



**Listening to the Learner: An Exploration of Primary School Children's
Learner Identity**

Fiona Brennan

B.Ed. in Education and Psychology

A thesis submitted to the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special
Education, Mary Immaculate College in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education by Research

Supervised by: Dr. Suzanne Parkinson

Submitted to Mary Immaculate College, July 2020

Abstract

Listening to the Learner: An Exploration of Primary School Children's Learner Identity

Fiona Brennan

Teachers are often unaware of the profound effect that aspects of everyday school life may have on pupils. To ensure meaningful learning, students need not only to construct meaning about subject matter, but also about themselves in the learning environment. Experiences encountered by pupils in education enable them to formulate self-understandings as learners, namely, a learner identity. This evolving and dynamic construct promotes the construction of meanings about oneself as a learner and supports individuals' engagement with the process of becoming a learner.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the concept of learner identity by exploring the intricacies of children's self-identities as learners; the factors that inform their self-understandings; and how practices in everyday school life can promote or demote the development of their identities. This study which recruited six eleven-year-old children as participants examined how practices in school influenced the development of their learner identities. Children were the primary source of data. Underpinned by a sociocultural perspective on identity, this study employed semi-structured interviews for data collection purposes.

The qualitative data were thematically analysed to discern pupils' perceptions of the composition and formulation of their learner identities. Most pupils associated their learner identities with classroom behaviour, perceived level of intelligence and strengths in core subject areas. Pupils utilised social interaction with peers, parents and teachers to construct their learner identities. Students valued the messages explicitly communicated to them by their teacher. Mindset and peer comparison were among other factors which informed students' identities. This piece of qualitative research sought to focus on the distinctiveness and exclusivity of the specific group under study. However, it is anticipated that the findings may advance teachers' knowledge about the role of learner identity in equipping today's students with the confidence and capacity to navigate the challenges and experiences of tomorrow's world.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for any other awards at this or at any other academic establishment. Where use has been made of the work of other people, it has been fully acknowledged and referenced.

I understand that this thesis will be available to MIC staff and students in paper or electronic form for viewing and for possible research.

Name: Fiona Brennan

Signature: 

Date: 16/07/20

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Parkinson, whose expertise, advice, insight and guidance were an important and invaluable source of support and reassurance to me throughout the duration of this research project.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the staff of the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education for privileging me with the opportunity of undertaking the role of Departmental Assistant. I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to Mary Immaculate College for financially supporting my tuition fees under the Departmental Assistantship Award.

I wish to thank the children who took part in the study without whom it could not have been accomplished. A special word of thanks is due to those pupils who participated in the interviews and whose willingness and generosity of spirit are greatly appreciated. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the class teacher and principal of the research school for giving so generously of their time to assist me in my studies.

I would like to thank my siblings, Donal and Ciarán, for their support and advice over the past two years. A particular word of thanks is due to my boyfriend Shane for being a constant source of encouragement and laughter during this research project.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my parents, Helen and Seamus. I am indebted to you both for your endless support, advice, patience, encouragement and help throughout this research journey.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Summary of Literature Review	2
1.3 Research Questions	4
1.4 Definitions	5
1.5 Research Design	6
1.6 Significance of the Research	8
1.7 Limitations of the Research	9
1.8 Summary	10
Chapter Two: Literature Review	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Learning	11
2.3 21st Century Education	15
2.4 Lifelong Learning	17
2.5 Disciplinary Literacy	19
2.6 Assessment	21
2.7 Learner Voice	25
2.8 Identity	30
2.8.1 Sociocultural Perspective	31
2.8.2 Psychosocial Perspective	32
2.8.3 Sociological Perspective	33
2.8.4 Identity Development in School	33
2.9 Learner Identity	34
2.10 Education Ecosystem	37
2.11 <i>Skills</i> versus <i>Competencies</i>	40
2.12 Learning Dispositions	40
2.13 Learning Skills	42
2.14 Key Competencies for 21st Century Education	43
2.15 Personal Attributes of Learning	44

2.15.1 Mindset	45
2.15.2 Self-Efficacy	46
2.15.3 Autonomy	48
2.15.4 Self-Regulation	49
2.15.5 Metacognition	49
2.15.6 Motivation	50
2.16 Influences on Identity Development	51
2.16.1 Teacher Expectations	52
2.16.2 Peer Norms	52
2.16.3 Supportive Classroom Climate	53
2.17 Summary of Literature Review	54
2.18 Research Questions	55
Chapter Three: Methodology	56
3.1 Introduction	56
3.2 Research Design	57
3.2.1 Interpretive Research Paradigm	57
3.2.2 Research Approach	58
3.2.3 Learner Voice	59
3.3.4 Sociocultural Perspective on Identity	59
3.3 Researcher Role	60
3.4 Sampling	61
3.5 Participants	63
3.6 Tools and Techniques	64
3.6.1 Questionnaire	64
3.6.2 Interviewing	66
3.6.3 Recording	68
3.6.4 Transcribing	69
3.7 Ethics	69
3.7.1 Voluntary Informed Consent	70
3.7.2 Access and Acceptance	71
3.7.3 Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality	72
3.8 Analysis	72

3.8.1 Thematic Analysis	73
3.8.2 Transcription	73
3.8.3 Coding	74
3.8.4 Themes	75
3.9 Summary	76
Chapter Four: Analysis and Findings	78
4.1 Introduction	78
4.2 Questionnaire	79
4.3 Thematic Analysis	84
4.4 First Research Question: How do pupils define learning?	84
4.4.1 Theme: Memorising Material	85
4.4.2 Theme: Attending to the Teacher	86
4.4.3 Theme: Career Aspirations	88
4.4.4 Theme: Pupils' Opinions Matter	88
4.4.5 Summary of First Research Question	90
4.5 Second Research Question: How do children articulate their sense of identity as learners?	91
4.5.1 Theme: Being Well Behaved	91
4.5.2 Theme: Being Smart	93
4.5.3 Theme: The Core Subjects	94
4.5.4 Summary of Second Research Question	95
4.6 Third Research Question: What factors do pupils attribute to the development of their learner identities?	96
4.6.1 Theme: Peer Influence	97
4.6.1.1 Peer Support	97
4.6.1.2 Peer Comparison	98
4.6.2 Theme: Learning from Mistakes	99
4.6.2.1 Feeling Angry at First	99
4.6.2.2 An Opportunity to Try Again	100
4.6.2.3 <i>Effort versus Intelligence</i>	101
4.6.2.4 Family Support	101
4.6.3 Theme: Teacher Praise	103

4.6.3.1 Proud Learners	103
4.6.3.2 Source of Encouragement	103
4.6.4 Summary of Third Research Question	104
4.7 Summary of Analysis and Findings	105
Chapter Five: Discussion	106
5.1 Introduction	106
5.2 First Research Question	107
5.2.1 Pupils' Understanding of Learning	107
5.2.2 Learner Voice	108
5.2.3 Implications	111
5.3 Second Research Question	113
5.3.1 Absence of Awareness	113
5.3.2 Smart Learners	113
5.3.3 Learner Strengths and Challenges	115
5.3.4 Implications	116
5.4 Third Research Question	119
5.4.1 Peer Influence	119
5.4.2 Teacher Praise	121
5.4.3 Hidden Acts of Recognition	122
5.4.4 Learning Experiences	123
5.4.5 Stable Identities	124
5.4.6 Implications	125
Chapter Six: Conclusion	127
6.1 Summary of Research Findings and Implications	127
6.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research	129
6.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice	130
References	134
Appendices	158
Appendix A: Letter of Preliminary Inquiry to the Principal	158
Appendix B: Parental/ Guardian Information Sheet	159
Appendix C: Parental/ Guardian Informed Consent Form	161

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet	162
Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent Form	163
Appendix F: Pupil Questionnaire	164
Appendix G: Pupil Interview Starter Questions	167

List of Tables

Table 4.1 Summary of Themes 84

Table 4.2 Third Research Question: Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes 96

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Research Methodology	58
Figure 4.1. Respondents' descriptions of an effective learner	80
Figure 4.2. Pupils' opinions on decision-making in learning	82

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Preliminary Inquiry to the Principal	158
Appendix B: Parental/ Guardian Information Sheet	159
Appendix C: Parental/ Guardian Informed Consent Form	161
Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet	162
Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent Form	163
Appendix F: Pupil Questionnaire	164
Appendix G: Pupil Interview Starter Questions	167

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

This proposed study seeks to advance knowledge about the role of learner identity in equipping today's students with the confidence and capacity to navigate the challenges and experiences of tomorrow's world. Traditional education has been criticised by researchers for merely generating a shallow level of curriculum knowledge and understanding among students (McGuinness 2018). This form of education is centred on a "banking concept" where omniscient teachers impart ideas to pupils to be accepted uncritically, automatically memorised and recalled (Freire 1970). This system of education has ensured that pupils have been provided with the information they need to succeed in school and state examinations. However, it has not equipped them with the ability to apply that knowledge in novel, unforeseen contexts.

The challenge for educators to prepare pupils to thrive in an unpredictable future is becoming an increasingly debated matter. The issue has received prominent attention at an international level with projects including the *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills* (Assessment and Teaching 21st Century Skills 2010) and more recently the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Future of Education and Skills 2030* (OECD 2019). Notably, discourse on the matter has been slower to emerge in Ireland. Nonetheless, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland has recently invested considerable resources towards research on the key priorities of primary education for the 21st century. Additionally, the NCCA has redeveloped the curriculum for Irish primary schools. It has recently published the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2020) which aims to address how teachers can better support the needs of Irish children in the evolutionary, diverse, demanding and ever-changing society in which they live. *Learning to*

be a Learner is outlined as one of seven key competencies relevant for children in primary education. This competency emphasises the need for pupils to be supported to develop themselves as learners. This, further augmented by the encouragement from the OECD (2019) to promote student agency to enable pupils learn *how* to learn lends increasing support to the value of nurturing learner identity among students. There is a need therefore to examine children's current understanding and awareness of their individual learner identities and to explore how practices in everyday school life can hinder or promote the development of these identities.

1.2 Summary of Literature Review

In an evolutionary and rapidly-changing technological world, it is becoming increasingly difficult for education policy-makers to ascertain the knowledge and abilities which will be most relevant for students in the future (Boud 2000). While subject knowledge is still deemed important, there is an expanding field of literature suggesting that pupils' beliefs, attitudes, competencies, values, dispositions and strategies can significantly impact upon their ability to succeed as learners. Indeed, Gholami (2016) contends that instead of concentrating solely on the deposition of knowledge into students' minds, modern curricula should focus on teaching pupils *how* to learn.

In a similar vein, Ring, O'Sullivan, Ryan and Burke (2018) propose that the overarching vision for primary education should merge the nurturing of the individual needs of the child, the holistic development of the individual, the promotion of the child's full potential and the enabling of the pupil to partake in society both now and in the future. Likewise, Carr and Claxton (2002) advise that the core aim of 21st century education 'is not so much the transmission of particular bodies of knowledge, skill and understanding as facilitating the development of the capacity and the confidence to engage in lifelong learning' (p. 9). In order

to address this aim, educators need to consider methods of educating pupils to enable them to cope with the requirements of the future. McGuinness (2018) postulates that such demands will require pedagogical practices which encourage enhanced problem-solving abilities, resilience and innovation; and which nurture a ‘learning to learn’ approach. This viewpoint is echoed by the NCCA (2020) which recommends that pupils be enabled to develop themselves as learners. The NCCA also advises that students should foster the skills, attitudes, values and dispositions necessary for being agentic and active learners.

The promotion of *intrapersonal competency* is regarded by McGuinness (2018) as a key priority for 21st century education. In a recent paper entitled *Research-Informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum*, McGuinness (2018) proposes the need for modern curricula to address the development of learners’ intrapersonal skills, dispositions and values. These include self-awareness about learning, metacognition, self-recognition of learning strengths and weaknesses, self-regulation, persistence, autonomy, agency, self-efficacy and personal identity construction. Kolb and Kolb (2009) propose that individuals with learning identities view themselves as learners, foster a learning attitude and trust in their ability to learn. It could be argued, therefore, that the concept of learner identity resonates with McGuinness’ classification of intrapersonal competency.

Moreover, there is growing expectation for 21st century education systems to consider the larger ecosystems within which schools operate. According to the OECD (2019), this change requires a shift in decision-making practices. Traditionally, decisions relating to education were generally made by a purposefully chosen group of people. However, it is anticipated that this may no longer be the case (OECD 2019). Instead, the OECD (2019) postulate that there should be shared responsibility and decision-making among stakeholders within the education system including pupils, parents, educators and communities. Adding to that, it is

recommended that students become more fully involved within education. This might encourage pupils to assume more responsibility for their learning and enable them to become active agents of change (OECD 2019). Addressing this aim of 21st century education may be achieved by nurturing pupils' sense of agency and identity.

Learner identity, an evolving and dynamic construct, promotes the construction of meanings about oneself as a learner (Coll and Falsafi 2010) and supports individuals' engagement with the process of becoming a learner (Kolb and Kolb 2009). Nurturing learner identity, wherein abilities, motivation, learning strategies and attitudes are encouraged and developed, marks part of the journey towards placing children at the centre of education. Promoting learner identity inspires learners to reflect on their experience of learning and to foster personal competencies needed to respond to complex challenges and learning opportunities throughout life (Kolb and Kolb 2009; Buckingham Shum and Crick 2012). So far, however, no previous study has investigated learner identity in the context of Irish primary schools. Little is known about Irish primary school children's perceptions of learner identity. Furthermore, it is not clear what factors Irish pupils attribute to the formation of their identities as learners in school. This paper seeks to deconstruct these issues by analysing the literature pertaining to learner identity and 21st century education, both nationally and internationally. In addition, the study aims to explore learner identities in children in primary education.

1.3 Research Questions

Thus, the purpose of this study is to shed light on the concept of learner identity with a view to exploring Irish children's current understanding and awareness of their individual learner identities and examining how practices in everyday school life can promote or demote the development of these identities. Specific questions of interest are:

1. How do children define the term *learning*?

2. How do children articulate their sense of identity as learners?
3. What factors do children attribute to the development of their learner identities?

1.4 Definitions

Throughout this dissertation, the researcher adopts the definition of learner identity put forward by Coll and Falsafi (2010) in their seminal piece of literature *Learner Identity: An Educational and Analytical Tool*. In the context of this study, learner identity is understood to consist of ‘generalised meanings about how one is recognised as a learner by oneself and others’ (Coll and Falsafi 2010, p. 220). Furthermore, throughout this study, the researcher considers the idea suggested by Kolb and Kolb (2009) that individuals with a learning identity ‘see themselves as learners, seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn’ (Kolb and Kolb 2009, p. 1). Finally, the researcher incorporates the idea proposed by Kolb and Kolb that learner identity encapsulates the process of ‘becoming a learner’ (2009, p. 1). These perspectives are the lens through which the researcher sought to explore pupils’ understanding, experience and awareness of learner identity. While a variety of terminology is utilised across a range of literature to refer to the concept, including learning identity and the learning way, the term learner identity is used throughout this study.

Several researchers have suggested differing definitions of learner voice. Furthermore, various terms are used interchangeably in academic literature to describe the concept. These include student voice, pupil voice, student participation, listening to students and consulting with pupils. This dissertation utilises the definition suggested by Fleming (2015) who views the concept as:

Students in dialogue, discussion and consultation on issues that concern them in relation to their education, but in particular, in relation to pedagogy and their experiences of schooling whether as a student cohort, individual class groups or

within a forum construct like a student council (Fleming 2015, p. 223).

Although numerous definitions of the term identity have been suggested by scholars, this dissertation uses the definition proposed by Burke (2003) who describes identity as the meanings held by an individual about what it means to be who they are. This study also considers Gee's (1999) view that identities are multifarious and context dependent and that people demonstrate several 'ways of being' in response to certain social circumstances.

