models. While this approach would have provided interesting data, it was considered beyond the scope of this study.

The inclusion of pupils' voice would have enriched the study. It would be of interest and important to hear what children would say about the topics of disciplinary literacy and the use of picturebooks in the classroom. However, the work involved in organising large number of schools to take part in the project, in addition to the four phases which led to an in depth account from the adult perspective, combined to afford me insufficient opportunity to engage with the pupils. Furthermore, with the disciplinary literacy webinar coming on stream for practitioners in Term 3 2023, it was considered that pupils may be more well equipped to converse about this topic in the future once it is introduced to the classroom.

Despite these limitations, I believe this research contributes to the landscape and understanding of disciplinary literacy and the use of picture books in primary classrooms in Ireland in an important way which had not previously been studied to the same degree of detail.

6.16 Concluding Reflection

In silent pages, colours dance,
A story told at just one glance,
A thousand words within a frame,
Where pictures speak, and none the same.

For children, eager eyes alight,
In picturebooks, they find their flight,
A world of knowledge, vast and bright,
Unfolding softly in their sight.

Each image, rich with tales untold,
A tapestry of hues and gold,
From forests deep to oceans wide,
Their minds set sail on every tide.

A lion’s roar, a starry night,
A hero’s quest, a dragon’s flight,
With every turn, a new delight,
Expanding thoughts in purest light.

Through pictures, words begin to grow,
A seed of thought they come to know,
From stethoscope to butterfly,
Their vocab blooms, they question why.

A thousand words, a single glance,

A timeless, vibrant, vivid dance,

In picturebooks, young hearts are stirred,

For every picture paints a word.

(Lawrance 2024)

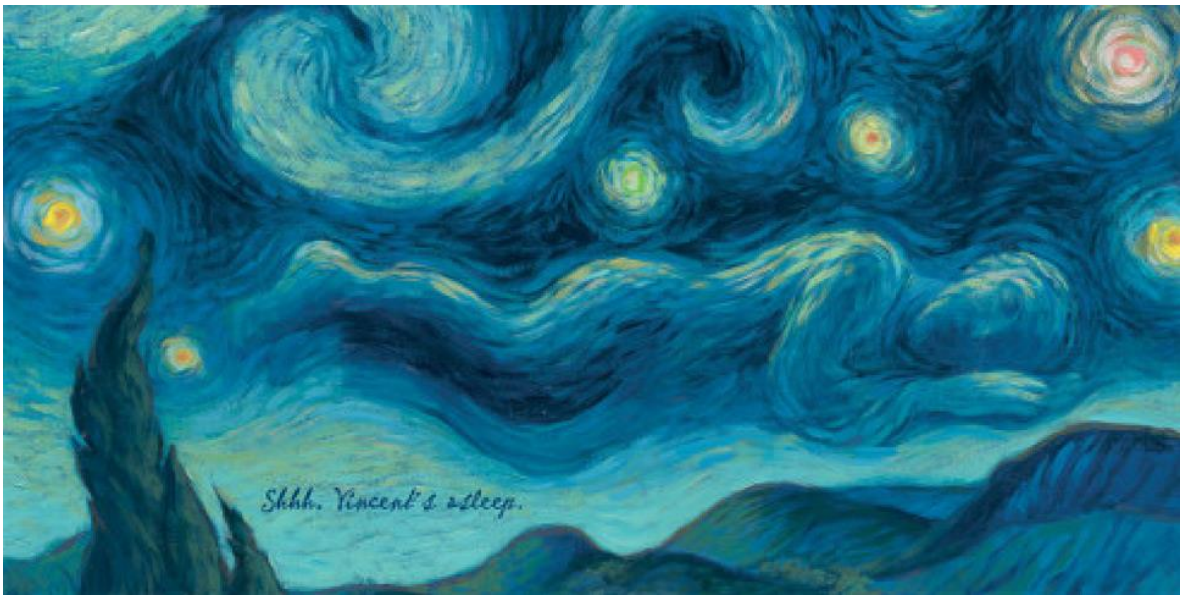


Image 22: Vincent Can't Sleep: Van Gogh Paints the Night Sky, by Barbara Rosenstock (Author), Mary GrandPre (Illustrator

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APPENDICES

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Chapter One Appendices

APPENDIX 8: DISCIPLINARY LITERACY IN THE CONFERENCING FORUM: 22ND EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON LITERACY, DUBLIN, 2022

Researcher/s and geographical location	***Topic presented***
Sari Sulkunen (Finland); Dorothee Gaile, Christine Garbe and Yvonne Hormann (Germany) and Minna-Ritta Luuka, Hilkka Paldanius & Johanna Saario (Finland)	ELINET symposium on teachers' professional development in disciplinary literacy
Leslie Rush, Jodi Patrick Holschuh, Jodi Lampi & Todd Reynolds (United States)	Say Something Interpretive: A disciplinary approach for reading literary texts
Ariana-Stance Vacaretu and Maria Kovacs (Romania)	The GROWE model of developing disciplinary literacy and social-emotional skills
Paul Flynn, Gerry Mac Ruairc and Art O' Neachtain (Ireland)	Disciplinary literacy in Initial Teacher Education: Content Area Frameworks Matter
Patrick Burke and Eithne Kennedy (Ireland)	Disciplinary literacy in primary and post-primary schools: Findings from a multi-phase mixed methods study with Irish teachers
William Brozo (United States)	Identifying the disciplinary literacy practices in the Content Classrooms: Possibilities and Challenges
Laurie O Campbell, Mary E. Little and Enrique A. Puig	Transdisciplinary literacies: New directions in broad spectrum learning and instruction
Rachelle Savitz and Britnie Delinger Kane (United States)	Culturally sustaining pedagogy and disciplinary literacy: tensions and supports

APPENDIX 9: PICTUREBOOKS IN CONFERENCING, 22ND EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON LITERACY 2022, DUBLIN

Researcher and country of origin	***Topic presented***
Katrina O' Connell (US)	Diverse and inclusive picture book read-aloud requirement: Impact on Pre-Service and Classroom Teachers
Christina Sturm and Martin Gries (Germany)	'The Flaming Fox': Reading Promotion with Not-for-profit Billingual Picture Books
Geraldine Balzer (Canada) and Eleni Louloudi (Germany)	Re-Envisioning Picture Books for Social Justice Education in Advanced Audiences: A Critical Literacy Perspective from Canada
Rowan Oberman and Ben Mallon (Ireland)	Picturebooks as multimodal vehicles for human rights explorations
Marie Luise Rau (Germany)	Diversity in picturebooks stories for young children: continuity and significant changes in form and content since the 1970s
Lory Haas, Macie Kerbs, Christina Hammons, Corinna Cole and Vickie Mitchell (US)	Building literacy through visual storytelling: Putting words to wordless books and Animation
Shabnam Moini Chaghervand and William Bintz (US)	Using a Picturebook Study to Suport Student inquiry in an 8th Grade English language Arts (ELA) Classroom

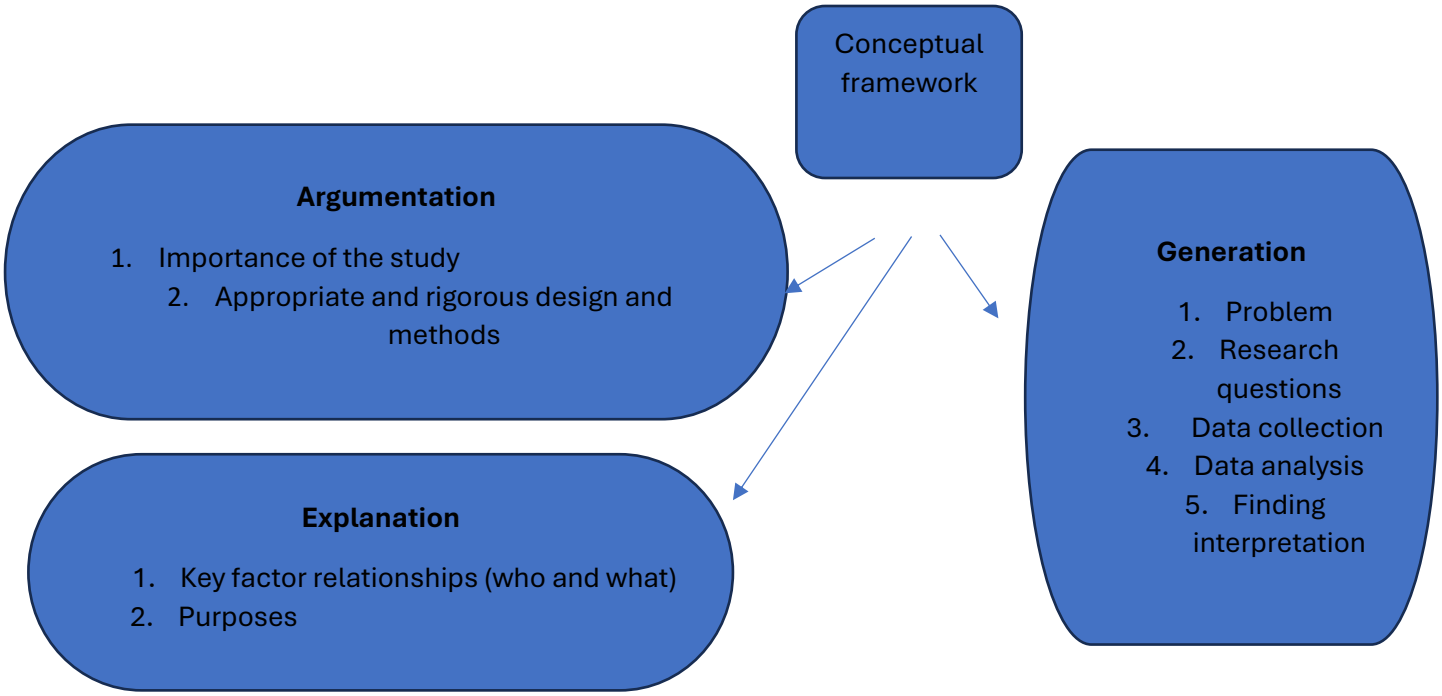
APPENDIX 10: LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOL 2022: KEY PRINCIPLES RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH

Key principal from Looking at our School 2022	**Main component of key principal**	**Main component of key principal linked to this research**
Importance of quality teaching	Cosán, the national framework for teachers' learning, positions pupils' learning as central and recognises the importance of quality teaching, viewing excellence in teaching as the most powerful influence on pupil achievement. It acknowledges the pedagogical skills required to enable high-quality learner experiences and outcomes.	Such was the aim of the PLC's which were formulated as part of this research which further embodies the vision set forth in the document to promote a culture of reflection, improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment.
Schools as learning organisations	The quality framework views schools as dynamic learning organisations, where teachers are enabled to work and learn individually and collectively to build their professional capacity in order to support continuous improvement in learning and teaching.	Such was the aim of the PLC's which were formulated as part of this research. Reflection: Effective teachers and leaders reflect on practice and on their learning, either individually or collectively, and improve as a result. The framework can be used: ● as a tool for teachers' and leaders' self-reflection and as a support in the development of their own teaching and leadership capacity
Contribution of external and internal evaluation to school improvement	The quality framework sees external and internal evaluation as complementary contributors to school improvement	Such was the aim of the PLC's which were formulated as part of this research. ● to provide a structure for peer-reflection within schools, among teachers and leaders in different schools and in communities of professional practice ● as a talking point to generate discussion and analysis of learning and teaching and

		leadership within the school community

Chapter Two Appendices

APPENDIX 11: PURPOSES OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND THE RELATION TO THIS STUDY



Purposes of conceptual frameworks

The **argumentation** for this study is twofold- the concept is important because the entire premise of disciplinary literacy has only recently emerged in the Irish primary context through the introduction of the concept in the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA, 2019) and teachers and school leaders are at the cusp of building an awareness and understanding of the topic. Therefore, research around the subject area is warranted. Secondly, the four - phase design of the research, through the appropriate adoption of the case study methodology, is a rigorous approach to assist educationalists in deciphering how and why disciplinary literacy can and should feature in their preparation for teaching and learning.
The **explanation** for this study is stresses the relationship among 'who' and 'what' will be studied. In this case, it is teachers, key educational stakeholders (INTO, PDST, NCCA, LAI, CBI) and librarians (both in Ireland and the UK) which are 'the who' being studied and the concept of disciplinary literacy, teacher planning and the use of picturebooks in the primary setting is 'the what' being deliberated. The purpose of the research is to examine the position of

picturebooks in the teaching of disciplinary literacy, ascertaining the place for DL in teacher's planning and exploring how DL will transpire from policy and academic research to actual classroom practice. The relationship between policy and practice is manifested through the participants - on one side there are the policy-makers and on the other are the practitioners working in primary classroom settings.
The **generation** of this study is set forth through the identification of the problem- *Is a picture worth a thousand words? An investigation into the use of picturebooks to support the teaching of disciplinary literacy in the primary setting*. This problem, identified by the researcher, partly manifesting from her experience in the field, as detailed in Chapter 1, spurred forward through the identification of a series of embedded research questions and an identification of a gap in the current research field, given this relatively recent area of study. It was subsequently generated through the data collection as featured in Chapter Four, the data analysis set forth in Chapter 5 and the interpretation of findings described concurrently.

APPENDIX 12: COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE PLC-ADAPTED FROM ROBERTS, 2003, CHPT. 1, P. 7-8

Key component	**Characteristics**
Reflective dialogue	conversations that focus on teaching behaviours and learning outcomes to encourage teachers to discuss their teaching practices and collaborate on how they can be improved.
Focus on student learning	ongoing conversations and decision making about curriculum, teaching, and learning that concentrate on student outcomes.
Interaction among teacher colleagues	encourage teachers to share ideas, learn from one another, and help their colleagues.
Collaboration	teachers share instructional strategies and techniques, make decisions about instructional issues, and come up with ideas that enhance learning for all members of the school community.
Shared values and norms	members of the professional community have reached agreement about the mission of their school and the values and norms that are to shape their behaviours as professionals.

APPENDIX 13: SUPPORTIVE MEASURES FOR TEACHERS (ADAPTED FROM NCCA, 2010 P. 32)

Promote professional development, allow time, expand teaching methodologies, improve resourcing, reduce textbook learning, give autonomy.

Promote professional development among teachers – provide time for teachers to talk and share good practice, and to disseminate teacher knowledge and expertise (e.g. through creation of learning communities as in Scotland and New Zealand)	Allow time for teachers to adopt new ideas and practices, and to identify with the aims of the curriculum	Expand the range of teaching methodologies and assessment tools (e.g. through curriculum in action websites, or the development of a 'Thinking Skills Programme' as in Singapore)
Improve the resourcing of teaching and learning materials (e.g. Scotland's intranet for education - 'Glow', or Singapore's Master Plan for Information Technology in Education)	Encourage teachers to reduce reliance on textbook learning (e.g. through greater use of ICT, or by making materials available in a range of media, such as in Korea's Education Broadcasting System)	Give greater autonomy to schools and teachers in planning learning for their own schools, taking local needs into account (e.g. allowing local timetabling decisions, as in Sweden, or in giving schools more curriculum control, as in Korea).

APPENDIX 14: KEY COMPETENCES THROUGH THE LENS OF DISCIPLINARY LITERACY AND PICTUREBOOKS

Key competency	Disciplinary literacy	Picturebooks
Being creative	The focus is on 'clarifying and expressing ideas' (NCCA, p.8). These skills as required across the disciplines. Proficiency in these skills comes from practice and transfer/application to other situations. This may be afforded through a DL approach.	'As children develop this competency, they come to understand that creative activity involves enjoyment…critical thinking and reflection' (NCCA, p.8). These are attributes commonly associated with picturebooks (Roche, 2015).
Being an active citizen	'This competency fosters within children the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions that motivate and empower them' (NCCA, p.8). DL offers a mode through which these attributes can be enhanced, connected and applied across different subjects.	'helps children question, critique and understand what is happening in the world' (NCCA, p.8). Again, a critical thinking approach which stimulates and enhances comprehension and oral language abilities.
Learning to be a learner	'This competency helps children to develop themselves as a learner, individually and with others. It promotes the development of the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions needed for being an active, agentic learner as well as learning with others' (NCCA, p.8) DL, with its explicit teaching approach, reflects the vision set forth in the development of this competency.	'It involves finding out about and making sense of people, things and places around them and in the wider world. Through developing this competency, children also learn to reflect on their learning. This competency taps into and nurtures children's innate curiosity and involves having opportunities to interact, to investigate, to question and wonder.' (NCCA, p.8) Picturebooks offer a child-friendly mode of learning about people, things and places, encouraging them to reflect, question and wonder. This mode of thinking can be applied across subjects as the language of the disciplines is explored.
Fostering wellbeing	'It fosters self-awareness and promotes the importance of	'This supports their ability to deal with the normal challenges of life,

	children seeing themselves as capable and resourceful.' DL promotes self-awareness/metacognition as they begin to confidently, capably and resourcefully use the language of a discipline and apply it to another.	become resilient and cope in a variety of situations and circumstances' (NCCA, p. 8). PDST's Picturebooks for Wellbeing (2020) complement this vision.
Communicating and using language	'Children need to be able to communicate and connect with others, in order to participate in wider society, share meaning and develop new knowledge' (NCCA, p.8) DL prepares children to function and participate in society.	'…involves children engaging purposefully in the creation and exploration of different text types including spoken, print and electronic formats.' (NCCA, p.8) Picturebooks can be explored through spoken, print and electronic formats.
Being mathematical	'When opportunities for using mathematics across the curriculum are identified, children can transfer their mathematical knowledge and skills to contexts outside the mathematics classroom. These opportunities help children recognise how mathematical knowledge and skills can be applied to other curriculum areas and the wider world, enriching children's experiences' (NCCA, p. 9) The transfer of skills across subject areas is identifiable here as is the premise of DL.	This competency supports children to develop and apply mathematical thinking to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. For many children, the abstract and mathematical thinking may prove difficult. Picturebooks that deal with mathematical concepts in a child-friendly way may help to bridge this gap (See section re. Mary Roche and Teachers' Toolkit below).
Being a digital learner	'As children develop this competency, their confidence in using a range of digital technology to harness their imagination and expand their creative thinking and creative expression increases' (NCCA, p.9) Digital technology is used across many subject areas in primary school.	'Being a digital learner fosters children's ability to collaborate and thrive in a world increasingly immersed in technology' (NCCA. P.9) Picturebooks can offer an escapism from a digitally emersed society or can complement this ideology through online picturebook readalouds.