While there are several theoretical perspectives on identity, this study adopts a sociocultural viewpoint on identity. From this perspective, an individual's identity is understood to be constructed through their participation in sociocultural contexts including work, school and home (Holland and Lave 2002). Furthermore, a person's sense of identity is influenced by their social interaction with others and by the norms, values and tools prevalent in a particular cultural context.

1.5 Research Design

This research utilised a qualitative research methodology under an interpretive research paradigm. Bhattacharjee (2012) suggests that interpretive research is suitable for deconstructing the hidden reasons behind complex, multifaceted processes. The intent of this research was to explore pupils' current perceptions of their learner identities and examine the factors that shaped the meanings pupils constructed about themselves as learners. The intent of the study correlates with the aims, strategies and philosophy of the interpretive research paradigm (van Esch and van Esch 2013). Crotty (1998) proposes that within the interpretive paradigm, individuals construct meanings in distinctive ways. These meanings are reliant upon the experiences, contexts and reference frames of the world they are seeking to interpret. The interpretive paradigm was deemed the most appropriate for this research due to its ability to generate new ideas and understandings about an emerging concept such as

learner identity.

Qualitative research was selected as a suitable approach for the research. According to Coolican (1999), qualitative studies can be carried out for exploratory research purposes. The author notes that within these types of studies, the researcher seeks to begin investigating an emerging concept and recording the experiences of a particular group. This study begins to examine learner identity in the context of Irish primary education. It also explores the perceptions of a specific group on the concept. Given that the primary topic of investigation in this study, learner identity, is an evolving concept, qualitative research offered an inductive approach for exploring this emerging construct.

There is an expanding body of literature which suggests that one of the most effective methods of gathering information about learning is to consult pupils about their educational experiences. The concept 'learner voice' has featured prominently in studies which have explored students' viewpoints about matters relating to their schooling (e.g. McIntyre, Pedder and Ruddock 2005; Hopkins 2008; McCallum, Hargreaves and Gipps 2000). The importance of encouraging pupils to express their opinions and considering their perspectives on school has gained increasing attention among experts in the field of education (e.g. Inspectorate 2016; Ofsted 2005). This study elicited learner voice as a conduit for exploring students' identities as learners.

The elicitation of learner voice was gathered through the use of pupil questionnaires and pupil interviews. Due to the qualitative research approach employed in this study, narrative data was collected using semi-structured instruments, including open-ended questionnaires and interviews. The open-ended questioning enabled respondents to provide as much information as possible about the complex and emerging concept, learner identity, which was under study. The semi-structured interviews contained a distinct focus and the questions

enabled the researcher to obtain a deeper, richer understanding of the respondents' understandings. According to Robson (2002), semi-structured interviews are commonly employed in qualitative designs. King (1994) suggests that this type of interview is most appropriate in studies that focus on the meaning of specific phenomena to the participants.

Prior to the exploration of learner identity, pupils' understanding of the term *learning* was explored. Traditionally, learning at school has been associated with teachers imparting content knowledge to their students. However, many researchers contest the suitability of this type of learning for pupils in the 21st century. Many educators propose that 21st century education should focus on teaching pupils 'how to learn' and equip students with the confidence and capacity to engage in lifelong learning.

Therefore, this piece of research examined pupils' understanding and awareness of the concept, learner identity. Within the educational experience, an individual creates meanings about himself or herself as a learner. This is referred to as the construction of learner identity (Coll and Falsafi 2010). Students with a learning identity view themselves as learners, adopt a learning attitude and trust in their ability to learn (Kolb and Kolb 2009). In recent years, learner identity has been regarded as a significant factor in promoting students' participation in education (Coll and Falsafi 2010; Buckingham Shum and Crick 2012). Finally, this research addressed the factors which pupils attribute to the development of their learner identities. Teachers are often unaware of the profound effect which elements of everyday school life may have on their pupils. Formal and informal learning experiences enable students to generate meanings about themselves as learners (Coll and Falsafi 2010).

1.6 Significance of the Research

The findings make an important contribution to the field of education in Ireland. This study offers some important insights into how Irish primary school children conceptualise learning

and how they articulate their sense of identity as learners. This research provides an exciting opportunity to advance teachers' understanding about the manner in which everyday classroom practices and procedures may influence children's understanding of themselves as learners. This study aims to contribute to the growing area of research on 21st century education by identifying some of the factors which Irish primary school children attribute to the construction of their learner identities. This project provides an important opportunity to inform 21st century educators about the value of considering the learners' beliefs, attitudes, skills, mindset and dispositions throughout the educative process.

1.7 Limitations of the Research

The reader should bear in mind, that due to practical considerations, this study is based on the understandings and viewpoints of a specific sample of pupils. The research design did not imply that data or findings would be representative of all primary school children in Ireland. The conceptual framework of this study indicated that purposive sampling would enable the exploration of the research questions. The research design facilitated the examination of a small group of pupils in order to obtain a richer understanding of the research topic. The conceptual framework upon which this research was based did not intend to yield broad, widely applicable findings. Nonetheless, while the data gathered in this research project is specific to a chosen group of students in a particular setting, it is anticipated that some of the findings gleaned from this study may be relevant or beneficial to other individuals or groups in similar situations. The small, focused inquiry facilitated an in-depth exploration of the respondents' viewpoints on the emerging concept of learner identity. The findings provide a unique insight into how Irish primary school pupils understand themselves as learners. Notably, this study makes an original contribution to educational research by capturing for the first time the voice of Irish learners about how they make sense of themselves as learners.

1.8 Summary

This chapter introduced the research project and explained the background of the study.

Operational definitions relating to key terms were discussed. The chapter concluded with an exploration of the assumptions, significance and limitations of the study.

The following chapter will examine the relevant literature pertaining to the research topic which informed the design and implementation of this project. This literature inspired the formulation of the three key research questions. The theoretical assumptions explored in this literature review informed the methodologies utilised to gather and analyse the data.

The third chapter will outline the methods and methodologies employed to carry out the research project. The tools and techniques utilised in the data collection process will be examined. Ethical concerns arising from the research design will also be explored. The process of data analysis will also be discussed.

In the fourth chapter, the analysis and findings from the data will be reported. Given that qualitative data analysis features an iterative process in which data collection is merged with data analysis, the researcher decided to combine data analysis and findings in this chapter.

In the fifth chapter, the findings are explored and discussed in detail. The findings pertaining to each research questions are considered in light of the evidence suggested in previous literature. The final chapter features the conclusions and implications stemming from the discussion of the findings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will document an extensive exploration of the relevant literature pertaining to the research topic. The progression of teaching and learning practices, as prescribed within national curricula, will be examined. Traditional education systems which promote content knowledge, memorisation and recall will be compared with contemporary forms which encourage the development of pupils' learning attitudes, beliefs, motivation and dispositions. Similarly, the transition from traditional views of assessment to modern, research-informed perspectives on the construct will be detailed. Arising from this exploration of assessment, the opportunities and challenges of learner voice within the classroom will be analysed.

The concept of identity will be defined and explored from a range of theoretical viewpoints. Based on the understandings gleaned from these differing perspectives, a decision will be made concerning the definition of identity utilised in this research project. Subsequently, the concept of learner identity will be introduced and explored. The definition employed in this study will be identified. Following this, some key learning skills, attitudes, values and skills necessary for 21st century education will be examined. This will be succeeded by an exploration of certain core personal attributes associated with the self-identity of learners. Finally, some factors related to the development of identity, as evidenced in research studies, will be outlined. Subsequent to this extensive review of literature, the research questions inspired by the relevant literature will be addressed.

2.2 Learning

As suggested by Deakin Crick, Broadfoot and Claxton (2004), learning is a process which is undertaken by individuals and groups. In any discipline, Deakin Crick et al. (2004) contend

that what is learned is considered knowledge or skill. In other words, learning occurs when an individual develops the ability to do something they could not do before or when they gain a novel understanding about the world (Deakin Crick *et al.* 2004).

Traditionally, within the field of education, learning has often been regarded as a process of acquisition as opposed to a responsive process (Biesta 2004). This view is supported by Thomas and Brown (2009) who highlight the fact that antiquated learning practices were generally based on the transmission of knowledge. Similarly, Gholami (2016) writes that in the past, curricula have emphasised the imparting of knowledge.

During the 19th century, an era characterised by colonialism and civil wars, education was utilised to address societal demands for labour. Therefore, the aim of education at this time was to prepare students for work. To promote efficiency, mass education was encouraged whereby one teacher was employed to teach as many pupils as possible and impart standardised content to students (OECD 2019).

The 20th Century witnessed the occurrence of two world wars, the reestablishment of several nations following the collapse of colonialism and the arrival of revolutionary technological advancements. The goal of education in the 20th century expanded to include a focus on pupils' sense of fulfilment alongside the continuing aim to prepare students for jobs (OECD 2019). Curricula broadened their content to include non-academic subjects including Physical Education. At the same time, schools and educators assumed increasing levels of responsibility and standardised testing was introduced to establish accountability.

Furthermore, educators were required to deliver standardised curricula and provide learning opportunities for all pupils, irrespective of their backgrounds.

In Ireland, the *Primary School Curriculum Introduction* (Department of Education and Science; DES 1999) clearly outlines three distinct core aims of education: 'to enable the child

to realise [their] potential as a unique individual; to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to society; and to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning' (p. 7). Expanding upon these aims of education, the DES (1999) stresses that enabling pupils to learn *how* to learn is a key goal of the curriculum. Adding to that, it is suggested that children should be enabled to foster an appreciation of the significance of lifelong learning (DES 1999). It is noteworthy that the DES (1999) remarks upon the need for educators to afford equal importance to the learning content and process for pupils, to enable pupils to learn independently and to prepare students to function effectively in a developing society. However, despite references to the need for pupils to be enabled to cope with the demands of a complex future, addressing this goal would be a challenge for teachers when implementing a curriculum that is already so heavily loaded with subject content.

Developments that occurred within the 20th century encouraged the promotion of child-centred education. This was a feature of the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES 1999) in Ireland. Interestingly, this vision for education is not endorsed by all prominent educationalists. Freire (1993) warns that a 'child-centred education' can give rise to a 'banking education'. Freire also states that by focusing too much attention on individual pedagogy, a child-centred education can fail to address important aspects of the broader school and community life. In a similar manner, Biesta (2013) proposes that this type of education can potentially result in an obsession with learning outcomes.

Likewise, Dewey (1915) argues that a child-centred education can undermine the value of teacher-student relationships. Dewey proposes that replacing a teacher-centred curriculum with a child-centred curriculum can suggest that 'authority' should be replaced with 'freedom'. However, Dewey (1915) argues that such freedom could render education

meaningless in the absence of a strong educative context of the school, teacher and community. What Dewey (1915; 1916) appears to advocate is an education that merges the significance of children and the broader social context as opposed to an exclusive child-centred curriculum. Interestingly however, Irwin (2018) draws attention to the fact that although the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES 1999) includes a child-centred principle as part of its core aims, it also includes principles relating to the wider society. Irwin (2018) concludes that the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES 1999) acknowledges the philosophical perspectives on education.

Thomas and Brown (2009) observe that over the past few years learning has begun to be viewed as a participatory process whereby the learner assumes responsibility for constructing his or her own knowledge and understanding. Over the past decades, many researchers in the field of education (e.g. Wirth and Perkins 2008; Thomas and Brown 2009; Boud 2000) have argued that new types of teaching and learning are needed within education systems of the 21st century. These viewpoints are echoed by Montessori (1949) and Dewey (1915; 1916) who contest the notion that education should focus on enabling pupil potentialities rather than on the transmission of knowledge. Moreover, Dewey (1915) believes that education should be informed by an understanding of how children develop. As previously mentioned, Dewey (1915) warns against the exclusivity of a child-centred education and instead advocates the role of the teacher as a co-constructor of knowledge with the student.

Traditional education systems have been criticised for generating only a shallow level of curriculum knowledge and understanding among pupils (McGuinness 2018). In other words, pupils have been provided with the information they need to succeed in school examinations yet they have not been equipped with the ability to apply this learning in novel contexts.

While Buckingham Shum and Crick (2012) point out that an understanding of subject

content, as outlined by a specific curriculum, is a critical measure in learning, other authors (e.g. Glaser 1991; Freire 1993) argue that subject knowledge alone is not sufficient.

According to the National Research Council (2000), the goal of education must move from focusing on subject matter to developing the tools and strategies necessary for learning. Moreover, Boud (2000) states that in an evolutionary and unpredictable world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine the curricular content with which students should be presented. According to Gholami (2016), instead of concentrating solely on imparting knowledge, curricula should focus on the teaching of *how* to learn. In a similar vein, Thomas and Brown (2009) propose the need to embrace a theory of ‘learning to become’ (p. 321) in contrast to theories that conceptualise learning as a process of becoming *something*.

The first two decades of the 21st century have demonstrated increased interdependence among nations due to advancements in global communication, significant technological and medical developments and increased occurrences of violence and terrorism. Consequently, some education systems have identified the need for schools to operate within part of a larger ecosystem. The OECD (2019) highlights the fact that some schools have begun collaborating with organisations and businesses within their environments in order to promote understanding about the skills and competencies which students need to develop for future work. There is an increasing awareness among educationalists and governments about the need for 21st century curricula to promote interdependence and citizenship.

2.3 21st Century Education

The OECD (2019) states that curricula must acknowledge individual differences among pupils and consider pupils’ differing levels of prior knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in the education process. In a similar vein, Ring et al. (2018) advise that the overarching vision for primary education should merge the nurturing of the individual needs of the child, the

holistic development of the individual, the promotion of the child's full potential and the enabling of the pupil to partake in society both now and in the future.

At a more global level, the issue of redefining curricula for the 21st century has received prominent attention. It has featured in projects such as the *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills* (Assessment and Teaching 21st Century Skills 2010) and more recently in the *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030* (OECD 2019). It has been slower to appear in Irish educational publications. Nonetheless, in February 2020 the NCCA released the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* which aims to 'set out a clear vision and principles ... and a description ... of what should be prioritised in children's learning' (p. 4). This framework has been informed by findings from four key sources – research, networks, deliberation and consultation (NCCA 2020). Through the inclusion of key competencies, the curriculum framework aims to enable children to foster the essential skills, dispositions, concepts, values and attitudes to 'adapt and deal with a range of situations, challenges and contexts in support of broader learning goals' (NCCA 2020, p. 7).

In a similar vein, McGuinness (2018) alludes to the need for educators to reconsider what pupils should learn in order to cope with the demands of future society. The author attests that such demands will require pedagogical practices that encourage enhanced problem-solving abilities, resilience, innovation, and nurture a 'learning to learn' approach (McGuinness 2018, p. 5). McGuinness (2018) draws attention to the potential significance of 'non-cognitive skills' (Rosen *et al.* 2010) in the establishment of broader learning goals in education. These skills incorporate personal attributes including motivation, self-efficacy, mindset, self-regulation – all of which have been shown to enhance pupils' learning outcomes. For Carr and Claxton (2002) the core aim of education for the 21st century 'is not so much the transmission of particular bodies of knowledge, skill and understanding as

facilitating the development of the capacity and the confidence to engage in lifelong learning’ (p. 9).

2.4 Lifelong Learning

The promotion of pedagogical practices that develop the skills and disposition needed for lifelong learning is a key educational priority envisaged by Boud and Falchikov (2007).

Deakin Crick et al. (2004) contend that ‘the desire to learn and to go on learning throughout life is a central aspiration in the concept of lifelong learning’ (p. 247). More specifically, the European Commission (2001) suggests that lifelong learning encompasses ‘all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence within a personal, civic, social, and/ or employment-related perspective’ (p. 9).