APPENDIX 15: COMPARING CONTENT AREA LITERACY WITH DISCIPLINARY LITERACY (ADAPTED FROM LEARNING SCIENCES INTERNATIONAL, 2019)

Content-Area Literacy Instruction . . .	**Disciplinary Literacy Instruction . . .**
-Highlights and privileges foundational underlying cognitive processes (e.g., making connections, inferencing, summarising, visualising, and so on) that may be similar across disciplines -Introduces general comprehension strategies that can be applied across content-area and disciplinary boundaries -Supports the effective reading of textbooks and pedagogical materials primarily used in schools -Values text primarily as a source of information to be learned -Focuses on the instruction of general academic language for wide reading success -Focuses on the acquisition of content area knowledge	-Highlights the specialised ways of reading, writing, and communicating unique to each discipline -Utilises interactive approaches to reading and writing to help support students in adopting the habits of mind and ways of working associated with each disciplinary subfield -Supports the effective reading of primary sources and age-appropriate authentic texts valued by each disciplinary community -Values text primarily as a model for how experts create, share, and use knowledge in the discipline -Focuses both on general academic language and the more specialised vocabulary and grammatical features associated with each discipline -Focuses on authentic inquiry and the creation and use of knowledge in discipline-specific ways

APPENDIX 16: PLC PAGE 48, PARAGRAPHS 1 & 2

PLC page 48 paragraph 1	**PLC page 48 paragraph 2**
Cross-curricular and disciplinary literacy Learning, language and literacy are closely intertwined. The tools provided by language support learning in a way that extends across and beyond the school day. Looking across the curriculum, we can see that important concepts, dispositions and skills influence how we communicate in different subjects. For example, explaining a food chain in science requires vocabulary and language structures that are quite different to those used to describe the elements present in a musical composition. The texts we associate with the visual arts can be contrasted with the print-based text structures children might encounter in a novel. Comprehending a primary source in history requires skills that are different to those needed to appreciate a poem.	Disciplines communicate in different ways. Teaching language and literacy throughout the curriculum, in a manner that supports thinking and learning in different subjects, is termed disciplinary literacy. Learning in other curriculum areas offers rich potential for the meaningful and critical application of language and literacy skills. Engaging children in inquiry in another subject gives an authentic context for development in oral language, reading and writing. Planning for, and teaching language in this way supports both linguistic development and understanding of a discipline. The Primary Language Curriculum encourages the integration of language and subject-based learning across the school day, week and year.

APPENDIX 17: PLC LEARNING OUTCOMES WHICH HIGHLIGHT ACROSS THE CURRICULUM, TOPIC-SPECIFIC LANGUAGE AND CURRICULUM BASED TOPICS.

Reading: Stage 4, LO9: Comprehension	**Reading: Stage 3: LO 7: Purpose, genre and voice**	**Reading: Stages 3 & 4: LO 2: Motivation and choice**
Choose, justify, and apply comprehension strategies to engage with text in a variety of genres across the curriculum, independently or collaboratively, and continue to draw on background knowledge.	Respond to the aesthetic, creative, and imaginative aspects of a wide range of texts in various genres across the curriculum and defend their preferences and opinions.	Choose, read and critically respond to texts in a range of genres and languages across the curriculum for pleasure, interest and specific purposes.
Oral Language: Stage 4: LO 5: Vocabulary	**Oral language: Stages 1 & 2: LO11: Information giving, explanation and justification**	**Oral language: Stage 3: LO 3: Social conventions and awareness of others**
Critically select and use a wide-ranging, complex oral vocabulary, phrases and figurative language for familiar, abstract and subject-specific concepts and topics, as appropriate to audience and purpose.	Supply, explain and justify points of information to familiar and unfamiliar audiences using topic-specific language.	Use language flexibly and with empathy while initiating, sustaining and engaging in conversations on personal and curriculum-based topics.