Predictably, there is agreement among researchers that the foundations for lifelong learning are laid in schools (Finsterwald *et al.* 2013). The European Commission (2010) proposes that school is where individual learners acquire the basic knowledge, skills and competences that they need throughout their future lives and where important attitudes and values begin to develop. In recent years, lifelong learning has become a key priority of European educational policies (e.g. European Commission 2010; OECD 2008). In addition, the Commission of European Communities (2000) affirms that the European Union is committed to promoting the development and implementation of explicit strategies for lifelong learning in education.

The concept of lifelong learning is gaining prominence in the Irish context. The promotion of lifelong learning is advocated in *Looking at Our School* (Inspectorate 2016), a quality framework for primary schools. The need for students to be afforded the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and attitudes to engage in long-term learning and training is regarded as a standard for effective schools (Inspectorate 2016). Within the quality framework, principles of highly effective practice pertaining to lifelong learning reiterate the

idea that students must have the initiative to transfer skills from one aspect of learning to another and must view themselves as learners into the future. It follows, therefore, that teachers should be supported in nurturing lifelong learning competencies among pupils (Finsterwald *et al.* 2013). In a similar vein, the acquisition of a love of learning is identified as an important outcome for children in Irish primary education (Fitzpatrick, Twohig and Morgan 2014). In a recent study exploring priorities for Irish primary education, it is argued that children who are happy and engaged learn more and succeed better in the long-term (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2014). Additionally, the authors report that when teachers instil a love of learning among pupils, the students are more likely to develop a liking for and dedication to lifelong learning.

The NCCA (2020) has acknowledged the emerging need for primary education to equip students ‘for the world they will inhabit as adults’ (p. 3). In the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, the NCCA (2020) stresses the impact children’s learning experiences in primary school have in shaping their lives as individuals in the future. The NCCA draws attention to the fact that while Irish society is becoming increasingly complex and diverse, future generations will also be challenged by issues including global pandemics, climate change, human migration and sustainability. This fact has been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the unparalleled period of school closure. This extraordinary event has necessitated an entirely different mode of teaching and learning at all levels of education across the globe. Concerning primary education, the experience has forced educators to consider alternative methods of facilitating learning using online platforms and technological devices. Navigating the uncharted territory of distance learning should urge educators to reflect upon the significance of learner autonomy, ownership and independence. As Parkinson (2020) points out, there is now an urgent need for pupils to be equipped with the language, skills and strategies to engage in independent learning. According to Parkinson

(2020), the occurrence of this viral pandemic should encourage educators to guide learners towards fostering the capacity to negotiate and navigate their own learning.

The NCCA (2020) believes that Irish teachers must cultivate dispositions, attitudes and skills among pupils to enable them to cope with this rapidly-changing context. The redeveloped vision for primary education in Ireland alludes to the significance of lifelong learning:

The curriculum aims to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential ... during childhood and in the future (NCCA 2020, p. 5).

2.5 Disciplinary Literacy

Stemming from the exploration of the concept of lifelong learning, it is worth considering the notion of a disciplinary literacy approach which has been advocated as a potential instructional method for 21st century curricula (Burke and Welsch 2018). This approach promotes the essential skills, dispositions and forms of knowledge associated with reading, writing, speaking and listening in specific academic disciplines (Moje 2008; Shanahan and Shanahan 2012). According to Shanahan (2019), basic reading and writing skills are not sufficient for educational, social and economic empowerment in the 21st century. In order to succeed in today's society, learners need to develop an understanding and appreciation of how mathematicians, scientists, musicians, and other experts use literacy (Shanahan 2019). Furthermore, the author proposes that pupils need to develop advanced, higher-order literacy abilities that are essential for 21st century life and work.

Within the disciplinary literacy approach, teaching should promote the methods of thinking and communicating that are representative of interaction and knowledge formation within an academic discipline (Shanahan and Shanahan 2008; Moje 2007). That is to say, pupils are encouraged to read, write and think like scientists, mathematicians, musicians and artists

(Burke and Welsch 2018). In the context of primary education, Shanahan (2019) advises that teachers should enable pupils to acquire the vocabulary pertaining to the specific subjects that they are studying. In addition, the author notes that learners should also understand the terminology that is applicable across disciplines (e.g. analyse, record, compare, observe).

Although disciplinary literacy is normally discussed as a secondary school affair (MacMahon 2014), researchers (e.g. Burke and Welsch 2018) have identified some reasons which merit its inclusion in Irish primary education. A disciplinary approach supports learner development by promoting key critical thinking and higher-order literacy skills (Burke and Welsch 2018). In addition, Shanahan and Shanahan (2014) point out that by learning to read and write like a discipline expert, learners acquire the ability to compare and contrast texts and justify their point of view using evidence. Furthermore, Moje (2007) states that integrating literacy and disciplinary knowledge enables pupils to read, write and think critically, and to contest ideas within the experiences they encounter. Finally, the application of literacy in disciplinary contexts for genuine purposes has proved to be a motivating factor for learners (e.g. Guthrie *et al.* 2004).

There is reason to suggest that a disciplinary literacy for learning how to learn should be promoted in primary education. If students are expected to become lifelong learners, they need to be equipped with the language and vocabulary associated with being a learner. As highlighted by Vygotsky (1962), the acquisition of language plays a vital role in shaping children's cognitive capabilities. If the targeted teaching of a disciplinary literacy associated with learning how to learn is excluded from primary education, then it is likely that students will be deprived of the opportunity to explore and develop lifelong learning skills including motivation, self-efficacy, mindset and metacognition. Therefore, if students are not explicitly taught the language of learning, learning to be a learner is likely to remain an implicit aspect

of primary education.

Internationally, there is a growing body of literature that explores lifelong learning as a prominent socio-political concern (Finsterwald *et al.* 2013). Recently, researchers (e.g. Finsterwald *et al.* 2013) have suggested that the ongoing global movement towards the development of ‘knowledge societies’ creates a need for individuals who are well-equipped for lifelong learning. This view is echoed by Fink (2003) who maintains that different needs relating to what people should learn and how they can learn are now evident in society and among individual learners. Boud and Soler (2016) point out that education today is more commonly viewed not in terms of what it provides in the present moment but in terms of what it delivers for the world beyond the present. However, Boud and Soler (2016) add a caveat that ‘teachers may well be teaching with the longer term in mind, but unless this work is actively supported through assessment practices, their good intentions can be inhibited’ (p. 401).

2.6 Assessment

Examination of the literature pertaining to the progression of teaching and learning practices within national curricula necessitated an exploration of similar shifts relating to the construct of assessment. Much of the current literature on educational assessment pays particular attention to formative assessment (Heritage and Wylie 2018; Boud and Soler 2016; Nicol 2009). The NCCA published a policy document on assessment in 2007 in which they advocated greater use of formative assessment in contrast to a previous over-reliance among teachers on summative assessment. Likewise, the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (2008) holds the view that if assessment serves to enhance learning, it must do more than administer grades and results. It is recommended in the quality framework for Irish primary schools, *Looking at Our School* (Inspectorate 2016) that teachers should strive to use

assessment as a method to both measure attainment and support pupils' learning. The use of consistent, appropriate formative assessment practices among teachers in primary schools is advocated within the framework.

In 2002, the Assessment Reform Group proposed the view that formative assessment strategies can promote learning if pupils are given relevant feedback, actively participate in their own learning, are encouraged to assess themselves and teaching is adapted in response to assessment results. In their critical review of studies, Black and Wiliam (1998) have also concluded that formative assessment improves learning. This type of assessment recognises the learners' understanding, learning strategies and learning dispositions. It also acknowledges the learning context and considers the learners' interpretations of the learning tasks and criteria for success.

In a related manner, Boud (2000) stresses the importance of high-quality formative assessment practices, asserting that engagement with such practices promotes and ensures a strong foundation for lifelong learning. In contrast to this, summative assessment highlights the 'most important' parts of the curriculum for learners and underlines the aspects of learning 'that matter' (Boud 2000, p. 152). Summative assessment takes the control of learning away from the learner and creates the illusion that assessment is a performance to be carried out by them; whereas formative assessment informs learners about how to learn and how they are progressing in striving to learn what they want. In this regard, Boud (2000) states that learners should be inspired to use formative assessment in learning tasks and activities throughout their lives.

As mentioned above, many researchers (e.g. Black and Wiliam 1998; 2009; Boud 2000) highlight the fact that formative assessment promotes students' learning and success.

Fluckiger (2010) postulates that formative assessment exists when assessment results and

feedback are used by teachers and students to further enhance learning. Work carried out by Black and Wiliam (1998; 2009) indicates that self-assessment is a core element of formative assessment. Similarly, Andrade (2008) highlights an important distinction between self-assessment and self-evaluation, the former being formative as pupils reflect upon their work in progress to identify ways to improve their performance while the latter is summative since it involves students assigning a grade to their work.

Stiggins (2001) acknowledges the significance of self-assessment by stating that ‘involving students as partners in assessment is the single best way to improve student learning achievement’ (p. 19). Andrade (2008) agrees that student self-assessment can uncover accurate, valuable information that serves to promote learning. According to Sadler (1989), if students appreciate the value of self-assessment, are taught how to do it and are supported in improving their work, they can effectively self-assess their work. In a literature review on assessment carried out by Dochy, Segers and Sluijsmans (1999), self-assessment practices were reported as having a positive impact upon learning:

Students who engage in self-assessment tend to score most highly on tests. Self-assessment, used in most cases to promote the learning of skills and abilities, leads to more reflection on one’s own work, a higher standard of outcomes, responsibility for one’s own learning and increasing understanding of problem-solving (Dochy *et al.* 1999, p. 337).

Adding to that, Andrade and Du (2007) found that self-assessment enables students to be more effective at identifying their strengths and weaknesses in learning and this had the effect of enhancing their level of motivation. It makes sense therefore that in the quality framework for Irish primary schools, *Looking at Our School* (Inspectorate 2016), it is suggested that in schools which demonstrate highly effective practice, students assess their progress realistically and recognise their present strengths and areas for future development as learners.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2020) outlines a redefined vision for educational assessment in Irish primary schools. Within this document, assessment is viewed as a shared process involving pupils and teachers and sometimes parents and other stakeholders ‘as they gather, record, interpret, use, and report information about a child’s progress and achievement in developing knowledge, concepts, competencies, skills and dispositions’ (NCCA 2020, p. 23). The NCCA (2020) recognises that the child is the most important user of assessment. They note that children require information that enables them ‘to identify where they are in terms of their learning, and what they need to do to progress beyond that point’ (NCCA 2020, p. 24). Moreover, within the draft curriculum framework, a significant emphasis is placed upon the social aspects of assessment. Conversations between pupils and teachers are deemed to be an essential part of the learning and assessment processes. The value of encouraging students to discuss and reflect upon their learning is advocated in the revised curriculum framework. The NCCA (2020) proposes that engaging pupils in self-reflection about their learning contributes to their self-identity as learners. Finally, the curriculum promotes pupil agency by ‘prioritising an assessment culture in which insights feed into and influence the nature and direction of teaching and learning in real time’ (NCCA 2020, p. 24).

The proposals for assessment in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2020) are in contrast to the key messages suggested in preceding documents. For example, in *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA 2007), the overarching purpose of assessment was to enhance the teacher’s understanding about the child’s progress and achievement to enable the teacher to plan appropriate future learning experiences for the child. Therefore, it would appear that the recommendations in the redeveloped curriculum seek to better align assessment practices in Irish schools with some of the visions for 21st century education. For example, the redefined aims of assessment

appear to nurture the learner's voice in the learning process.

2.7 Learner Voice

Learner voice has been a subject of educational discourse for the past few decades. Many researchers have offered differing conceptualisations of the concept. According to Fleming (2015), learner voice involves 'students in dialogue, discussion and consultation on issues that concern them in relation to their education' (p. 223). As far back as 1975, Stenhouse put forward the idea that pupils would perform better at school if they were treated with 'respect as learners ... and [their] ideas listened to and taken seriously' (p. 32). However, Rudduck and Fielding (2006) contend that while researchers in the 1970s were interested in exploring pupils' perspectives, schools were not committed to promoting the voice of the pupil in the classroom.

In the United Kingdom, the importance of pupil voice was acknowledged in the policy initiative *Every Child Matters* which gave rise to the establishment of the *Children Act 2004* (Government of the United Kingdom 2004). The matter of pupil voice featured prominently in the latter publication which proposed that children should be given the right to positively contribute to their lives and that pupils' views relating to their physical, emotional and educational needs should be given due consideration. In an attempt to encourage the promotion of pupil voice in schools, the Office for Standards in Education, Services and Skills (2005) requires schools to consider pupils' viewpoints and states that pupils are to be consulted during school inspections.

Discourse on the matter of learner voice in Ireland arose from the *United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). Article 12:1 (UNCRC 1992) mentions that children should be entitled to a right to express their views and have their opinions given due consideration. In light of this rights-based perspective, learner voice was incorporated into Irish education

through the construction of student councils. The *White Paper on Education* (Government of Ireland 1995) declared that ‘school policies should be developed in close consultation with students, where appropriate’ (p. 181). The paper states that schools should consider the formation of a students’ council to facilitate this consultation.

The concept of learner identity has featured in some initiatives instigated by the Inspectorate in the past two decades. Models of external evaluation including *Whole-School Evaluation* (Inspectorate 2004) and *Whole-School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning* (Inspectorate 2011) introduced focus-group student interviews and standardised pupil questionnaires as part of the school inspection process. However, as Fleming (2015) remarks, while these advancements welcome the voice of the learner, there is doubt as to whether they afford pupils the agency or power to inspire changes in their school lives.

The topic of learner voice re-surfaced onto the Irish education landscape following the introduction of school self-evaluation guidelines (Inspectorate 2012). Learner voice was suggested as a method of ensuring the ‘inclusion of the voice of students in school self-evaluation processes’ (Inspectorate 2012, p. 9). However, in this instance, it was positioned as ‘an evaluation criterion for teachers underscoring the pedagogical importance of engagement and consultation’ (Fleming 2015, p. 236). It is apparent therefore, that although references to learner voice are evident in Irish education policy, the promotion of the concept has been challenged by issues of performativity, accountability and power. Relating to this type of problem, Flutter (2007) makes a notable point suggesting that:

‘Top-down’ approaches, which attempt to enforce change through external pressure, may lead teachers to overlook the more simple and profound rationale of pupil voice, which is that it affords teachers an opportunity to refocus their attention on what really matters – learners and how they learn best (p. 345).

Recently, there has been a further increase in the attention and interest given to learner voice

in the Irish context. The promotion of learner voice has appeared as a crucial factor in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The Quality Framework for Primary Schools in Ireland, *Looking at Our Schools* (Inspectorate 2016) proposes that the development and facilitation of learner voice and participation in school is characteristic of highly effective education. More specifically, it states that schools should ‘recognise students as stakeholders ... ensure that the student council has an active role in decision making ... and actively consult and engage with students to review and improve teaching, learning and assessment practices ... [and enable] students to negotiate their learning thereby increasing their autonomy and effectiveness as learners’ (Inspectorate 2016, p. 16). These proposals appear to allude to a rights-based perspective for learner voice. Although there are some references to accountability and school improvement, these are somewhat balanced by recommendations for learner voice opportunities that promote pupil agency and autonomy.

Much of the literature on the topic of learner voice explores its relevance for teaching and learning. Rudduck and Flutter (2004) make a noteworthy comment on the significance of learner voice in enhancing teaching and learning practices:

Hearing what pupils have to say about teaching, learning and schools enables teachers to look at things from the pupil perspective ... [and] being able to see the familiar differently and to contemplate alternative approaches, roles and practices is the first step towards fundamental change in classrooms and schools (p. 141).

This viewpoint is echoed by Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) who propose that learners’ ideas and views about teaching and learning are worth listening to because they lay a ‘foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools’ (p. 1). Likewise, Levin (2000) highlights the fact that learner voice should be a core aspect of school improvement and planning and that school reform should consider and incorporate the pupils’ ideas for change. McIntyre, Pedder and Rudduck (2005) describe two complementary principles upon which their ideas about the role of learner voice in teaching and learning is based. The first premise

is that ‘all school pupils have a right to be consulted and their voices listened to’ and secondly that ‘consulting pupils offers schools a very important means towards their own improvement’ (p. 165).

Flutter (2007) reported on a school in which teachers had incorporated learner voice into their teaching and learning. In this school, a small team of pupils carried out an investigation among their fellow pupils to record students’ views on the factors comprising a good lesson. Following focus-group discussions, the team created a model of a good lesson. The team’s findings and other suggestions about improving teaching practices were presented to the school staff. Following a largely positive response from the staff, the students’ recommendations and ideas were implemented into the school system and pupils were required to attend staff meetings and inform staff members of their findings from ongoing investigations. Flutter (2007) highlights the fact that although this investigation did not initially intend to report on how pupils’ views impacted upon teaching practices, the promotion of learner voice had ‘led to profound changes in teachers’ thinking and practice’ (p. 347).

In a similar manner, McIntyre et al. (2005) examined how six Year 8 teachers in England utilised learner voice. The study was conducted in three phases. During Phase One, pupils reported their ideas on teaching and learning and their teachers’ responses to the views were recorded. In Phase Two, the teachers’ use of the ideas proposed by students was explored and the pupils’ evaluations of their teachers’ responses to their ideas were recorded. Finally, Phase Three focused on examining the lasting impacts of pupils’ views on teaching and learning practices among their teachers. The findings of the study yielded interesting observations with successful implementation of learner voice exhibited by some teachers and unsuccessful efforts demonstrated by others. The researchers coined the terms ‘comfortable

learnings' and 'uncomfortable learnings' (McIntyre *et al.* 2005, p. 166) to describe the data found in the study. Comfortable learnings for teachers occurred in settings in which the pupils' views were consistent with the teachers' current practices and teachers' own views. On the contrary, uncomfortable learnings took place in settings in which the pupils' suggestions did not concur with the teachers' current practices and involved a shift in classroom power or student responsibilities. It seems reasonable to suggest therefore that if pupils' ideas are to be taken seriously and incorporated into teaching and learning, teachers need to be prepared to address issues of 'power relations' and changes in student responsibilities.

However, certain studies have examined pupils' views about learning without investigating if and how the students' opinions were considered by teachers or whether pupils' views impact upon teaching practices. For instance, Hopkins (2008) conducted group interviews with 132 students aged 11-14 years in three secondary schools in England to identify 'classroom conditions' which students deemed conducive to effective learning. Although Hopkins (2008) produces interesting findings about what students seek in terms of learning conditions, this paper does not document how the students' perspectives might affect teacher practices.

Similarly, McCallum *et al.* (2000) carried out research with pupils aged 7 and 11 in a British primary school to examine pupils' views on prime learning conditions. While pupils provided valuable insights into pupils' perspectives on conditions pertaining to the learner - including ability, mood and physical state - and elements relating to the classroom - such as teaching approaches and classroom climate - the research did not add to our understanding of how pupil voice impacts upon teaching and learning practices.

As mentioned above, some efforts to incorporate learner voice in schools have threatened teachers' sense of autonomy and power. Several authors have offered opinions on this matter.

Fisher (2014) explains that teachers may be more welcoming of pupils' opinions about changes in extra-curricular activities or sports equipment than about the structure of station teaching. He proposes that pupils' suggestions regarding a teacher's organisation or delivery of learning material may be negatively perceived by teachers. However, Alexander et al. (2010) remind us that 'suggesting that children should have a voice does not negate the importance of teacher voice' (p. 154). Adding to that, the authors suggest that the encouragement of pupil voice should be regarded as a 'sustained principle informing a school's ethos, culture and practice' (Alexander *et al.* 2010, p. 153).

Incorporating and implementing learner voice may require some teachers to experiment with new practices in the classroom and changes in student responsibility (Riley and Docking 2004). As noted by McIntyre et al. (2005) 'sustained incorporation of pupils' ideas ... is possible if teachers have confidence ... to make it happen' (p. 152). Lundy (2007) identifies four conditions necessary to fulfil the aspirations of a rights-based perspective as the basis for meaningful learner voice. She proposes that learners should have a space in which they can share their views; a voice to express their opinions; and an audience to listen to their ideas. Furthermore, she states that pupils' views should instigate a response and action. Where learner voice is incorporated meaningfully into primary education, it has the power to support pupil agency and contribute to students' self-identity as learners.

2.8 Identity

The precise definition of identity has been widely contested and debated by researchers. Some scholars (e.g. Sarup 1996) propose that identities should not be viewed as single entities since they are 'full of contradictions and ambiguities' (p. 8). Similarly, Compton-Lilly (2006) states that identities cannot not be described as individual elements. Gee (1999) suggests that identities are multifarious and context dependent and that people demonstrate

several ‘ways of being’ in response to certain social circumstances. On the other hand, it is suggested that a person’s identity is constructed through relationships with others. In other words, identities are constantly influenced and changed by the impacts of others. According to McCarthy and Moje (2002), ‘identities are always situated in relationships ... and power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned’ (p. 231). There are a number of differing theoretical perspectives which seek to explain the development of identities among individuals.

2.8.1 Sociocultural Perspective

From a sociocultural viewpoint, identity is understood to be a multifaceted phenomenon as opposed to a single element (Gee 2001; Holland and Lave 2001). Sociocultural scholars suggest that individuals form a range of self-understandings, for example as a mathematical student (mathematical identity) or as a music student (musical identity). They propose that individuals integrate these various self-understandings to form a more general learner identity or student identity. Ultimately, individuals combine these identities with other non-learning-related identities to form their personal identity. This perspective suggests that an individual’s identity is formed through their participation in different sociocultural contexts including school, work and home (Holland and Lave 2001). Within each context, individuals engage in social interaction with others which allows different identities to become available, for example a co-operative person or an innovative person. Identities are therefore enabled and enacted through interaction with others (McCarthy and Moje 2002).

With regard to the cultural aspect of identity, each context is defined by a specific set of norms, values and tools that guide peoples’ actions and aspirations and influence their emerging sense of identity (Holland *et al.* 1998). According to Geertz (1973), culture is not created from individual meaning making, rather culture – encompassing norms, values, tools

and behaviour – enables people to derive meaning from and make sense of the world. This gives reason to suggest that an individual's sense of identity is influenced by the particular cultural lens through which they view the world.

The sociocultural perspective on identity explores how different norms, values and tools - which may be implicitly or explicitly communicated in learning opportunities or activities - may inform or impact the students' identities (Verhoeven, Astrid and Poorthuis 2019). Some sociocultural researchers have used narratives as a method of exploring students' identities. For example, in some cases (e.g. Solomon 2007) student interviews have been utilised to examine how pupils share their self-understandings and how these were informed by the tools, norms, values and identity positions embedded within the school context.

2.8.2 Psychosocial Perspective

From a psychosocial stance, researchers are primarily concerned with the internal, psychological processes involved in the development of an individual's identity. Studies which examined identity development among adolescents have yielded findings which suggest that there are two major stages of identity development among adolescents, exploration and commitment (Negru-Subtirica *et al.* 2015; Solomontos-Kountouri and Hurry 2008). The exploration stage involves individuals investigating new areas of interest and sampling new activities with the aim of discovering what they value and deem worthy of pursuit. The commitment phase encompasses the stage at which adolescents make enduring life decisions in relation to their education and career.

Concerning the school context, the psychosocial perspective on identity focuses on how some educational activities or strategies promote or demote the development of pupils' identities during the exploration or commitment phases (Verhoeven *et al.* 2019). The importance of providing students with opportunities to experiment with new learning activities and areas of

interest is advocated from a psychological stance on identity (e.g. Charland 2010).

Psychosocial researchers are more interested in examining the process of identity development as opposed to exploring the distinct dimensions of the construct. In contrast to sociocultural scholars, psychosocial researchers generally conduct large-scale, quantitative studies to explore identity development (Verhoeven *et al.* 2019).

2.8.3 Sociological Perspective

The sociological perspective on identity focuses on group membership and the degree to which individuals identify with these groups (Verhoeven *et al.* 2019). Sociological researchers explore how group membership may include certain individuals and exclude others as a method of acquiring status. The sociological perspective on identity is concerned with how people establish groups, operate in societal power structures and employ their power and agency to present themselves in preferred ways (Coté 2002; Foucault 1980). Some studies which adopt a sociological perspective on identity investigate how a student's peers and teachers can support the pupil in using his/ her agency to present himself/ herself in a desired position (e.g. Robb *et al.* 2007). In comparison to sociocultural scholars, sociological researchers focus on how groups are constructed and how individuals can utilise their agency. The latter set of researchers utilise qualitative research methods, including observations, interviews and focus groups, to explore the construct of identity (Verhoeven *et al.* 2019).

2.8.4 Identity Development in School

School is a key context in which an individual's identity development can be supported or inhibited (Verhoeven *et al.* 2019). Teachers can provide pupils with opportunities to explore new concepts, skills and activities thus exposing novel identity positions (Coll and Falsafi 2010; Flum and Kaplan 2006). Gee (1990) points out that teaching should value the 'discourses, ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting'

(p.143) that children utilise to identify themselves as members of specific social groups.

Interestingly, Dyson (2003) concludes that schools often expect pupils to utilise symbols and language in a manner that is socially and academically valued within the institution of formal education.

Compton Lilly (2006) illustrates an example of how the school context may impact upon a pupil's self-identity. The author explains that a child's identity as a reader (reading identity) is influenced by their history as a reader, previous successful experiences, the criteria for measuring reading competences, and the child's current difficulties. Compton Lilly (2006) states that children's successes or difficulties as learners do not occur within neutral, political or social contexts. Furthermore, the author remarks that factors in education including access, opportunity and privilege which are associated with class, race and gender affect pupils' construction of learning-related identities.

2.9 Learner Identity

Different definitions of learner identity have been proposed by researchers and authors in the field of education. As documented by Parkinson and Brennan (2020), initial attempts by the Centre for Learner Identity Studies (CLIS 2014) to conceptualise learner identity proposed a broad model of the construct based on six bases: gender, generation, social class, place, ethnicity and spirituality/religion. Their model suggested that these bases and the socio-cultural aspects of individuals' experiences influence one's subjective experience of being a learner (CLIS 2014). Other researchers, however, contested this preliminary model of learner identity. For example, Fal (2013) argued that the CLIS definition described several social identities rather than providing a definition of learner identity that was based solely on the activity of learning.

Coll and Falsafi (2010), in their definition, argue that 'learner identity is the conceptual

artefact that contains, connects and enables reflection over the emotional and cognitive processes of the experience of becoming and being a learner, in the past as well as in the present and the future' (p. 219). They suggest that pupils formulate self-understandings as a result of the experiences they encounter in formal and informal educational settings. Coll and Falsafi (2010) explain that an individual's learner identity 'consists of generalised meanings about how one is recognised as a learner by oneself and others' (p. 220). In describing learner identity, Kolb and Kolb (2009) state that 'people with a learning identity see themselves as learners, seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn' (p. 1). They add that a learning identity develops over time and is nurtured through positive relationships.

From a sociocultural perspective, learner identity is understood to comprise of three main elements (e.g. Bruner 1996; Holland *et al.* 1998; Gee 2000). Firstly, identity construction is embedded within an activity that distinguishes the type of identity. Secondly, it is proposed that identity includes a discursive element which refers to the mode in which the identity is constructed. Finally, the idea of recognition is suggested to occupy a vital role in identity development. Coll and Falsafi (2010) argue that the combination of these three features enables an individual to formulate a sense of recognition as someone. These authors mention that most sociocultural scholars emphasise the two-dimensional nature of identity, that is to say, identity is part individual and part social.

As stated above, Coll and Falsafi (2010) postulate that the experiences encountered by students in formal and informal educational settings mediate their construction of meanings about themselves as learners. As outlined by these authors, certain aspects of the learning environment influence the meanings pupils construct about the experience. These include the student's perception of the school teacher, the pupil's confidence in their own ability, the

student's prior knowledge in a specific area and the pupil's feelings, motivation and interests. Consequently, the learning experience mediates the individual's construction of meaning about the learned subject, the overall educational experience and about oneself as a learner in novel learning settings.

One thought-provoking issue which has intrigued researchers for many years is why some learning experiences and the meanings a pupil constructs during these experiences are more significant than others in the student's overall self-recognition as a learner. Coll and Falsafi (2010) suggest that certain learning episodes and the meanings constructed during these experiences are more influential than others in the pupil's sense of identity as a learner. Bruner (1996) explains this occurrence by suggesting that individuals seek to maintain their identities, on a daily basis throughout their lives, to generate coherence and stability, even when circumstances change. As a result, the process of identity transformation becomes difficult and complex. Similarly, Coll and Falsafi (2010) note that although learning situations change and individuals' meanings about themselves as learners shift, they generally maintain a stable, coherent identity. This is because learners seek recognition from others for actions that reinforce their current understanding of themselves.

As noted by Coll and Falsafi (2010), educational environments encapsulate a plethora of subtle acts of recognition which include 'any explicit or implicit actions on the individual's behalf to seek and receive recognition' (Coll and Falsafi 2010, p. 226). The ultimate aim of these acts is to receive recognition of oneself. Importantly, Coll and Falsafi (2010) highlight the fact that, in a classroom environment, pupils typically direct these actions towards teachers because they assume a superior status as supplier of recognition. Interestingly, however, acts of recognition are not always aimed at positively reinforcing the individual. Criticism and destructive feedback are types of recognition because the person is still

recognised as something.

Many scholars concur that learner identity is a key factor in promoting participation in education (Coll and Falsafi 2010; Buckingham Shum and Crick 2012). It enables educators to promote participation in educational experiences and to understand how individuals become learners in a variety of learning situations. Consequently, Buckingham Shum and Crick (2012) argue that education systems must consciously support the development of the students' learner identities. That is to say, educators should encourage pupils to develop awareness of themselves as learners.

Unsurprisingly, in a study investigating priorities for Irish primary education (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2014), the nurturing of children's sense of identity was recognised as a key concern for education at primary level. The respondents in this study discussed the need for children to develop a positive sense of themselves as learners and recommended that each pupil 'be given an opportunity to discover where his/ her abilities lie' (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2014, p. 279). However, this has not yet been prioritised in traditional curricula. Consequently, nurturing learner identity is among the core aspirations for 21st century education.

2.10 Education Ecosystem

As mentioned above, current 21st century views relating to education value the importance of considering the larger ecosystems within which schools operate. Traditionally, decisions pertaining to education were made by a specifically chosen group of people. However, this should no longer be the case. According to the OECD (2019), education should now demonstrate shared responsibility and decision-making among all relevant stakeholders including pupils, parents, educators and communities. There are movements towards promoting students' involvement within the education system, enabling them to assume responsibility for their learning and encouraging them to become active agents of change

alongside principals and teachers (OECD 2019). Consequently, a 21st century model of education should incorporate student agency, co-agency and teacher agency (OECD 2019).