APPENDIX 18 PICTUREBOOK PADLETS

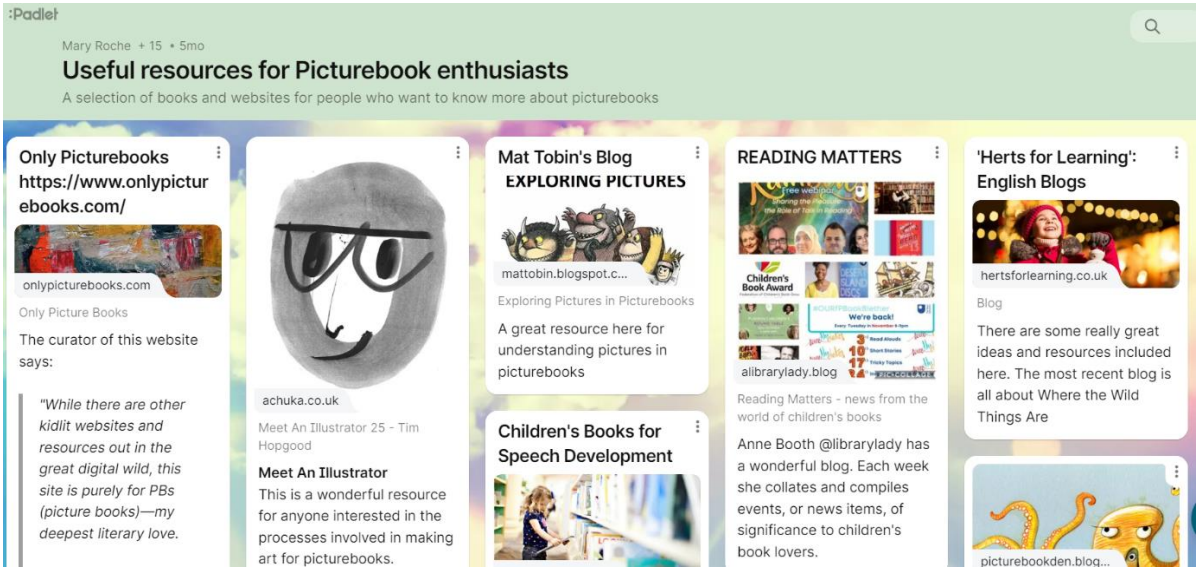


Figure 33: Mary Roche Picturebook Padlet

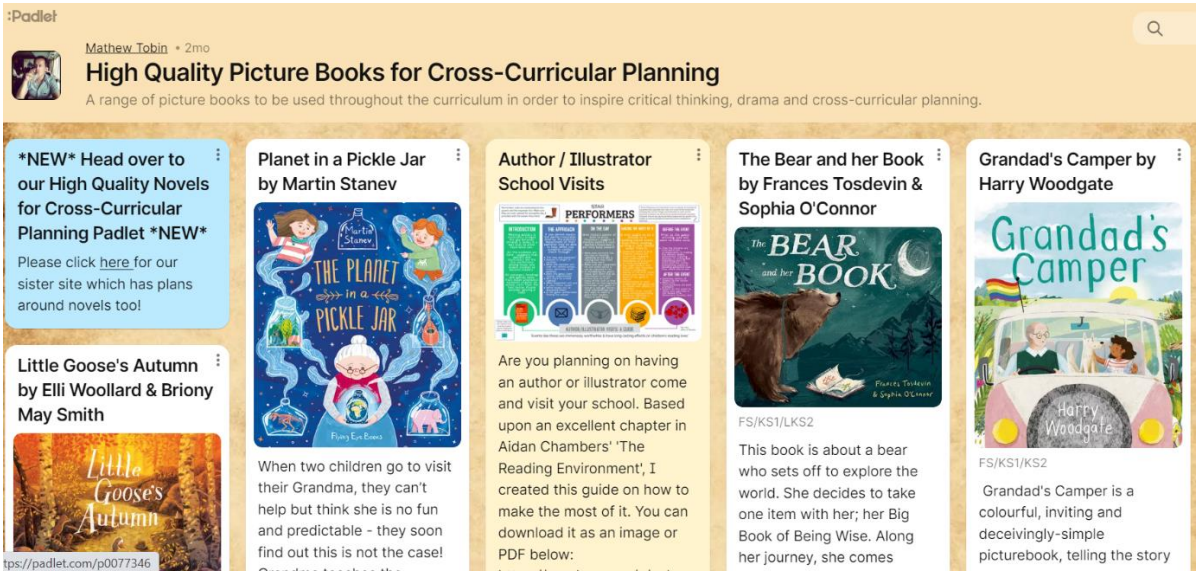


Figure 34: Mathew Tobin Picturebook Padlet

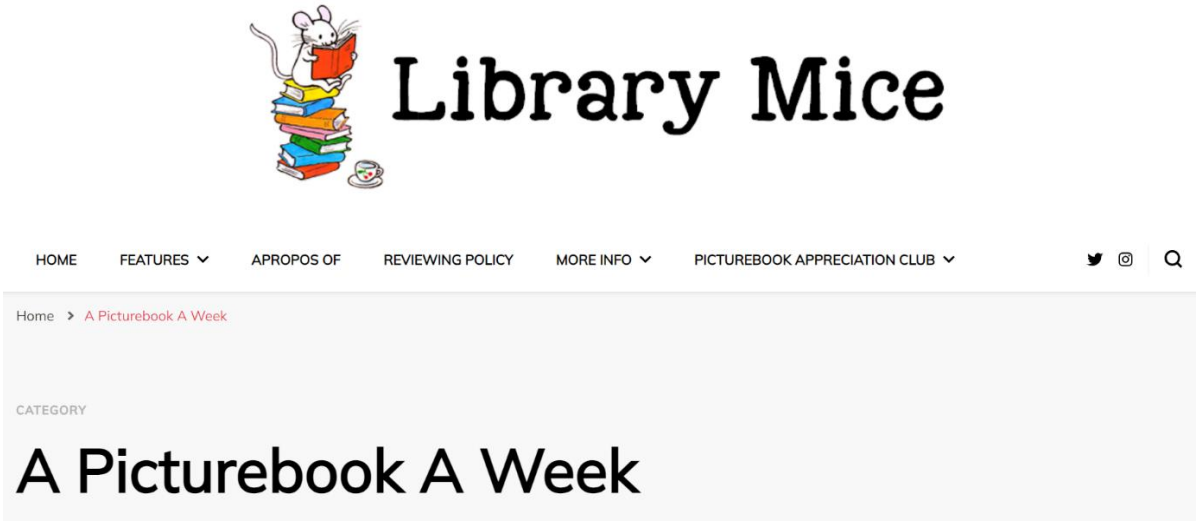


Figure 35: Library Mice (Melanie McGilloway, librarian, UK)

Conference Presentations

- Dolan, A. M. (2013) *Making development issues accessible for children through picture books*. IASSEE Annual Conference Meeting the Challenges of a Globalised world. June 20th and 21st.
- Dolan, A. (2013) Picturebooks and development education, Geographical Association (Primary Geography) Presented at Charney Manor Geography Conference, Oxford.
- Dolan, A M. (2012) 'The Potential of Picture Books for Teaching Migration as a Geographical Theme. *33rd IBBY International Congress : Crossing Boundaries: Translations and Migrations* 23rd -26th August 2012, Imperial College, London.
- Dolan, A. M. (2011) 'You , Me and Diversity': The potential of picture books for teaching development and intercultural education. DICE Annual Conference: *You, Me and Diversity*, 25th and 26th November, 2011.
- Dolan, A. M. (2011)' Picture Story Books and the Futures Dimension in Primary Geography. Primary Geography Conference (Geographical Association). Charney Manor, Oxfordshire. England. *Geography in the revised primary curriculum: looking forward.* February 25th -27.th
- Dolan, A. M . (2011) 'Windows on the World: Use of picture books for teaching geography'. IASSEE Conference: Learning for the 21st Century, From Research to Practice. 4-5th of February, 2011, St.Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
- Dolan, A. M. (2010) 'Teaching primary geography through the medium of picture story books'. Primary Geography Conference (Geographical Association). Charney Manor, Oxfordshire. England. *Geography in the revised primary curriculum: looking forward.* February 19th – 21st

Figure 36: Anne Dolan conference presentations on picturebooks

APPENDIX 19 WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS

Figure 37: Wordless picturebooks by Aaron Becker & Daivid Weisner

APPENDIX 20: BOOKS FOR DEVELOPING CRITICAL LITERACY AND THEMES OF DIVERSITY: BOOK SUMMARY AND SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL (CALLOW, 2017)

The Little Refugee by Anh Do and Suzanne Do, illustrated by Bruce Whatley	The true story of Anh Do's perilous journey across the oceans from Vietnam to Australia as a young child. The cultural challenges he finds in his new home are treated with humour and insight in both the written text and the illustrations. (Grades 3–4)
Mirror by Jeannie Baker	This award-winning book is unique in that it simultaneously tells two stories about growing up—one about a boy in Australia and the other about a boy in Morocco—using only pictures. The pages fold outward from the centre of the book, inviting comparison and reflection on how life in different cultures can be very different but also quite similar. (Grades 3–6)
The Treasure Box by Margaret Wild, illustrated by Freya Blackwood	Using a range of pencil and ink drawings as well as collage, this story tells of Peter and his father fleeing their war-torn home, taking with them an iron box containing his father's precious book about his family's life and culture. Many years after the war, Peter returns to seek the hidden treasure box. This is a powerful story of loss and resilience. (Grades 3–6)
The Arrival by Shaun Tan	Shaun Tan's award-winning wordless picture book powerfully yet gently invites readers on an immigrant's journey of leaving his family and traveling to a new and very different land. Like an old photo album from another world, Tan's sepia images convey the trials and challenges of one man's arrival in a new home. (Grades 4–9)

Chapter Four Appendices

APPENDIX 21: CASE STUDY RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS-ADAPTED FROM BASSEY (1999) FROM IDEAS DEVELOPED IN CHAPTER 6

1. What kind of an educational case study is this?
2. Is this an empirical enquiry conducted within a localized boundary of space and time?
3. Does it examine interesting aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system?
4. Is it set mainly in its natural context and with an ethic of respect for persons?
5. Does it inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners, policy-makers, and/or theoreticians?
(6-12) Were sufficient data collected for the researcher to be able
6. to explore significant features of the case?
7. to create plausible interpretations?
8. to test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations?
9. to construct a worthwhile argument or story?
10. to relate the argument to the literature?
11. to convey convincingly to an audience this argument or story?
12. Is there a case record which could provide an audit trail that other researchers could use to validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments?

APPENDIX 22: HARTEY'S CASE STUDY MODEL ALIGNED WITH THIS CASE STUDY MODEL-ADAPTED FROM HARTLEY 1994

	Order outlined by Hartey		**Order specific to this study**
Step 1	Researchers must identify an 'instance', which could be the introduction of a new way of working, the way an organisation adapts to a new role, or any innovation or stage of development in an institution.	Step 1	The introduction of disciplinary literacy into Irish curricula, teacher's planning and preparation for teaching and learning and the exploration of the position of picture books as a tool for use across the curriculum in a disciplinary literate way.
Step 2	Evidence has to be collected. This should be conducted systematically, the relationship between variables studied and the investigation methodically planned.	Step 2	Four phases of data collection, each phase impacting on the next.
Step 3	Case study researchers aim to identify the key features of organisations and individuals, to identify or attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work, to show how they affect the implementation of systems and influence the way an organisation functions. These processes may remain hidden in an alternative research methodology.	Step 3	Broader macro level – open ended questionnaires, survey and semi-structured interviews with representatives from practitioners, key professional bodies and librarians in Ireland and the UK.
Step 4	Data analysis and presentation of findings	Step 4	Data analysis and presentation of findings

APPENDIX 23: ESSENTIAL AND FLEXIBLE ASPECTS OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH (JONISDOTTIR ET. AL 2018)

	Aspect of Case Study Research	**Characteristics**	**Application to this study**
Essential aspects:	Unit of analysis is a bounded case, in its real-life context Use multiple sources of data (qualitative or mixed) Transparency of the output/report	Clear description of a case and its context - but its definition may change during the research process. Observations, documents, interviews, archival records, physical context and/or artefacts. All decisions and actions in the research process are made explicit for the readers	This study provides a clear description of the case and its context and uses multiple sources of data. It further details all actions in the research process in a readable manner.
Aspects that are Flexible:	Paradigmatic stance Research question Selection of case(s) Types of case study Data analysis methods	Post-positivism, constructivism, pragmatism, other How, why, what….? Multiple approaches and rationales Based on number of cases, purpose of study, case selection, or disciplinary orientation Many strategies to choose from	This study outlines the constructivist and interpretivist approaches adopted by this study. It provides multiple approaches and rationales through its conceptual and theoretical frameworks as well as positioning outlined in Chapter Two.