Student agency can be understood ‘as the belief that students have the will and the ability to positively influence their own lives and the world around them as well as the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change’ (OECD 2019, p. 16). The researchers comment that student agency pertains to the emergence of an identity and a sense of belonging. The concept of student agency is inextricably linked with learner voice and learner identity. Fleming (2019) illuminates these connections stating that ‘enabling learners to feel they have a genuine voice in the learning process is a key aspect of developing agency and, hence, identity’ (p. 24). The OECD (2019) proposes that developing agency necessitates motivation, self-efficacy and growth mindset. Similarly, Kolb and Kolb (2009) associate these factors with learner identity. The OECD (2019) states that the development of agency enables students to foster a sense of wellbeing. Agency is needed in order to enable students to establish personal learning goals and to identify the actions required to achieve the goal. When students are agents in their learning, they demonstrate higher levels of motivation and interest as learners (OECD 2019).

Importantly, Schoon (2017) suggests that the development of agency is a relational process, involving interactions with peers, teachers and parents over time. This refers to the concept of ‘co-agency’. According to Leadbeater (2017), an effective learning environment nurtures co-agency whereby pupils, parents and teachers work together to maximise the pupils’ learning and development. Similarly, Salmela-Aro (2009) proposes that a pupil’s peers, parents, teachers and wider community affect his or her sense of agency. In order to enable a child to reach his or her full potential, which is a key aim of education, educational goals can be shared among all stakeholders in the broader education ecosystem. This can enable the pupil

to foster the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to thrive in school, at home and in the community (OECD 2019).

Traditional models of education expected teachers to impart knowledge to students through instruction and assessment. On the contrary, in current models of education, learning involves instruction and co-construction (OECD 2019). This system expects teachers and pupils to become co-constructors and co-creators of knowledge in the learning process. This proposition correlates with the views of Dewey (1915) and Freire (1993). Through such an approach it is envisaged that the pupil will acquire a sense of purpose and responsibility as a learner.

Pupils' peers constitute another significant part of the development of student agency. This type of co-agency enables students to engage in meaningful discussions about their learning, enhance their communication skills and higher-order thinking abilities, and acquire more effective problem-solving skills (Salmela-Aro 2017; Greig 2000; Hogan, Nastasi and Pressley 2000). Furthermore, pupils develop autonomy and confidence when working as part of a team (Gafney and Varma-Nelson 2007). Overall, this type of co-agency gives rise to improved performance, positive attitudes and enhanced feelings of empowerment among pupils.

Parents play a crucial role as co-agents in their child's learning. There is evidence to suggest that positive parental engagement with schools leads to enhanced pupil academic performance and reduced levels of absenteeism (Davis-Keen 2005). This researcher also reports that pupils with positive parental involvement attain higher test scores, demonstrate better behaviour at school, and exhibit better social skills.

The OECD (2019) draws attention to the fact that children do not only learn in school because the pupils' teachers, parents and wider community share the responsibility of the

students' education. Adults are expected to equip children with the skills they will need in the future (OECD 2019). Importantly, as Talreja (2017) points out, children require the support and understanding of adults in order to develop a sense of agency, in other words, playing an active role in their education. Collaboration among pupils, teachers, parents and communities can enable pupils to learn about futuristic opportunities and how they can become responsible, engaged citizens. At the same time, communities can learn about the needs, viewpoints and concerns of the younger generation.

2.11 Skills versus Competencies

It is important to draw attention to a noticeable change in terminology evident in the literature pertaining to 21st century learning. McGuinness (2018) highlights the introduction of the term 'competencies' which is becoming more commonly utilised instead of the term 'skills'. Although the above terms are used interchangeably, McGuinness (2018) distinguishes between the meaning of both. A skill is associated with 'carrying out some action with a degree of proficiency, doing it well rather than poorly' (McGuinness 2018, p. 8) and while skills were traditionally linked to the acquisition of psychomotor acts, they are now commonly associated with complex cognitive and social actions. On the other hand, a competence is defined by the OECD (2005) as 'more than just knowledge and skills ... it involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context' (p. 4). Therefore, competencies are more concerned with the application of knowledge and skills rather than the development of knowledge.

2.12 Learning Dispositions

Similar to competencies, disposition is another novel term which appears in the literature pertaining to 21st century learning goals. According to McGuinness (2018), 'disposition

generally refers to the tendency for a person to act in a certain way in given circumstances' (p. 9). The author explains that in all learning contexts an individual must not only be skilful but they must also be motivated and willing to apply their skills in appropriate situations and be sensitive to these circumstances. This view is supported by Claxton (2007) who suggests that being 'disposed' implies that individuals are 'ready and willing ... to make use of the ability they possess' (p. 119). Adding to that, Claxton (2007) contends that 'a disposition is merely an ability that one is actually disposed to make use of' (p. 119). Claxton and Carr (2004) point out, therefore, that a disposition is not *acquired* but rather, as it were, a natural aptitude towards which the individual is more or less disposed.

Importantly, Sadler (2002) highlights the fact that learning dispositions are not achievements. As noted by Claxton et al. (2011), dispositions should not be viewed as skills which can be ticked off using a checklist. Indeed, the authors note that the term *skill* is unhelpful when discussing disposition since *skill* refers to something one can do and *disposition* to something one is on the look out to do. It makes sense, therefore, for Claxton (2007) to suggest that along with mastering a skill, individuals need to develop an awareness of when the skill is to be used, and they must also be motivated to increase their desire to use it.

Moreover, Carr and Claxton (2002) argue that if an individual is not sufficiently disposed to learning, little of it will take place even if skills have been learned. Likewise, Claxton (2007) states that if teachers merely focus on teaching a skill - e.g. problem-solving - and neglect to nurture disposition, disposition will fail to last. This important point is reiterated by Dewey (1933) when he states that 'knowledge of methods alone will not suffice: there must also be the desire and the will to employ them. This is an affair of personal disposition' (p. 30).

Littlejohn (2008) draws attention to a similar relationship between learning strategies and learning disposition. He proposes that opportunities for effectively implementing new

learning strategies are restricted by pupils' prior experiences or dispositions. Commenting upon strategy training, Littlejohn (2008) argues that disposition plays a significant role in determining if the training will be of benefit for the individual.

In a study carried out by Bryce (2004) it was found that schools which promote lifelong learning, focus on promoting students' awareness and understanding of dispositions for a changing world. It is unsurprising, therefore, that based on the findings of a study exploring key priorities for Irish primary education, Fitzpatrick et al. (2014) conclude that 'curriculum subjects are only as important as the opportunities they afford for children to develop important life skills and dispositions in relationship with others' (p. 281). Importantly, it is stated within the quality framework for Irish primary schools, *Looking at Our School* (Inspectorate 2016), that assessment practices used by teachers should include assessment of pupils' learning skills and dispositions along with assessment of their knowledge.

Learning dispositions have featured in recent publications pertaining to Irish primary education. The *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2015) highlights the importance of enabling children to foster positive dispositions towards language and literacy. Likewise, *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2009) encourages the nurturing of dispositions including resilience, curiosity, confidence, independence and playfulness. In a similar manner, the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum: Draft Specification Junior Infants to Second Class* (NCCA 2018) advocates the promotion of productive disposition among learners. In doing so, the curriculum aims to support learners to be confident in their mathematical ability and knowledge. It also enables teachers to inspire learners to discover the relevance of mathematics in their everyday lives (NCCA 2018).

2.13 Learning Skills

A large and growing body of research has explored the idea of promoting learning skills

among learners. A key priority identified by Fitzpatrick et al. (2014) was the need to support children in developing learning skills and dispositions through a broad education.

Specifically, respondents remarked upon the need to ‘form learners who know how to learn throughout their lives’ and to ‘move away from learning by rote and towards teaching children how to learn and think’ (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2014, p. 275). Additionally, in a study by Bryce (2004) it was found that schools which promote lifelong learning focus on helping students learn *how* to learn. In a similar vein, Fitzgerald et al. (2014) discuss appropriate learning skills for pupils at primary level including, ‘setting their own learning goals, making their own learning plans, assessing and evaluating their own work and reflecting on their learning’ (p. 276). Importantly, Littlejohn (2008) argues that educators must not view learning skills as objectives of learning but as ‘ways of working’ which are incorporated into daily tasks and activities.

2.14 Key Competencies for 21st Century Education

Exploration of literature relating to learning in the context of the 21st century merits inclusion of some key competencies for future education. McGuinness (2018) provides an explanation of three key competencies necessary for 21st century education. Explaining that key competencies consist of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, McGuinness (2018) proposes that curricula should promote cognitive competency, interpersonal competency, and intrapersonal competency. These are deemed to be key competencies because of their applicability across many knowledge domains. Cognitive competency refers to the development of cognitive skills including problem-solving, critical thinking, reasoning and decision-making. It also includes dispositions such as open-mindedness, persistence and curiosity. In terms of values, cognitive competency resonates with the desire to be stimulated, seek challenges and act with integrity. Interpersonal competency pertains to the development

of socio-emotional, teamwork, listening and communication skills. With regard to dispositions, interpersonal competency involves being empathetic, assertive, responsible and respectful. Values might include the desire to be just, ethical, agreeable and trustworthy.

The third key competency proposed by McGuinness (2018) for 21st century education is intrapersonal competency. This incorporates the development of personal skills, dispositions and values. These include self-awareness about learning, metacognition, self-recognition of learning strengths and weaknesses, self-regulation, persistence, autonomy, agency, self-efficacy and personal identity construction. Considering Kolb and Kolb's (2009) understanding that individuals with learning identities views themselves as learners, foster a learning attitude and belief in their ability to learn, it could be argued that the concept of learner identity resonates with many elements of McGuinness' classification of intrapersonal competency. Many of the intrapersonal skills, attitudes and values identified by McGuinness (2018) reflect the personal attributes associated with the process of becoming a learner – some of which will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

2.15 Personal Attributes of Learning

Traditional curricula utilised learning outcomes and academic achievements as measurements of the success and effectiveness of education systems. On the contrary, modern curricula value the importance of students' experiences, wellbeing and engagement with the learning process. The OECD (2019) asserts that modern curriculum design should acknowledge the individuality of each pupil. This can be achieved by recognising that every child has their own distinct learning path, embarks on their learning journey with their own unique personal attributes and brings with them their own personal experiences and backgrounds.

McGuinness' (2018) inclusion of intrapersonal competency as a key competency for 21st century education is similar to the 'non-cognitive skills' which feature in some revised

curriculum frameworks internationally (OECD 2019). Both concepts reflect the need for educators to enable students to foster learning attitudes, dispositions and values which are transferable across knowledge domains. In light of this, some core personal attributes which are deemed important for 21st century education and are associated with an individual's self-identity as a learner will be explored. These include mindset, self-efficacy, autonomy, motivation, self-regulation and metacognition.

2.15.1 Mindset

In the context of learner identity, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the subject of mindset. Dweck and colleagues (e.g. Dweck 1975, 2000; Dweck and Leggett 1988) have explored differences between incremental learners who embrace challenges and view intelligence as learnable; and entity learners who have a fixed view of intelligence, avoid challenges and retreat easily in the face of obstacles. Molden and Dweck (2006) propose that individuals with a learning self-identity believe they can learn and improve. These students persist when confronted with obstacles, embrace new challenges and learn from criticism. On the other hand, individuals with fixed identities avoid challenges and criticism and quit more easily.

With regard to mindset and learning, Farrington et al. (2012) state that a strong, positive mindset enhances a pupil's engagement with academic work. An individual with a positive mindset is more likely to demonstrate positive academic behaviours and persist in the face of obstacles (Farrington *et al.* 2012). Diener and Dweck (1978; 1980) report that learning beliefs are independent of cognitive ability but significantly influence cognitive performance. Similarly, Molden and Dweck (2006) point to the fact that irrespective of intelligence levels, students with learning self-identities are more successful at school than their fixed identity counterparts. As Dweck (2006) declares:

The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, this is the hallmark of the growth mindset; it is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives (Dweck 2006, p. 7).

In a related manner, Dweck (2000) explains that an individual's learning identity is not affected by their successes and mistakes alone, rather it is partly influenced by the attributions the student forms about these experiences. These self-attributions are inspired by the evaluations of significant others in the pupil's life. Moreover, Dweck (2000) outlines the impact of teacher praise on pupils' sense of identity. She states that when teachers commend students for successful learning by praising them for being 'clever' or 'smart', they promote fixed identity beliefs among pupils. This demotes students' appreciation of the importance of effort.

Research instigated by Carol Dweck (e.g. Dweck 2006; Mueller and Dweck 1998) in the area of mindset has yielded interesting findings about the correlation between beliefs about intelligence and motivation. Her studies indicate that fixed views about intelligence are associated with lower levels of motivation whereas incremental beliefs are related to higher levels of motivation. Moreover, Lee et al. (2018) found that pupils with fixed mindsets about intelligence had higher levels of stress after experiencing predictable grade declines following their transition to secondary school.

2.15.2 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is another core personal attribute which positively impacts upon children's learning and development (Bandura 1986). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own abilities, particularly their ability to execute a forthcoming challenge and to successfully complete a task (Bandura 1977); all of which resonate with the concept of learner identity. Successful learning experiences promote self-efficacy while unsuccessful

learning experiences demote the attribute among individuals. With reference to the latter, some researchers warn against the issue of 'learned helplessness' which can arise from a repetition of failed endeavours. Learned helplessness is characterised by an individual's reluctance to engage in a task because of their perception of their incompetence and unlikelihood to succeed (Maier, Seligman and Solomon 1969). Maier et al. (1969) draw attention to the fact that individuals who experience this feeling do not persist and give up easily even in situations where they are likely to be successful.

In a similar vein, Bandura (1997) argues that self-efficacy affects the choice of task carried out by individuals. It also impacts their efforts and sense of perseverance. Askar and Umay (2001) conclude that pupils with high-perceived self-efficacy exert more effort to complete a task and are more persistent when confronted by obstacles. Likewise, Bandura (1997) suggests that low self-efficacy learners are more likely to give up when faced with challenges. In contrast, when confronted with problems, high self-efficacy learners have a greater tendency to persist and work harder (Schunk 1995). Dweck and Molden (2005) draw attention to the fact that in order to carry out learning actions, individuals must not only have an appreciation of learning but also a self-assurance of being effective at learning. Bandura and Schunk (1981) advise that self-efficacy among learners can be encouraged by helping them to set realistic learning targets and by breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps. Furthermore, Schunk and Cox (1986) recommend the use of timely, relevant feedback to enable learners attribute success to their efforts.

Self-efficacy among learners has been found to be related to other elements pertaining to a student's learner identity. For example, Luftnegger et al. (2012) conclude that individuals are more interested in learning, have a learning goal orientation and demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy when they view themselves as autonomous in classroom learning tasks. These

researchers also found that the promotion of self-reflection in learning at school is a good predictor of self-efficacy, learning goal orientation, self-assessment of learning and enduring interest in life-long learning.

2.15.3 Autonomy

Lamb (2011) draws attention to an important connection between learner autonomy and learner identity stating that an individual's desire to have control over their learning and be able to regulate their learning forms their learner identity. Autonomous learners assume responsibility for and control of their own learning and understanding (Nation 2001). As noted by Deci and Ryan (1987), learning contexts can be either autonomy supportive or restrictive. Lap (2005) highlights elements which are essential for learner autonomy such as a learner's cognitive ability, affective factors including attitudes and self-confidence, meta-cognitive strategies including goal-setting, self-assessment and social factors including a willingness to work with others. On the other hand, Lamb (2011) discusses factors which can constrain the development of learner identity, particularly those that reduce learners' capacity to control their own learning. These can be internal factors such as a lack of self-confidence or external factors including disruptive learners or poor classroom control.

The publication *Looking at Our School 2016 A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (Inspectorate 2016) states that highly effective practice in schools is evidenced when students display qualities that include the following: having a sense of ownership of their work; having a sense of pride in what they are doing; taking responsibility for improving their performance; displaying a sense of autonomy as learners; reflecting on their behaviour and attitude to learning; and setting meaningful personal goals as a result of their reflection.