APPENDIX 24: STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED FOR THE STUDY FROM JONISDOTTIR'S MODEL

Strengths:
1. **Contextual Understanding:** Case study research provides a contextualised understanding of a specific setting. In this research, where the educational context is essential, the flexibility of case study design allowed for a nuanced exploration of how educational factors intersect.
2. **Richness and Depth:** The flexibility of case study research allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena. In this study, this was particularly beneficial when studying sophisticated issues such as disciplinary literacy and the integration of picture books in the Irish primary classroom context, as it facilitated a detailed analysis of the multifaceted factors at play.
3. **Holistic Examination:** The flexible and essential nature of case study research allows the researcher to consider various aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. In this case, examining the opinions of teachers, librarians, and key educational stakeholders requires a holistic approach, considering varied perspectives within the Irish primary education system.
Challenges:
1. **Resource Intensive:** Case studies can be resource-intensive, requiring significant time and effort. In the context of this research, which involved multiple stakeholders, the flexibility of case study design demanded careful resource management.
2. **Subjectivity:** The interpretive nature of case study research means that the researcher's subjective interpretation plays a significant role and this can introduce potential bias. Own perspectives must be considered when collecting and interpreting data.
3. **Generalisability:** Since case studies often focus on specific contexts, it might be challenging to generalise findings to broader populations. This is a consideration in informing broader educational policies.

APPENDIX 25: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DATA COLLECTION- ADAPTED FROM DUDOVSKIY (2016)

Advantages of observation data collection	**Disadvantages of observation data collection**
• direct access to research phenomena • high levels of flexibility in terms of application and generating a permanent record of phenomena to be referred to later. • can be structured or unstructured. • data collection may be conducted using specific variables and according to a pre-defined schedule • data may be conducted in an open and free manner in a sense that there would be no pre-determined variables or objectives.	• longer time requirements • high levels of observer bias • impact of observer on primary data, in a way that presence of observer may influence the behaviour of sample group elements. • may be associated with certain ethical issues such as fully informed consent. • the behaviour of sample group members may change with negative implications on the level of research validity if they are notified about the presence of the observer.

APPENDIX 26: PUNCH AND OANCEA'S CASE STUDY V'S THIS STUDY, ADAPTED FROM PUNCH AND OANCEA (2014 P. 153-155)

Punch and Oancea	**This study**
Case study is imperative in situations where our knowledge is shallow, fragmentary, incomplete or non-existent	The knowledge of DL in the primary setting is shallow, fragmentary, incomplete and in many instances non-existent
We can learn from the study of a particular case. The case may be unusual, unique or not yet understood therefore building an in-depth understanding of the case is worthwhile.	There are many who can learn from this case study, predominantly teachers, librarians, researchers and educational stakeholders. The case is unusual in that it examines DL as a new concept in teacher planning and also explores the place of picture books across the curriculum in relation to DL. It is also unique in that it concentrates on a variety of school settings, comparing the views of practitioners from mixed and single sex schools and urban and rural schools. All of these factors are yet to be understood by educationalists and researchers.
The 'exemplary knowledge' of case study may form a basis for connection with the experiences of participants and indeed readers of the research.	Exemplary knowledge was constructed with the participants through this case study research. The research was consciously presented in a teacher-friendly manner at all times, fostering organic connection with participants.
The case may give understanding to aspects of a new or problematic area of research. The discovery of important features and development of an understanding and conceptualisation of them, is often best achieved through case study.	This case provides much understanding on how DL may transfer into actual classroom practice. So too, it presents how picture books may be used as a tool to successfully teach the language associated with DL.
The case study contributes to other research approaches by fleshing things out in a way that is not possible using other techniques.	The PLC model allowed for the organic 'fleshing out' of the topics of DL, teacher planning and the use of picture books in the classroom. This work may contribute to future studies in this area, perhaps using differing methods of research.

APPENDIX 27: EXAMPLES OF RESEARCHER NOTE-TAKING THROUGHOUT RESEARCH

'It would be wonderful if all practitioners could have heard that interview (reference to interview with NCCA). The amount of work that has and is going in to the reimagined curriculum is something that teachers are not seeing. The level of research, liaison with focus groups, national consultation process and training involved was substantial. There is a gap in the system in how the curriculum is brought to teachers on the ground. It would be interesting for both NCCA and teachers to conduct a compulsory course for both parties in the design and delivery of the new curriculum so that both parties could gain a greater understanding of the work behind the scenes and the work on the ground i.e. the transfer of policy into practice.' January 2023	'There seems to be a lot of frustration from teachers on the ground trying to comes to grips with the PLC. I wonder how many schools are engaging with the sustained support from PDST and how they find this service. I also wonder what training is taking place for literacy leaders within schools or do these positions exist in schools? What does leadership in literacy look like in different school settings? How can the planning and preparation for teaching and learning be simplified for schools and for teachers? Is it up to each individual school to devise their own templates? Why is there no central database for curricular policies and frameworks for schools? I understand the importance of teacher agency but is this the best way or the most feasible way given the time constraints and pressure that teachers report to be under? March 2023
'It is proving difficult to get schools to commit to the professional learning community model. Time has been flagged as a key issue. Principals are reporting to me that there is simply too much on in schools at the moment and they cannot bring another thing to their teachers. Perhaps extending to non-DEIS schools should be considered'. February 2023	'The responses from the survey so far seem to indicate that teachers are unsure whether disciplinary literacy is similar to classroom practice that is already being carried out.' April 2023
'Teachers seemed out of their comfort zone at the first professional learning community meeting. They are waiting to be led, perhaps used to being 'facilitated'. Taking ownership of the PLC model is definitely a learning curve and one that will take time to embed'. May 2023	'The capacity for partnerships between schools and libraries is underutilised. In many respects there is a further distancing between the entities despite some fantastic initiatives set forth between the two partners. The UK model, on the other hand, provides more scope for enriched learning experiences for pupils. By placing librarians in schools and allowing their expertise to be shared with staff and with pupils, the dream of fostering

	a lifelong love for reading might just be possible'. April 2023

APPENDIX 28: OUTLINE OF PLC SESSIONS

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
Meeting with the principals of the respective schools to discuss the purpose of the research, logistics and modes of conduct. Distribution of personal detail questionnaire.	Coffee Mornings: Meeting with the participants of the respective schools who volunteered to participate in the research. Overview of the research, timetable for participants.	PLC Meeting 1: Introduction to the professional learning community approach and a brainstorm of how this will serve the needs of each respective school setting	PLC Meeting 2: Discussion of theme 1: Teacher planning
Session 5	**Session 6**	**Session 7**	**Session 8**
PLC Meeting 3: Discussion of theme 2: disciplinary literacy	PLC Meeting 4: Discussion of theme 3: the use of picture books	PLC Cluster: Meeting: Review and recommendations from team members	PLC Check in

APPENDIX 29: APPLYING YIN'S CASE STUDY PROTOCOL TO THIS STUDY

Planning and Design
Yin's Guidance: It is imperative to begin by carefully planning your case study, considering the research questions, unit of analysis, and overall design.
This study's implementation: I clearly defined the research questions related to disciplinary literacy and picture books in the Irish primary context. I then identified the unit of analysis (the cases) and created the overall research design.
Data Collection
Phase 1 - Interviews with Key Educational Stakeholders:
Yin's Guidance: Use multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, to triangulate data.
This study's implementation: I conducted interviews with key educational stakeholders to gather distinct perspectives on the topics of disciplinary literacy, the use of picture books in the classroom and teachers planning and preparation for teaching and learning amidst curricular reform, aligning with Yin's recommendation for comprehensive data collection.
Phase 2 - Nationwide Survey for Primary School Teachers:
Yin's Guidance: Surveys can provide quantitative data to complement qualitative findings.
This study's implementation: I implemented a nationwide survey to collect quantitative data from a sample of primary school teachers across Ireland, adding breadth to the study.
Phase 3 - Open-ended Questionnaires and Interviews with Librarians:
Yin's Guidance: Open-ended questions in questionnaires and interviews allow for in-depth exploration.
This study's implementation: I engaged with librarians, both in Ireland and in the UK, through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, aligning with Yin's approach to gather rich, qualitative data.
Phase 4 - Professional Learning Communities:
Yin's Guidance: Multiple data sources and embedded units of analysis can enhance the depth of the case study.
This study's implementation: I orchestrated a series of professional learning communities with teacher teams, which enabled me to delve deeply into collaborative practices related to TPPTL, disciplinary literacy and picture books.
Data Analysis
Yin's Guidance: Use pattern matching, explanation building, or time-series analysis, depending on the nature of your research questions.
This study's implementation: I applied appropriate data analysis methods (NVivo systematic coding reflective of Braun and Clarke's Six Step Approach), considering Yin's recommendations which shall be detailed in the next section of this chapter.
Reporting

Yin's Guidance: Present findings in a systematic and organised manner, making explicit the links between data and conclusions.
This study's implementation: I organised the findings of this research in a structured manner, ensuring clarity in presenting the relationships between data collected from the four different phases and the overarching conclusions.

APPENDIX 30: TIMELINE OF THE RESEARCH

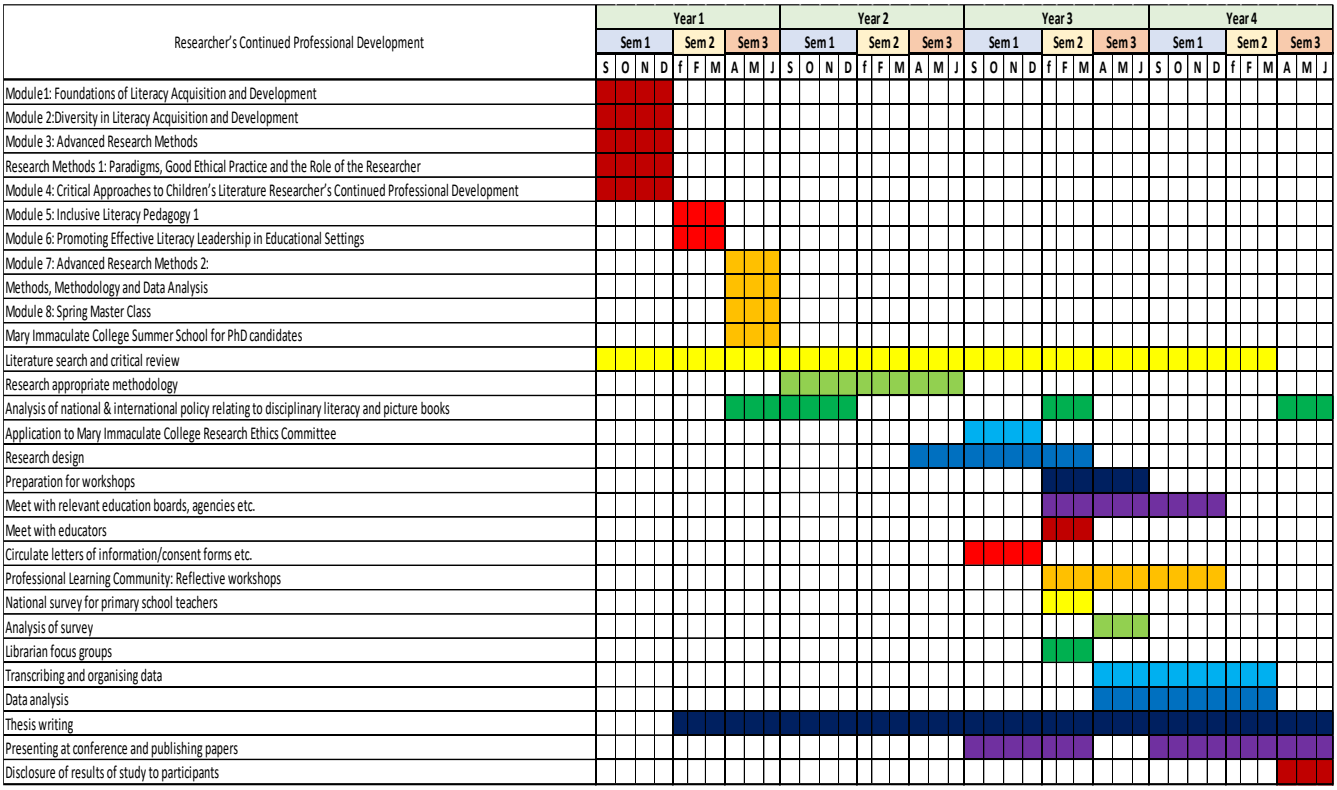


Figure 79: Timeline of the Research Project

APPENDIX 31: NVIVO AND BRAUN AND CLARKE'S THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Appendix 31.rtf

APPENDIX 32: CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Using%20pictureboo
ks%20for%20disciplir

Chapter Five Appendices

APPENDIX 33: DIALOGUE AND STATISTICS REFERRED TO IN CHAPTER FIVE

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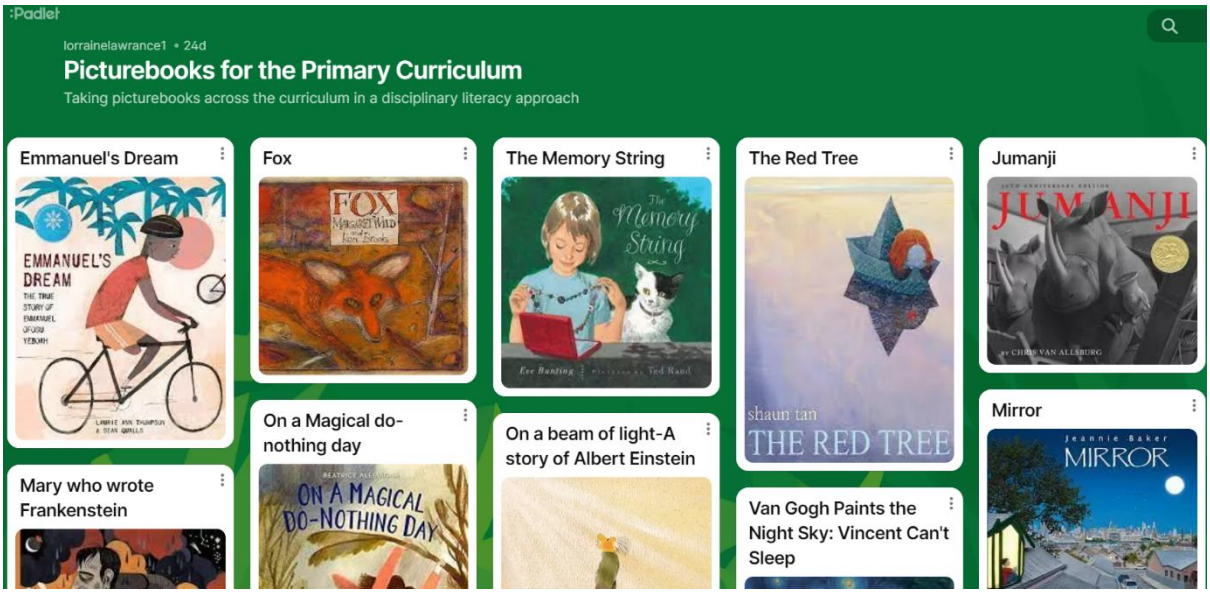
APPENDIX 34: PADLET CO-CREATED BY THE RESEARCHER, CONTRIBUTIONS FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS, INTERVIEWEES AND THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

https://padlet.com/lorrainelawrance1/picturebooks-for-the-primary-curriculum-y4ceoht991fge3vz



APPENDIX 35: LANGUAGE CARD 1:EXAMPLE OF LANGUAGE CARD FOR PICTUREBOOK ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISCIPLINE OF ART

Flame-haired, blue, green, pink, yellow, velvety violet, a blanket of sapphire sky, colours of the night	Starlit shapes, constellation of freckles, wild shimmer of midnight air, bold and infinite	Brother Theo, Uncle's galleries, Tattered hat and cloak, hospital, can't sleep, wild questions, a sensitive boy, a hidden genius, a brilliant artist, strange and restless	Dutch village of Zundert, boarding school at Zevenbergen, Tilburg, working in The Hague, London, Paris, west England, south Belgium
Pencil drawings, inked, charcoal stained hands, painting, paints, canvas, brushstrokes	Marigold, geranium, blackberry, raspberry	Sloping beams, church with its tall steeple, rolling hills and sandy paths	Soothing darkness, harsh light, warm sun, moonlit dream
Excited, bored, eager, lazy, explosive, shy, coloured moods, galaxies of colour float on the night air	Roadside scenes, peasants and thunderclouds, framing haloed sunsets	Does darkness have a texture? Thick? Thin? Does it have a rhythm? Quick? Slow? Is the night sky at rest? Or do eleven stars pulse like a beating heart?	country cottage at dusk, city café's at midnight

APPENDIX 36: EXAMPLE OF LANGUAGE CARD FOR PICTUREBOOK ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISCIPLINE OF GEOGRAPHY

Dry, wet, dripping, dropping, gushing, pouring, shifting shape and size	Moon, world, Earth, outer space, oceans, rivers, streams, snow, ice, clouds, steam, lands, lakes, waterfall, floods, clouds	A drop of rain, flake of snow, great wave, ablaze with fires, tears that trickle	H2O, meteorites, vital, rehydrate, planet Earth spun in a dance around the sun, Moon has little gravity, space has water, Saturn's rings are dust and ice, Mars, frozen seas, Earth's the wettest planet.
Mizu, nero, agua, eau	Burst, crashed	"ice turned liquid, boiled to gas and sky-borne clouds appeared at last"	Cooled down, sun heats sea, turns to clouds, clouds cool, rain in puddles pools
"Water in a chain cloud rain river sea water cycles endlessly."	"Vapour, liquid, ice or snow, water's always on the go."	Shower, sink, loo, wash, cook, swim, baptise, sail ships, dive.	"Plants, creature, human life all need water to survive."