According to Gholami (2016) learners who assume responsibility for their own learning are the most successful. This is supported by Farrington et al. (2012) who contend that

effectiveness in learning is enhanced when learners have a desire to learn and to formulate their own understandings for their personal use. Likewise, Kolb and Kolb (2012) point out that the strength of an individual's identity as an independent lifelong learner is shaped by the extent to which he or she assumes additional responsibility for their learning. It is unsurprising therefore that learner autonomy is now considered to be such an important educational goal (Gholami 2016).

2.15.4 Self-Regulation

According to Schunk and Zimmerman (1994) self-regulation is 'the process whereby students activate and sustain cognitions, behaviours, and affects, which are systematically orientated towards the attainment of their goals' (p. 304). There is much evidence to suggest that fostering pupils' self-regulation is essential to ensure their overall success as learners (e.g. Whitebread 2013; Blair and Razza 2007). Additionally, findings from longitudinal studies indicate that measures of self-regulation are better indicators of academic success and overall well-being than conventional measures of intelligence (Blair and Raver 2015). Perry (2013) posits that strategies and interventions which promote self-regulation among pupils can enhance the performances of all students, particularly those who are struggling.

2.15.5 Metacognition

Metacognition, a concept introduced by John Flavell, explains the cognitive process involved in self-regulation. As children self-regulate, they employ a variety of planning, monitoring and evaluation strategies. Whitebread (2010) advocates the need for children to develop and utilise a range of mental strategies during their engagement with cognitive tasks. Importantly, O'Sullivan (2016) notes that children's understanding and experience of metacognition and ability to regulate their cognition and behaviour is largely influenced by their interactions with others.

In a similar manner to Vygotsky's (1962; 1978) Zone of Proximal Development, co-regulation involves the co-construction of understanding between two individuals through the use of regulatory strategies or tasks. Whitebread et al. (2007) draw attention to the fact that co-regulation reduces the cognitive demand placed upon students and provides an opportunity for them to express their internal thoughts. Unsurprisingly, Perry (2013) postulates that positive, responsive interactions with teachers are necessary to promote children's development of metacognition and self-regulation. Teachers can support this development by nurturing open relationships with pupils, enabling students to foster a sense of ownership, providing appropriate levels of cognitive challenge for pupils and generating conversations with children about their learning.

2.15.6 Motivation

Another personal attribute associated with learner identity is motivation. Motivation has been found to correlate with self-regulation (Whitebread 2012; Deci and Ryan 2008). More specifically, the researchers contend that intrinsic motivation is linked to higher levels of persistence, attention, achievement and involvement. The earliest theory of motivation was proposed by Abraham Maslow. Maslow (1943) proposed a five-tier hierarchical pyramid illustrating individuals' basic, psychological and self-fulfilment needs. Ring et al. (2018) point out that while Maslow's theory has been criticised for depicting an over-simplistic view of human needs, his theory has inspired many educationalists to explore the relationship between learning and motivation. Murayama et al. (2013) report that motivation has a profound influence on learning and that it explains a significant proportion of academic achievement, irrespective of IQ levels. Long et al. (2011) conclude that higher levels of motivation are associated with lower levels of classroom management issues and off-task behaviour.

The *Self-Determination Theory*, pioneered by Deci and Ryan (1985), provides an alternative explanation of learners' motivation. The theory puts forward the idea that an individual's behaviour is influenced by three basic psychological needs: 'autonomy (the need to feel in control of decisions); competence (the need to experience success) and relatedness (the need to interact with, be connected to, and feel like you belong)' (Ring *et al.* 2018, p. 31). Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that these three needs account for an individual's intrinsic motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is defined as 'the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence' (Ryan and Deci 2000, p. 56). Learners who are intrinsically motivated to learn experience a sense of autonomy and engage in tasks willingly and not because of external forces. It makes sense, therefore, that if students are given an opportunity to develop autonomy by making meaningful decisions about their work they are more motivated, engaged and interested in learning (Patall, Cooper and Wynn 2010).

It is well recognised that the personal attributes associated with learning - including mindset, self-efficacy, motivation and autonomy - merit inclusion in the future education of pupils.

Moreover, it is apparent that many of these elements contribute to a student's sense of identity as a learner. In other words, the personal attributes of learning comprise some of the dimensions that make up learner identity. However, the overall development of an individual's learner identity is influenced by several factors. It is worth noting that external factors including parental involvement, socio-economic status and ethnicity could potentially impact an individual's experience of the learning environment and thus shape the understanding they form of themselves as a learner in that environment. Given the limited critical input on these factors on learner identity development, the following section will focus on some of the relational factors involved in identity development.

2.16 Influences on Identity Development

2.16.1 Teacher Expectations

Commenting on teacher expectations, Heyd-Metzuyanim (2013) reported that as a teacher, she implicitly and unintentionally demonstrated low expectations of a pupil's maths ability by consistently expressing a lack of interest in the pupil's maths thinking problems. Heyd-Metzuyanim (2013) stated that she did not expect the student to progress any further. As a result, the identity position of a positive or successful maths learner was no longer made available to the pupil. Observations and student data gathered in this study indicated that the expectations expressed by the teacher negatively affected the pupil's maths identity. The researcher concluded that because of the teacher's expectations, the pupil who was once willing and capable to learn maths no longer believed they could learn and improve.

In a related manner, many researchers (e.g. Berg 2010; Rubin 2007) found that teachers may have enduring expectations of pupils which can affect the type of identity position which is made available for the student. This can positively or negatively affect the pupils' engagement in school. Some researchers (e.g. Edward-Groves and Murray 2008; Landers 2013) utilised student interviews and questionnaires to explore the impact of teachers' perceived expectations on students' self-understandings. Findings from these studies indicate that pupils' self-understandings are influenced by perceived teacher expectations irrespective of whether the expectations are real or imagined. This was evidenced by a pupil's remark in Edward-Groves and Murray's (2008) study 'and anyway I think I am dumb and stupid 'coz I am not as good as the others, they [the teachers] think that too' (p. 168).

2.16.2 Peer Norms

Concerning the association between peer norms and identity development, some researchers (e.g. Fields and Enyedy 2013; Volman and Ten Dam 2007) report that peers make certain identity positions available or unavailable to each other. In a study carried out by Hall (2010),

teacher interviews and questionnaires were utilised to make three different reader identity positions available to pupils – poor reader, becoming a good reader and good reader. Some pupils reported that it was not possible to have a good reader identity due to the fear of being embarrassed. It was found that some students declined to participate in class in order to conceal their reading difficulties. The researchers concluded that this restricted the pupils' abilities to develop their identities as readers in a positive way.

2.16.3 Supportive Classroom Climate

A supportive classroom climate has been found to play a role in pupils' identity formation. Most researchers have found that pupils need to feel appreciated and respected in order to cultivate a positive classroom climate. Furthermore, to promote a favourable classroom climate, pupils must feel safe to make mistakes (Carlone *et al.* 2015) and peers should demonstrate an open mind towards each other (Fields and Enyedy 2013). These elements are considered to be important in encouraging pupils to experiment with new identity roles, develop self-understandings and self-reflect on feelings and experiences. Additionally, Hazari *et al.* (2015) report that when adolescents do not feel under pressure to perform they feel liberated to explore other identities. In a related manner, Rudd (2012) found that when teachers are open-minded and offer students second chances, pupils feel more confident in exploring their identities.

The above studies highlight some of the different ways in which everyday practices and procedures in the classroom may inform and impact pupils' identities as learners. Although the list of influential factors is not exhaustive, there is significant evidence to suggest that teachers play a prominent role in shaping the self-understandings that their pupils acquire during the formative years in primary education.

2.17 Summary of Literature Review

In summary, an extensive range of pertinent literature has been explored and analysed to guide the construction of the emergent research questions. This broad review of literature was initiated by an exploration of the development of education over time, with a particular focus on pedagogy. Traditional curricula which focused on imparting knowledge to students were contrasted with modern versions which promote the teaching of *how* to learn. Subsequently, the construct of assessment was explored and the shift from summative and formative methods to redefined visions for self-assessment was documented. Stemming from the aspirations of modern curricula to foster student agency and voice, the construct of learner voice, both in policy and practice, was explored.

The definition of identity, from different theoretical perspectives, was examined. Identity was understood to be a complex, multifaceted phenomenon which is constructed through social interaction and impacted by cultural tools, norms and values. Learner identity was introduced as a concept that encompasses the self-understandings formed by students based on their experiences in formal and informal educational settings. This led to an exploration of the core learning dispositions, skills, attitudes and values which merit inclusion in 21st century curricula. McGuinness' (2018) classification of key competencies for 21st century education was analysed, with a specific focus on intrapersonal competency. A link was established between the dimensions of this competency and the self-identity of learners. This guided the examination of certain personal attributes of learning including self-efficacy, motivation, mindset, autonomy and self-regulation. An exploration of studies which identified some influential factors in identity development concluded the literature review.

This broad examination of literature informed the construction and exploration of three main research questions.

2.18 Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the concept of learner identity with a view to exploring Irish children's current understanding and awareness of their learner identities. The study also sought to examine how practices in everyday school life can promote or demote the development of pupils' self-identities as learners. The specific research questions are:

1. How do pupils define the term *learning*?
2. How do children articulate their sense of identity as learners?
3. What factors do children attribute to the development of their learner identities?

This study sought to capture the pupils' narratives on their experiences in education, with a particular focus on how the experiences informed their self-understandings as learners. The researcher recognised that the children, as opposed to parents or teachers, were best positioned to provide valuable, unique insights about their identities. Therefore, in this study, the pupils were the primary source of data. The following chapter will outline in detail the methods, methodologies and data collection processes employed to explore the three research questions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter the study sought to examine children's understanding of learning, explore children's awareness and understanding of their learner identity and identify factors that children attribute to the development of their learner identity. Evidently therefore, children were the primary source of data in this study.

As discussed in the previous chapter, 21st century models of education should encourage pupils to become active participants in their learning. The OECD (2019) states that student agency should be encouraged within the education system. It is recognised that students are competent agents and are capable of positively influencing their own lives and the world around them. This proposal had significant implications for the design of this research. This chapter will outline the research design. Considerations of this design will be discussed in detail. Potential issues or challenges arising from the research design will be addressed. Matters relating to sampling will also be discussed.

The tools and techniques utilised in this study will be examined in detail. The use of pupil questionnaires, pupil interviewing and audio recording will be addressed alongside issues relating to the use of these tools and techniques. Ethical matters arising from the research design will be considered. Additionally, ethical concerns pertaining to the recording and transcription of interviews and the recruitment of children will be addressed.

Finally, the data analysis processes will be outlined. The use of coding as a methodological tool in the analysis of qualitative data will be explored. Throughout the progression and development of the research design efforts have been made to ensure all tools, techniques, procedures and analytic processes reflect the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Interpretive Research Paradigm

This research employed a qualitative research methodology under an interpretive research paradigm. Concerning the concept of research paradigm in research the two most common approaches are the interpretive and positivist (Veal 2005). The distinction between these two perspectives relates to dichotomous associated research methodologies that include qualitative and quantitative methods and induction and deduction methods (Veal 2005). According to Bhattacharjee (2012) interpretive research is suitable for deconstructing the hidden reasons behind complex, multifaceted processes.

The aim of this research was to explore pupils' current perceptions of their learner identities and to examine the factors that shaped the meanings pupils constructed about themselves as learners. The intent of the study correlates with the aims, strategies and philosophy of the interpretive research paradigm (van Esch and van Esch 2013). According to Crotty (1998), within the interpretive paradigm, individuals construct meanings in distinctive ways. The meanings formulated by individuals are dependent upon the experiences, contexts and reference frames of the world they are seeking to interpret.

The interpretive paradigm was deemed the most appropriate for this research because of its ability to generate new ideas and understandings about an evolving concept such as learner identity. Furthermore, since this study sought to explore the knowledge that is embedded in human interaction and meanings, it was felt that an investigation of learner identity under an interpretive paradigm was justified (van Esch and van Esch 2013). Therefore, as presented in Figure 3.1, this study used a qualitative research methodology under an interpretive paradigm.

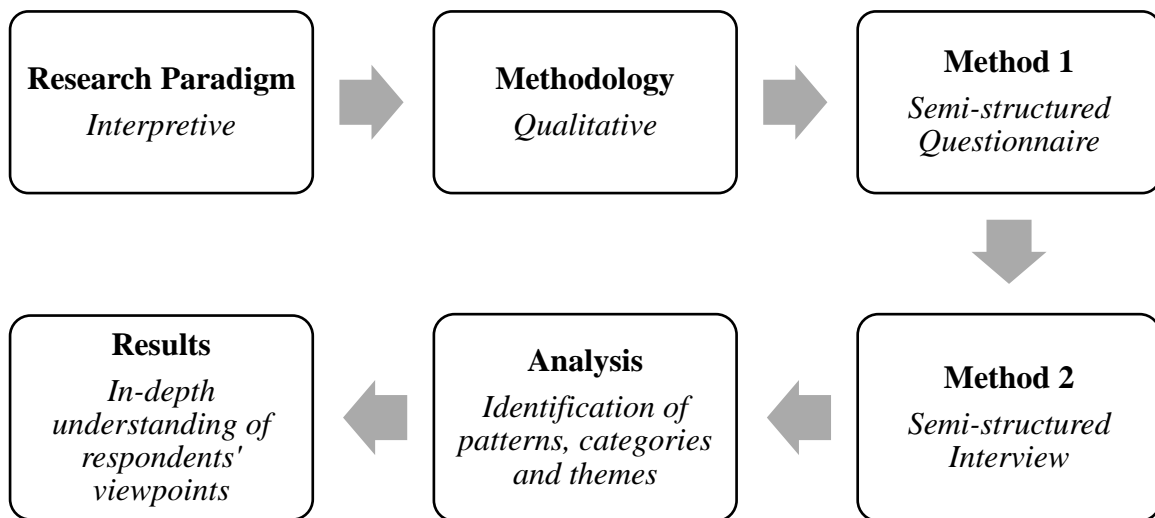


Figure 3.1. Research Methodology

3.2.2 Research Approach

As illustrated in the above diagrammatic representation of the research methodology, qualitative research was selected as an appropriate approach for the research. According to Coolican (1999), qualitative studies can be carried out for exploratory research purposes. The author notes that within these types of studies, the researcher seeks to begin investigating an emerging concept and recording the experiences of a particular group. This current study begins to examine learner identity in the context of Irish primary education. It also explores the perceptions of a specific group on the concept. Given that the primary topic of investigation in this study, learner identity, is an evolving concept, qualitative research offered an inductive approach for exploring this emerging construct.

In contrast to quantitative data analysis which focuses on explanations and predictions, qualitative data analysis involves making sense of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes and categories (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011). According to Bhattacharjee (2012), qualitative data analysis is dependent upon the

‘researcher’s analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where the data is collected’ (p. 113). Moreover, qualitative data analysis relies heavily on interpretation (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Consequently, there are often multiple interpretations to be formed from qualitative data. Nonetheless, qualitative research facilitates an in-depth exploration of the human interactions, relationships and experiences among the chosen participants in the study (van Esch and van Esch 2013).

3.2.3 Learner Voice

This study elicited learner voice as a conduit for exploring pupils’ perceptions of their learner identities and of the factors that shaped their self-understandings as learners. The elicitation of learner voice was gathered through the use of pupil questionnaires and pupil interviews. There is growing awareness among researchers about the value of consulting pupils about their educational experiences when investigating matters relating to teaching and learning. Learner voice has been incorporated into several studies which have examined students’ perspectives about issues pertaining to their schooling (e.g. Hopkins 2008; McIntyre *et al.* 2005; McCallum *et al.* 2000). Moreover, the need for pupils to be provided with an opportunity to share their opinions and have their viewpoints considered has been advocated by Irish policy-makers in the field of education (e.g. NCCA 2020; Inspectorate 2004).