APPENDIX 37: EXAMPLE OF LANGUAGE CARD FOR PICTUREBOOK ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISCIPLINE OF WELLBEING

Breathe slowly in, breathe slowly out, patient.	My breath is a river of peace. I rush, rush, rush. Thoughts flutter and dart like birds.	I am here in the world. Each moment I can breathe and be. Tomorrow's an egg that hasn't hatched. Yesterday is a bird that has flown. Today is real. Here, now.	What am I thinking? I watch my thoughts. They swim by like little fish. Slow down thoughts. Come quietly with me. Each thought is a floating leaf. The leaves drift softly away.
There's a quiet place in my head like an egg hidden in a next.	The fresh smell of grass, a line of ants winding by	I see the world new. I see each for the first time.	I'm a cloud…a mountain…a stone…a river…a small seed…a great tree. I am always me.
Days crash and thunder and throw lightening around. I am still, watching. I am a calm umbrella inside the blue and grey storm.	I bark and snap like a little dog. Quiet place. I am becoming more me. I am alive in this world.	Tree, leaves, branches, roots, summer, fall, winter spring, caterpillar, tadpole.	I see myself by the ocean, toes touching the sand, fingers finding a shell at the edge of blue water. My feet touch earth.

APPENDIX 38: EXAMPLE OF LANGUAGE CARD FOR PICTUREBOOK ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISCIPLINE OF HISTORY

Annex, safe, eight of us, open wide and let us out.	Clouds are moving in on us, approaching danger, cut off, an impenetrable wall trying to crush us.	November 8th 1943, Frankfurt, June 12th 1939, Adolf Hitler ruled Germany then. He had vowed to get rid of the Jews. A German Jew. Sister: Margot.	Ordinary little girl, someone you might sit next to in class.
Money, father had a job.	Germany was blamed for starting the first world war and had to pay huge amounts to make up for the destruction. Ten years after the war ended Germany was desperately poor. Unemployment and hunger. Angry and disgraced. Blame.	Hitler, stiff little man with a moustache, talked a lot, promised a lot, hope, Germany rich and strong, hated Jews. Germans were the finest race in the world. Nazi party. Spark turned into a flame and flame to a blaze. Hate campaign. Waves of bombers.	School-mocked, bullied Jewish children. Sit in a separate corner of the classroom. Stopped talking to Jewish neighbours, shop windows smashed, harassed in the street, beaten up by Storm Troopers, rounded up and sent away.
Bewildered, scared, fled Germany, work in Netherlands. Rough men in uniform with pistols, trapped, nowhere to run. August 4th 1944.	Miep, Dutch helpers. Papers and books and bits of shopping. Peter, couple and son, old office in the evenings, listen to radio, peep through curtains, church clock chime.	Camps, imprisoned, forced to work, army, troops, Dutch powerless, German soldiers marched through Amsterdam. Died of typhus in a German concentration camp. Mr Frank survived.	Star Jude. Stopped from going into public places. 1942 Margot 16, labour service. Blood money.
Schoolbooks, letters, comb, curlers, satchel, diary, underwear, stockings, dress, cap, stockings, jacket, raincoat, shoes, scarf.	Beds unmade, dishes in the sink, note with false address, Morchie cat.	Wooden staircase, grey door, hidden away, quiet as mice, flush the toilet, constant danger of being spotted and reported.	Kitty, described life in the annexe, love of nature, terror, feelings for Peter.

Chapter Six Appendices

APPENDIX 39: GLANCE CARD: CONCLUDING FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Aims of the study presented as questions	**Aims of the study presented as questions answered**
What do the voices of practitioners in a variety of school settings say in relation to teacher planning, DL and the place for picturebooks across primary setting?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "S" School Based Planning; "M" My Understanding.
What is the understanding of disciplinary literacy within current national and international educational research, policy and practice and how does this translate into planning and practice?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "M" My Understanding.
What is the value of high quality picturebooks in teacher planning, and what are the skills necessary to develop this within schools?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "M" My Understanding, "L" Library.
What is the place of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and other curricular documents (Primary Curriculum Framework 2023) in the integration of literacy across the disciplines in a teacher-friendly, child-centred manner?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "S" School Based Planning, "A" Agency, "L" Leadership.
What is the possible role of disciplinary literacy within teachers' planning and the use of pictures books to support disciplinary literacy learning in Irish primary schools?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "S" School Based Planning.
How can a professional learning community model be used to gather practitioners together in a productive setting to engage in in-depth discussion and professional development?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "S" School Based Planning, "A" Agency, "L" Leadership.
What is the role of librarians in primary schools?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "L" Library
How was the concept of DL and the use of picturebooks in the classroom amidst curricular reform in Ireland evaluated?	See Chapter Five's SMALL Framework, "M" My Understanding.

APPENDIX 40: RESEARCH QUESTIONS EXPLORED THROUGH DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Central and embedded research questions	**Mode of inquiry**
Central: Is a picture is worth a thousand words?: An investigation into the use of picture books to support the teaching of disciplinary literacy in the primary school.	• Literature review • Semi-structured interview with key educational stakeholders • Open ended questionnaires with librarians • Professional learning communities • Nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers
To hear the voices of practitioners in a variety of school settings in relation to teacher planning, DL and the place for picturebooks across the primary setting.	• Professional learning communities • Nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers
To locate our understanding of disciplinary literacy within current national and international educational research, policy and practice and how this translates into planning and practice.	• Literature review • Semi-structured interview with key educational stakeholders • Professional learning communities • Nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers
To recognise and explore the value of high quality picturebooks in teacher planning, observing and working with teachers to develop the skills necessary to develop this within their school.	• Literature review • Semi-structured interview with key educational stakeholders • Open ended questionnaires with librarians • Professional learning communities • Nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers
To explore the place of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and other curricular documents (Primary Curriculum Framework 2023) in the integration of literacy across the disciplines in a teacher-friendly, child-centred manner.	• Literature review • Semi-structured interview with key educational stakeholders • Professional learning communities • Nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers
To investigate the possible role of disciplinary literacy within teachers' planning and the use of pictures books to support disciplinary literacy learning in Irish primary schools.	• Professional learning communities • Nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers

To use a professional learning community model to gather practitioners together in a productive setting to engage in in-depth discussion and professional development.	• Professional learning communities
To hear the voices of librarians to decipher the role of the librarian in primary schools	• Semi-structured interview with Irish librarians, open ended questionnaire with librarians Ireland and UK
To evaluate the concept of DL and the use of picturebooks in the classroom amidst curricular reform in Ireland.	• Literature review • Semi-structured interview with key educational stakeholders • Professional learning communities • Nationwide questionnaire for primary teachers

APPENDIX 41: CONCLUSIONS DRAWN IN ANSWERING THE CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Central questions of the research	**Conclusions drawn**
What do the voices of practitioners in a variety of school settings say in relation to teacher planning, DL and the place for picturebooks across primary setting?	PBs are viewed very positively by practitioners. Teachers are eager to engage in further PD on using these resources in the classroom, within their planning and across subject areas. DL is an evolving concept, which needs further clarity, modelling and embedding for practitioners so that they have the tools to teach it effectively. Leadership is a key factor in relation to TP for DL and PBs. Time, resources and professional development were seen as some of the key obstacles in relation to effective PPTL where PBs and DL were concerned. PD and the utilisation of PLCs were seen as positive modes for initiating a DL model within schools. The language of DL must be explicitly taught and frameworks for teaching this language need to be intricately planned by educationalists. Picture books are a viable mode of teaching the language associated with DL across a range of subjects but this language requires time to plan and decipher, a factor which further impinges on the lack of time which teachers report to have for planning. While merit is seen in using DL at primary level, further exemplars are necessary, as the new curriculum unfolds, showcasing how this ideology can look both in classroom practice and in TP.
What is the understanding of disciplinary literacy within current national and international educational research, policy and practice and how does this translate into planning and practice?	DL, traditionally a topic associated with second and third level has been sweeping the globe in the past decade, entering into the primary school sphere. In Ireland, through Shannahan's DES publication in 2019 on DL in Irish primary classrooms, the foundations were laid. The PLC in its mentioning of DL within the curricular document, spread its roots. Furthermore, Oide in its Webinar 7 entitled "DL" ,brought the concept nationally to Irish primary teachers. Despite such advances in policy and efforts by the DES in the dissemination of this concept to practitioners, findings from this study articulate that DL is very much in its infancy where the transfer to practice is concerned. Many participants were unaware of the term or confused by it and other terms from the PLC. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic, teacher burnout and other curricular changes were seen as hindering factors in this translation. Positively, participants of the study saw Professional Learning Communities as a viable means for such translation to occur in an effective manner. A further positive outcome saw that members from NCCA, Oide and those who engaged in PD in Literacy, all had an increased understanding

	and awareness of DL. This concludes that the transfer of information is trickling down, however there needs to be a systematic POA to ensure that the capacity of DL reaches practitioners across the nation.
What is the value of high quality picturebooks in teacher planning, and what are the skills necessary to develop this within schools?	PDST have published their *Children's books for Wellbeing* document (2020) which shows how picture books can be used to support the teaching of SPHE and Wellbeing. Roche (2019) outlined in her PLC *Support Material for Teachers* how specific picture books could be utilised when working on particular mathematical concepts. PDST STEM published its *Picturebooks for STEM* in 2023. Given the growing interest in Irish researchers and departmental employees in the area of picturebooks, it is clear that there is a high value placed on using picturebooks for TPPTL. This study shows that picturebooks are both enjoyed and used by Irish teachers, as seen in the nationwide survey. Furthermore, teachers eagerly wish to engage in further PD in this area. This is one of the key necessary skills identified for the success of PBs. Members of the PLC, through their exploration of particular picture books show that planning using PBs in the areas of explicit language, word choice, vocabulary acquisition, PB choice and building background knowledge are some of the key prerequisites to developing the use of PBs for DL within schools. It is difficult to say at this point whether picture books are curtailed to specific subjects, much more research would need to be conducted in this area to make solid conclusions around this. However, illuminated by Chapter Five's presentation of picturebooks for History, Geography, Science and Wellbeing, it can be concluded that PBs can be used for DL in a wide range of subjects across the primary school curriculum. In terms of skillset, teachers have benefited from the knowledge of using PBs to teach comprehension strategies as well as the PLC exemplar by Roche which showcases CT&BT. The utilisation of picturebooks by PDST over the past decade or more has also seen the positive effect of PBs being instilled in the teaching profession in Ireland. Despite such positive findings, there is also a lack of confidence and knowledge on how to use picturebooks to maximum effect with teachers detailing that they would need more direction and access to explicit instruction on how to teach the skills afforded by PBs effectively.
What is the place of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and other curricular documents (Primary Curriculum Framework 2023) in the integration	The PLC and PCF both directly and indirectly mention DL. The PLC Toolkit pays homage to DL. The examination of how DL fits with the LOs of the PLC, conducted through this study in its Phase 4 PLCs shows that there is scope for the use of DL across the vast majority of the curriculum. So too, the possible links to DL are obvious in the PCF through its integrated framework and grouping of subject areas. Such connections require such links to be clearly

of literacy across the disciplines in a teacher-friendly, child-centred manner?	outlined to practitioners so that they can in turn make these links clear to the pupils in their care. The use of PBs is one such child-centred mode of achieving this.
What is the possible role of disciplinary literacy within teachers' planning and the use of pictures books to support disciplinary literacy learning in Irish primary schools?	<u>Content and Language Integrated Learning CLIL (See PLC p.41)</u> One of the key messages from the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) is that it supports teaching for the transfer of skills across languages. The Primary Language Toolkit quotes that > from a teaching and learning perspective, teachers can make better use of class time if they draw children's attention to similarities and differences between the languages that they are learning, and give children opportunities to reflect on these similarities and differences. Many children do this naturally in an informal way. This process helps children to not only learn the second language more efficiently, but also, to gain a greater understanding of the structure of their first language. (PLC p.41) This study argues that this transfer of skills can be extended across all subject areas. This is how disciplinary literacy could look in Irish primary classrooms. Following the transfer of skills model; teachers could prepare their teaching and learning in a manner which purposefully fosters opportunities for children to observe, practice and reflect upon disciplinary literacies in a meaningful way. The content and the language integrated learning may be the vehicle to support this. And, a train on this carriage are picture books, a child-friendly tool to help support practitioners in making those important links for the child's growing brain. Afterall, the idea that subjects are separate entities is an aging concept. Subjectification (Biesta 2010) states that the 'learnification' of education (Biesta 2007) has too great a focus on the technical aspects of learning which often leads to a neglect of questions about *what* we are learning and *why* we are learning it. This study sought to draw these key questions back into the preparation for teaching and learning that takes place in Irish classrooms. Keeping in mind what Dewey depicted almost one hundred years ago, the rhetoric is still a reality in many classrooms nationwide. > Custom and convention conceal from most of us the extreme poverty of the traditional course of study, as well as its lack of intellectual organisation. It still consists, in large measure of a number of disconnected subjects made up of more or less independent items. An experienced adult may supply connections and see the different studies and lessons in perspective, in logical relationships to one another and the world. To the pupil, they are likely to be

	curiously mysterious things which exist in school for some unknown purpose, and only in school (John Dewey 1936) It is envisaged that with new curricula and its emphasis on integration and DL, Dewey's ideology shall eventually become a reality. The language curriculum after all, seeks to encourage teachers to value the language experience of all children, realising that when children develop skills in one language, they are not just discovering the skills of that language, 'they are also developing a common underlying proficiency which enables them to transfer language skills and learning strategies to other languages' (PLC, p.10). This study has gone a step further to try to discover whether this transfer of skills and learning strategies may be employed by teachers and pupils to enhance the acquisition of disciplinary literacy. In this way, the same principle of transferring skills and strategies would be achieved, in a conscious manor in the everyday workings of Irish primary classrooms.
How can a professional learning community model be used to gather practitioners together in a productive setting to engage in in-depth discussion and professional development?	As evidenced by the 2024 OECD review on resourcing schools to address disadvantage, the importance of PLCs is stage fronted. The role of the principal in leadership and professional development is further highlighted through this study findings. On you depends tomorrow' (Pope John Paul II 1983).The Education Act (1998) 22 (b) states that principals should "provide leadership to the teachers and other staff and the students of the school, (c) be responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers". If PLCs are to become a reality, school leaders need to steer this. Support services from the leadership teams at Oide must take heed of the advice and findings of studies such as this and indeed of the more robust studies such as the OECD Report (2024) which correlates the findings that PLCs are a viable means of the rapid learning systems which I spoke about in the opening chapters which was a Covid-19 model introduced to rapidly upskill people.
What is the role of librarians in schools?	Irish primary schools do not have access to in house librarians. They have access to local libraries and librarians. Liaison is dependent on the relationship between the librarian and the school personnel which is increased if there is a supportive HSCL or literacy leader. Libraries reported to stock picturebooks but were unaware of their use at senior standards in primary school, mostly viewing them as a resource for younger pupils. Some primary schools in England have access to an in-house librarian which assists teachers and pupils in choosing texts and in planning for and resourcing lessons based on texts. Libraries host a variety of

	initiatives and workshops which have the capacity to include picturebooks. The collaboration with CBI is another avenue to explore in the role of the librarian and schools.
How was the concept of DL and the use of picturebooks in the classroom amidst curricular reform in Ireland evaluated?	This concept has not yet been evaluated in Ireland and requires a systematic review, building on the work of Burke and Kennedy in their governmental systematic review of Literacy in the primary school. As aforementioned, in 2020, PDST published its *Children's Books for Wellbeing*. The document carefully selected a series of picture books suited to themes, language and subject matter relating to Wellbeing the subject of Social, Personal, Health Education (SPHE). A concise account of each book and how it linked to particular topics formulated the body of this resource. It is without question that this document needs to be on every teachers table across the nation if they are to be able to evaluate the use of PBs across this discipline. So too should the more recent publication of Picturebooks for STEM by PDST. In order to achieve such evaluations, Government need to fund the books mentioned therein to be delivered to the tables of those teachers who may then be given the opportunity to sit down, perhaps in a Professional Learning Community type scenario, and discuss with colleagues how best to prepare for their lessons using such resources. Needless to say, such documents should continue to be published by Oide and other educational bodies, in the following years, detailing how picturebooks may be used across all of the other subject areas in a similar fashion. This is a promising start in Irish primary schools disciplinary literacy journey.