3.2.4 Sociocultural Perspective on Identity

The research design of this study was underpinned by a sociocultural perspective on identity. This viewpoint suggests that an individual’s identity is formed through their participation in different sociocultural contexts including school, work and home (e.g. Holland and Lave 2001; Wenger 1998). Within each context, individuals engage in social interaction with others which allows different identities to become available. Indeed, numerous writers on the concept of identity (e.g. McCarthey and Moje 2002; Holland and Lave 2001; Wenger 1998)

allude to the fact that identities are enabled and become enacted through interaction with others.

Concerning culture, each context is defined by a particular set of cultural norms, values and tools that influence peoples' actions and aspirations (Holland *et al.* 1998) and ultimately impact upon an individual's emerging sense of identity. Geertz (1973) argues that culture is not created from individual meaning making; rather culture – comprising of norms, values, tools and behaviour – enables individuals to derive meaning from and make sense of the world. Therefore, there is reason to question whether individuals assume total control over their meaning making and sense of identity or whether their understanding of the world and sense of identity is shaped by the particular cultural lens through which they view the world. As Crotty (1998) highlights, 'constructivism drives home unambiguously ... that there is no true or valid interpretation' (p. 47). He argues that while researchers who embrace the theory of constructivism can yield helpful satisfying interpretations, they should not seek to produce definitive explanations of concepts. Given that the research design of this study was partly underpinned by the theory of social constructivism, the researcher aimed to generate useful interpretations as opposed to undisputable findings.

3.3 Researcher Role

In qualitative research, the researcher assumes a crucial role as they are responsible for the collection and analysis of data (Creswell 2002). In this study, therefore, I was the principal instrument of data collection and analysis; I collected, coded and analysed the data from semi-structured questionnaires and interviews to identify the emerging patterns and themes. Consequently, there is the potential for bias on my part which could affect the result of the study. This potential bias could be due to my experience of teaching children, as I have had three years of primary school teaching experience. Furthermore, my pre-reading of relevant literature

could potentially generate researcher bias. Importantly, Strauss (1987) believes that the researcher's prior experience and pre-reading of appropriate literature is beneficial for the initial formation of research questions. Nonetheless, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) propose that the researcher must remain open to hearing new utterances which might lead them towards new understandings.

Researcher reflexivity was enacted within this study in order to limit the extent of researcher bias. Firstly, throughout all phases of data collection and analysis I made considerable effort to remain open to novel ideas and answers to my researcher questions. Secondly, in order to support myself in being objective and non-judgmental in my thoughts I discussed my observations from both the questionnaires and interviews with the class teacher in the research school. Furthermore, I discussed my observations and reflections with my Supervisor during supervision meetings. Engaging in discussions with others enabled me to distinguish more clearly the emerging patterns and themes from my data. The use of reflexivity in this study was both beneficial and insightful. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), reflexivity should mitigate the potential effect of researcher bias within the study.

3.4 Sampling

Cohen et al. (2011) state that the quality of findings produced by a study depends not only on the suitability of instrumentation or methodology but also on the appropriateness of the sampling strategy that has been utilised. Therefore, decisions concerning the sampling strategies adopted in this study were made in consideration of the following factors: the sample size, access to the sample, the representativeness of the sample and the type of research that was being conducted. As Cohen et al. (2011) state, issues including time, expense and accessibility often restrict researchers from obtaining data from the whole

population.

Importantly, Bailey (1994) remarks that sample size is partly influenced by the style of the research. Qualitative research is more likely to have a small sample size (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Additionally, the authors suggest that sample size might be restricted by cost – in relation to money, time, stress, resources and the number of researchers. However, concerning both qualitative and quantitative research it is crucial that the sample recruited to partake is representative of the whole population under study.

On the contrary it has been observed that non-probability, purposive sampling is frequently utilised in qualitative research. As Cohen *et al.* (2011) report, a significant amount of qualitative research focuses on the distinctiveness and exclusivity of the group or individuals under study. The group or individuals represent themselves and are not intended to be characteristic of the wider population. This type of research intends to explore a specific group and does not seek to generalise findings. Indeed, Cohen *et al.* (2011) caution against referring to a ‘sample’ in such cases and instead suggest that it might be more fitting to refer to a group or individuals.

Purposive sampling requires researchers to choose the participants to be included in the sample (Cohen *et al.* 2011). The participants are selected based on the researcher’s judgement of the individuals’ suitability or demonstration of specifically required characteristics. As a result, researchers create a sample that is relevant to their topic of study. Teddlie and Yu (2007) highlight the fact that although it affords greater complexity and intensity to the study than does probability sampling, purposive sampling offers less breadth.

The conceptual framework of this study rendered purposive sampling more appropriate than probability sampling. This study sought to explore the understandings and viewpoints of a specific sample and did not seek to generalise findings. The research design did not suggest

that data or findings were representative of all primary school children in Ireland. The conceptual framework of this study indicated that purposive sampling would enable the exploration of the research questions. Therefore, the research design of this study encouraged the examination of a small group in order to develop a deep understanding of the research topic. The conceptual framework on which this research was based did not intend to yield broad, widely applicable findings. While the data gathered in this research project is specific to a chosen group in a particular setting, it is hoped that some of the information gleaned from this study may be relevant or beneficial to other individuals or groups in similar situations.

3.5 Participants

To conduct this research project, twenty-two individuals aged ten to twelve years were invited to complete a questionnaire as part of an initial screening process. The participants were recruited from mainstream mixed-gender classroom settings in a primary school in an urban area. The research school was chosen because of the convenience of the school's location for the researcher. It was not the school in which the researcher was teaching. Of the initial cohort of students 8 were female and 14 were male. All participants in the study were in their second term of 5th or 6th Class at the time of the investigation.

Following the completion of the questionnaire six pupils were chosen by the researcher to engage in a follow-up interview. The researcher was heavily reliant upon the co-operation and assistance of the class teacher during the recruitment process. The researcher invited pupils to volunteer an interest in participating in the interviews. With the assistance of the class teacher, the first six students to volunteer were recruited. Two substitute participants were selected in the event that a participant was absent on the day of interview. In order to be deemed eligible to partake in the interview, it was necessary that both the individual and their

parents or guardians had provided consent for the student to partake in the interview and in the audio recording of the interview. Furthermore, it was necessary for the chosen participants to have completed each part of the questionnaire and to have volunteered interest in discussing the research topics in more detail. Of the six pupils who volunteered to partake in the interview, three were female and three were male. All of the participants were aged eleven and were in 5th Class.

3.6 Tools and Techniques

3.6.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a valuable and widely used instrument for gathering survey information (Wilson and McLean 1994). This study utilised a questionnaire as part of a screening process for the recruitment of participants for interview. The pupil questionnaire is included in Appendix F. Additionally, the questionnaire was used as a precursor to the individual interviews. Consequently, the questions included as part of the questionnaire formed the basis of the starter questions in the semi-structured interviews. This will be explained in more detail in the following section.

In the construction of the questionnaire, the researcher considered the approach outlined by Wilson and McLean (1994) who suggest identifying the research problem, clarifying relevant concepts of constructs, identifying different types of measures of these constructs and evidence about them including their key features and dimensions.

Due to the qualitative research approach employed in this study, narrative data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Cohen et al. (2011) point out that a semi-structured interview provides a series of questions and statements to which participants are asked to respond or to answer in a manner that they think best. Although the semi-structured interview

features an open-ended layout it still demonstrates clear structure, focus and sequence (Cohen *et al.* 2011). In comparison to a closed questionnaire the semi-structured questionnaire outlines the plan but does not presume the participants' responses.

The questionnaire utilised in the study featured a number of closed and open-ended questions. Dichotomous questions which involve 'yes or no' responses were included for the collection of demographic data. Multiple choice questions which are designed to capture individuals' possible range of responses to given questions and statements were not utilised in the questionnaire. Wilson and McLean (1994) note that although closed questions are quick to complete and easy to code they do not allow respondents to explain or clarify their answers (Oppenheim 1992). The exploratory nature of the research design in this study required the use of open-ended questions instead of multiple-choice questions. As Bailey (1994) remarks, open-ended questions are beneficial if the questionnaire is exploratory and the potential answers are yet unknown. Furthermore, this type of questioning allows individuals to provide as much information as they like about complex and emerging concepts.

Cohen *et al.* (2011) make a noteworthy point stating that researchers often assume that participants will possess the necessary information or hold opinions about the issues under investigation. This matter was of particularly grave concern in this study because it involved working with children who may sometimes 'write anything rather than nothing' (Cohen *et al.* 2011, p. 383). Therefore, participants were afforded the opportunity to indicate that they did not have any opinion on a topic or that they did not know the answer to a specific question. In addition, significant consideration was given on the questionnaire to the choice of vocabulary and the representation of novel concepts. The researcher was committed to ensuring that the language and conceptual ideas presented in the questionnaire were appropriate for the level of linguistic and cognitive abilities of the respondents.

Strange et al. (2003) propose that the setting in which participants complete a questionnaire can impact upon the results. These researchers found that some pupils might find it difficult to complete a questionnaire in a quiet examination style environment in a classroom while other students did not feel comfortable completing a questionnaire independently. In light of these findings the researcher, following collaboration with the participating class teachers, ensured that respondents completed the questionnaires in a relaxed and calm atmosphere in their own classroom. This study utilised a self-administered questionnaire which was completed in the presence of the researcher. As a result, respondents were encouraged to seek clarification from the researcher about uncertainties and were provided with adequate time to complete the questionnaire. The presence of the researcher minimised the likelihood of respondents making wrong interpretations or answering questions inaccurately. Furthermore, it enabled the researcher to ensure the questionnaire was administered to participants in a suitable environment.

3.6.2 Interviewing

Cannell and Kahn (1968) defined the research interview as ‘a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation’ (cited in Cohen *et al.* 2011, p. 411). Cohen et al. (2011) point out a range of advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of interviewing. Concerning the advantages, the authors note that the interview allows for greater depth of information to be obtained. Similarly, Oppenheim (1992) proposes that interviews generally boast higher response rates than questionnaires because participants become more engaged, involved and motivated. On the other hand, Cohen et al. (2011) highlight the fact that interviews are more susceptible to bias and subjectivity on the part of

the researcher.

As outlined by Cohen et al. (2011) there are a variety of interview types which may be used as methods of data collection. Punch (2009) draws attention to the three main categories of interview namely, *structured interview*, *focused or semi-structured interview* and *unstructured interview*. In line with recommendations outlined by Punch (2009), when deciding upon the most appropriate style of interview to utilise in this study the researcher considered the purposes and underlying theoretical framework of the research design.

Given the exploratory nature of the research design the researcher deemed the use of semi-structured interviews to be most suitable for investigating the researcher questions. According to Robson (2002) semi-structured interviews are commonly utilised in qualitative designs. Similar to the semi-structured questionnaire, the semi-structured interview contains a distinct focus and the research ideas emerge and develop throughout the research process. King (1994) suggests that this type of interview is most appropriate in studies that explore the meaning of specific phenomena to the respondents. In contrast to the structured interview which contains specific questions which must be asked of all participants in the same order, the semi-structured interview enables the researcher to deviate from the core topics in order to explore other relevant areas of interest.

Semi-structured interviews consist of a range of open-ended questions which are accompanied by a collection of probes and prompts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007). The purpose of a prompt is to allow the researcher to clarify misconceptions or issues while a probe permits them to seek more detail or clarification from the interviewee about a response. Both elements enable the researcher to gather a richer understanding of the participants' conceptualisations and understandings.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allows the interviewee freedom to direct the

interview towards topics which are relevant and of interest to them. An aim of this type of interviewing is to raise issues and concepts which may not have arisen from a predetermined list of questions. Given that learner identity is an emerging concept, the study acknowledges the impossibility of presupposing all aspects and conceptualisations of the construct.

Therefore, following the initial screening process using the semi-structured questionnaire a list of starter questions was compiled by the researcher. The questions related to aspects pertaining to the research questions. These starter questions are included in Appendix G.

Because the intent of this research was to explore the participants' capacity to define learning and to articulate their sense of themselves as learners prior to any specific intervention, the researcher did not provide purposeful or targeted opportunities for the 'co-construction of language' (Flynn 2017) prior to the completion of the questionnaire or during the interview. Instead, the researcher sought to capture the pupil's pre-existing ability to articulate how they see and view themselves as learners. However, in the event that a participant did not comprehend the meaning of a particular question, the researcher explained the meaning of the specific vocabulary to the students. For example, with regard to the question '*How would you describe an effective learner?*', the terms 'good' and 'successful' were used interchangeably during conversations with pupils. Furthermore, as evident on the audio recordings, pupils were provided with anecdotal examples to illustrate the meaning of some questions. For example, in order to explain the meaning of the question '*What skills do you need to be an effective learner?*', the researcher described the specific skills required to good at hurling.

3.6.3 Recording

With regard to interviewing, decisions must be made about if and how the interviews are to be recorded. There are two main types of recording: *audio* and *audio-visual* recording. The use of audio-visual recording equipment ensures that non-verbal aspects of the conversation

can be captured. However, when working with children caution must be exerted concerning child protection matters. Furthermore, some authors (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Robson 2011) argue against the use of video recording suggesting that it does not provide an accurate or neutral portrayal of social reality. These researchers propose that audio-visual recording is subject to the same conventions of representation and interpretation as other forms of data collection. Therefore, a decision was made to audio record the participants' interviews.

3.6.4 Transcribing

The decision to audio record the participants' interviews made it possible for the researcher to transcribe the interviews. Transcriptions are useful because they provide key information and an accurate verbatim recording of the research interview (Cohen *et al.* 2011). However, transcriptions do not include non-verbal features of the interaction and they do not record the events preceding or succeeding the interview. In line with recommendations proposed by Cohen *et al.* (2011), the researcher assigned each interviewee a pseudonym and she recorded hesitations, silences, non-verbal activity and non-verbal behaviours.

3.7 Ethics

Ethics has been succinctly surmised by Cavan (1977) who defines the issue as a 'matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others' and states that 'while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better' (p. 810). When conducting research, it is vital that researchers consider the potential effects of the research on participants. Additionally, researchers must conduct all research in a manner that protects the participants' rights and respects their dignity as human beings (Cohen *et al.* 2011).

The significance of ethical matters is highlighted by the volume of literature published on the

topic and on the emergence of regulatory codes of ethical practice created by different institutions and professional bodies. As noted by Cohen et al. (2011), each stage of the research process gives rise to ethical concerns. These matters may relate to the research procedures; methods of data collection; the nature of the participants; the type of data gathered; how the data is stored; and how the information is disseminated (Oliver 2003). Studies which involve children give rise to specific ethical, methodological and practical concerns. These are all matters that must be considered throughout an entire research project (Robson 2011). The following sections will discuss ethical issues which relate to this study – voluntary informed consent, access, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and audio-visual materials.

3.7.1 Voluntary Informed Consent

A crucial aspect of all regulatory codes of ethical practice is voluntary informed consent. Diener and Crandall (1978) define informed consent as ‘the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions’ (p. 57). Cohen et al. (2011) note that this definition of informed consent comprises four parts: ‘competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension’ (p. 78).

It is important to note that this study, like much other educational research, recruited children as participants. Cohen et al. (2011) advise that children cannot be viewed as being on level terms with the researcher. This has been an important consideration for the researcher during all stages of this research process. For example, obtaining informed consent from the participants in this study involved two stages. Firstly, the researcher provided information to and sought permission from the participants’ parents and guardians (see Appendix B and Appendix C). Secondly, the researcher informed and sought consent from the children

themselves (see Appendix D and Appendix E). In accordance with ethical standards, suggested by the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee, both parents or guardians and participants were informed about the aims of study; their right to withdraw at any point; the confidential nature of the data; the use of audio recording the storage of data; and how the participants' data would be disseminated.

The importance of informed consent with regard to young people has been documented by many authors. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) conclude that when working with children, researchers must provide a plausible and appropriate explanation of their research aims and that young people must be given a genuine opportunity to decline participation in a study. Additionally, Greig and Taylor (1999) propose that research involving children should only occur in situations where informed consent of parents or guardians has been obtained in advance and information has been provided about the storage, destruction and sharing of data.

3.7.2 Access and Acceptance

When conducting research, Bell (1991) advises researchers to obtain permission as early as possible by gaining fully informed consent and outlining the potential benefits of the research to participants. Prior to gaining the informed consent of participants, the researcher must obtain official permission to conduct research among the target group (Cohen *et al.* 2011). As this study sought to recruit participants in a school setting the researcher first contacted in writing the chairperson and principal of the participating primary school. A copy of the letter to the school principal is included in Appendix A. After gaining permission from the chairperson and principal to carry out the study in the school the researcher then contacted the 5th and 6th Class teacher. The researcher sought to foster an amicable relationship with the class teacher. In order to minimise disruption for the pupils, the researcher engaged with their

class teacher in a cooperative manner at all times. The class teacher was informed of the aims and procedures of the study. Ethical considerations permeated all aspects of the research process. Issues including research purposes, data collection methods, guarantees of privacy and confidentiality, data storage and dissemination of results were discussed with honesty, openness and accuracy.

3.7.3 Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

Ensuring the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants is a vital responsibility of the researcher. Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that the crux of anonymity is that data provided by respondents should not reveal their identity in any way. Consequently, the participants' names or any other identifying information should not be included in publication. Instead, this study utilised codes and pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Additionally, the participating school and class teachers were made anonymous in publication. All children were made aware that their anonymity would be respected at all times.

In a related manner, individuals partaking in a study should have their right to privacy safeguarded through the researchers' guarantee of confidentiality (Cohen *et al.* 2011). In this study the researcher sought to ensure that participants' data was disseminated in a manner that did not identify individuals and that information cannot be traced back to the respondents. The researcher was committed to ensuring that any information of a confidential nature shared during the research process would not be made public. Finally, in accordance with Mary Immaculate College Data Retention Policy, all parents or guardians and participants were informed that anonymised data gathered in this study may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

3.8 Analysis

This study employed a qualitative research design thus giving rise to the generation of qualitative data. Qualitative data analysis involves exploring participants' definitions of concepts, observing patterns and differences among the data and identifying themes and categories (Cohen *et al.* 2011). In contrast to quantitative data there is no distinct separation between data collection and data analysis (Cassell and Symon 1994). Cohen *et al.* (2011) reiterate this point by stating that qualitative data analysis is characterised by the 'merging of analysis and interpretation and often by the merging of data collection with data analysis' (p. 537). The authors note that there is no one specific method which can be utilised to analyse qualitative data, instead they recommend that researchers make decisions by considering the notion of *fitness for purpose*. Given that this type of data analysis relies on interpretation, it is important to remember that often numerous differing explanations can be drawn from qualitative data.

3.8.1 Thematic Analysis

Because of the exploratory nature of this research design, the researcher decided to utilise thematic analysis to investigate the data. This study was inspired by the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) who define thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (p. 6). Given that the primary topic of investigation in this study, learner identity, is an evolving concept thematic analysis was considered to be a more inductive way of exploring this emerging construct. This enabled the researcher to explore participants' current understanding of the concept in order to generate evolving themes and explanations.

3.8.2 Transcription

The process of thematic analysis began with the researcher transcribing the verbal data from the interviews. Although this was a time-consuming activity, it was recognised as an

invaluable method for the researcher to familiarise herself with the data. The researcher was committed to ensuring an orthographic transcript was obtained from this process which featured a verbatim account of all spoken and unspoken utterances. All relevant punctuation was included in the transcript, thus ensuring the data was consistent with its original form (Poland 2002). As advised by Braun and Clarke (2006) when all six interviews were transcribed the transcripts were checked back against the original audio recordings for accuracy.

3.8.3 Coding

Coding is a common feature of qualitative data analysis (Flick 2009; Gibbs 2007). Kerlinger (1970) defines coding as ‘the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis’ (cited in Cohen *et al.* 2011, p. 559). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) codes identify features of the data ‘that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon’ (Boyatzis 1998, p. 63). In the initial stages of coding, the data may appear confusing, unrelated and inconsistent (Cohen *et al.* 2011). However, coding is an important aspect of analysis because it enables the data to be organised into meaningful groups (Tuckett 2005).

Having transcribed each interview individually the researcher read through the original data and began extracting and labelling parts. The data were not coded according to pre-decided themes. Instead, the researcher applied labels which emerged naturally from the data. The research questions were used as an essential guide when seeking out codes. The researcher highlighted aspects of the respondents’ answers and coding was based on the semantics of whole sentences, part sentences and phrases which related to research questions. Following the recommendations of Punch (2007) the researcher stopped at regular intervals to reflect and consider the central and core components of the data. After completing the first process

of coding the researcher listened to the audio recordings again. The researcher then repeated the initial coding process on a second copy of the transcripts. This iterative process enabled the researcher to alter and, if necessary, disregard existing codes and generate new codes.

3.8.4 Themes

Following the initial process of coding and collating codes, the researcher began sorting the codes into potential themes. As opposed to codes, themes comprise of broader units of analysis (Braun and Clark 2006). In this study the process of generating themes involved the examination and combination of codes to construct broad themes. The researcher created visual representations of the themes, codes and raw data to facilitate the comparison of individual themes. Any data which was not encompassed by the potential themes were categorised as miscellaneous.

Subsequent to the identification of potential themes, the themes were reviewed and refined by the researcher. Specific consideration was given to Patton's (1990) criteria for assessing categories: *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity*. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006) 'data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes' (p. 20). In order to address these issues, the researcher reviewed each potential theme to ensure the associated codes and data formed a consistent pattern. In the event that a specific theme and its constituents were incoherent, the researcher revised the theme or discarded the data. When the researcher was satisfied that the data within themes were coherent and that the themes were distinct she reviewed the entire set of themes in relation to the entire data set. As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the purpose of this procedure was to ensure the 'thematic map accurately reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole' (p. 21).

Once the researcher was satisfied that the potential themes were representative of the data set,

the themes were subjected to the process of ‘define and refine’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 22). The authors describe this procedure as ‘identifying the “essence” of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 22). In some instances, this process led to the identification of sub-themes within certain themes. In all cases names were ascribed to themes to replace working titles.

Thematic analysis is not a linear process, rather it is iterative, whereby the researcher moves back and forth throughout the phases mentioned above. In this study the researcher progressed through the stages of thematic analysis in a recursive pattern with a particular emphasis on the refinement of initial codes and subsequent themes. The process of thematic analysis culminated in the identification of themes and sub-themes which were intended to be representative of the entire data set from the pupil interviews. However, as Cohen et al. (2011) remark, it is impossible to attest with absolute certainty that the variables are saturated as there are limitations to induction. Learner identity is a fluid, organic and evolving construct and therefore it is possible that new data may come along which refute existing findings.

3.9 Summary

In summary, this chapter examined the methodology utilised to examine children’s conceptualisations of learning, awareness and understanding of their learner identity and to identify factors that children attribute to the development of their learner identity.

The chapter began by examining theoretical implications on the research design of this study. Potential concerns or challenges arising from the research design were addressed. The issue of sampling was explored with a specific focus on purposive sampling. Following this, other pertinent aspects of the study were discussed including tools and techniques - the semi-

structured questionnaire, the semi-structured research interview and transcription. Ethical considerations including voluntary informed consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were also addressed. Finally, the chapter concluded with an examination of the methods of qualitative data analysis utilised in this study. This included a discussion on the process of thematic analysis.

The next chapter will discuss the findings of the data in relation to each of the three main research questions. This piece of qualitative research sought to focus on the distinctiveness and exclusivity of the specific group under study. The individuals are representative of themselves and are therefore not intended to be characteristic of all primary school children.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, this study employed a qualitative research design. Twenty-two students completed a semi-structured questionnaire as part of an initial screening process. Following the completion of the questionnaire, six pupils were chosen by the researcher to engage in follow-up semi-structured interviews.

The qualitative data gathered in the semi-structured interviews were thematically analysed over a number of distinct stages. This enabled the researcher to explore respondents' understanding of the topic under study and to identify patterns and differences among the data. Firstly, each individual interview was transcribed by the researcher. Secondly, coding was conducted on the data. The researcher read participants' responses and began extracting and labelling sections. This procedure was repeated a second time to enable the researcher to change or disregard existing codes or to construct new codes. Following that, the codes were collated, combined and sorted into overarching themes. The potential themes were reviewed and revised to ensure their constituent data were coherent and that the themes were distinctive.

Although the researcher sought to maintain an open-mind during the data analysis stage the three main research questions were utilised as a guiding framework throughout the process. The iterative practice of thematic analysis which occurred over a number of stages led to the emergence of a distinct set of themes which informed the researcher's effort to address the research questions:

1. How do children define the term *learning*?
2. How do children articulate their sense of identity as learners?

3. What factors do children attribute to the development of their learner identities?

Given that qualitative data analysis features an iterative process in which data collection is merged with data analysis the researcher decided to combine data analysis and findings in this chapter. As the researcher engaged in the iterative process of thematic analysis she continuously developed and expanded upon the emerging themes. This type of analysis was reliant upon the researcher's individual interpretations of the data. Therefore, the researcher does not intend to yield incontestable findings. Instead, the findings are expected to be useful in explaining the understandings of the specific group of children under study.

This chapter begins with an overview of the responses provided by students in the semi-structured questionnaires. Following this, the themes pertaining to each research question are addressed. Each theme is discussed in relation to pupils' responses from the semi-structured interview. Following the exploration of the relevant themes the researcher attempts to answer each of the three research questions.

4.2 Questionnaire

This section outlines participants' responses to the items contained within the semi-structured questionnaire. Twenty-two individuals returned the questionnaires. The first section of the questionnaire required students to provide information on their understanding of the term *learning*. In response to the question, '*What words come into your mind when you think about the word learning*'? The majority referred to the following terms, 'Focusing, concentration, listening and maths.'

Pupils' responses to the question about how they would describe an effective learner are presented in the histogram below (see Figure 4.1). Most respondents suggested several factors in response to this question. The four most frequently cited reasons included 'being a

good listener, paying attention, being focused and being smart.’ Almost one quarter of respondents (22.7%) indicated that an effective learner was ‘smart or clever.’ From the data in Figure 4.1, it can be seen that innate characteristics including ‘being smart’ featured more prominently than malleable traits such as ‘being a hard worker’ in pupils’ descriptions of an effective learner.

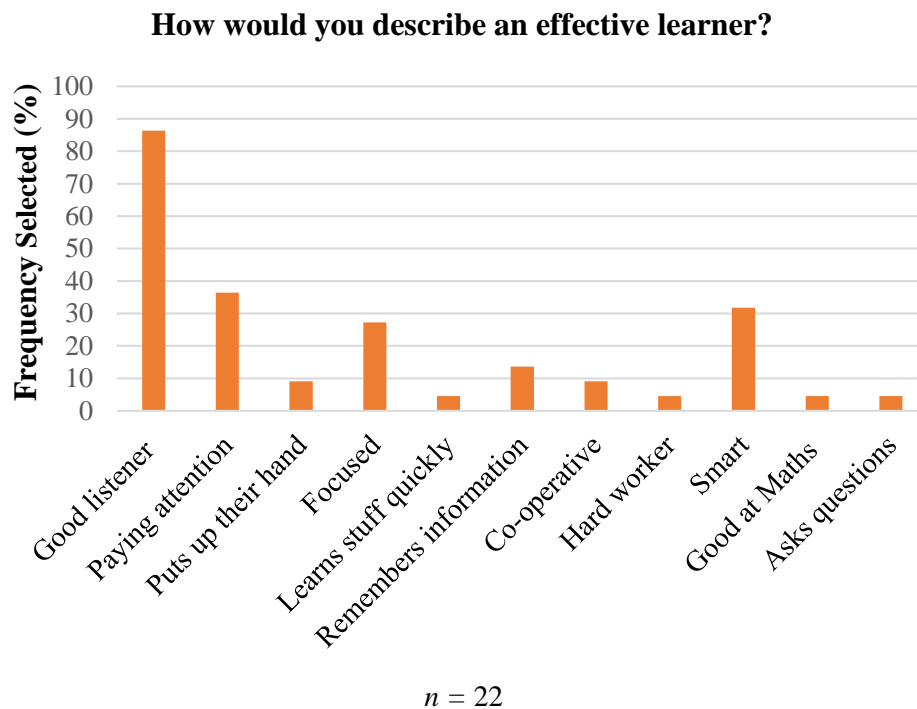


Figure 4.1. Respondents’ descriptions of an effective learner

The second part of the questionnaire required pupils to answer questions about their strengths, difficulties and beliefs as learners. When students were asked how they would describe themselves as learners in school, more than one third (40.9%) mentioned aspects of their behaviour. For example, they suggested being ‘distracted, attentive, patient, co-operative and hard-working.’ Other answers to this question included students’ subject preferences and strengths. In response to the question, ‘*If your teachers described you, what do you think they would say?*’ More than half of the respondents (54.5%) remarked that their teacher would allude to ‘the subjects [they] were good at’ while almost one quarter of pupils

(27.7%) stated that their teacher would say that they were ‘smart.’

Of those surveyed, ninety-one percent listed curricular subjects in response to the question about their strengths or talents at school. The three most frequently cited subjects were Maths, History and English. When participants were asked how they knew they were good at these learning areas a range of responses was elicited. Some participants mentioned that they were informed by their teachers. Others stated that they received ‘high marks in tests or projects in these subjects’ while a minority of pupils (13.6%) remarked that they ‘worked hard or practised.’ In response to the question, ‘*What do you find difficult in school?*’ More than half the students (63.6%) reported that they found Irish difficult. Maths was cited as an area of difficulty among 27.2% of the respondents. When commenting upon possible reasons for their difficulties, many students indicated that they were ‘distracted during lessons.’

The third section of the questionnaire elicited pupils’ thoughts about the important people and experiences in their learning journeys. When the pupils were asked who inspired them to do their best at school, the majority of respondents mentioned their ‘parents or teacher’ while a minority alluded to their ‘friends, grandparents or [themselves].’ When asked how they found out how they were getting on in school, the participants’ responses resembled their answers about their learning strengths. More than half (54.5%) remarked that they utilised the information provided to them by their teacher in class, at parent-teacher meetings or through report cards to monitor their progress in school. A smaller percentage of respondents (18.2%) stated that their ‘test and project results’ informed them of their progress. Almost all students indicated that they felt either ‘happy or proud’ when they were praised by their teacher. One student commented that she felt ‘happy, like [she] should keep doing it.’

Pupils’ responses to the question about who should make decisions about what pupils learn is presented on the pie-chart below (see Figure 4.2). It can be seen from the data in Figure 4.2

that almost half the students (45.5%) suggested that the teacher should make decisions about what pupils learn in school. Among other popular suggestions were parents (22.7%) and pupils (13.6%). The Department of Education and school principal were proposed by two students respectively. From the data in Figure 4.2, it is apparent that the greatest demand among pupils is for their teachers to make decisions concerning the learning content in school.

Who do you think should make decisions about what pupils learn?

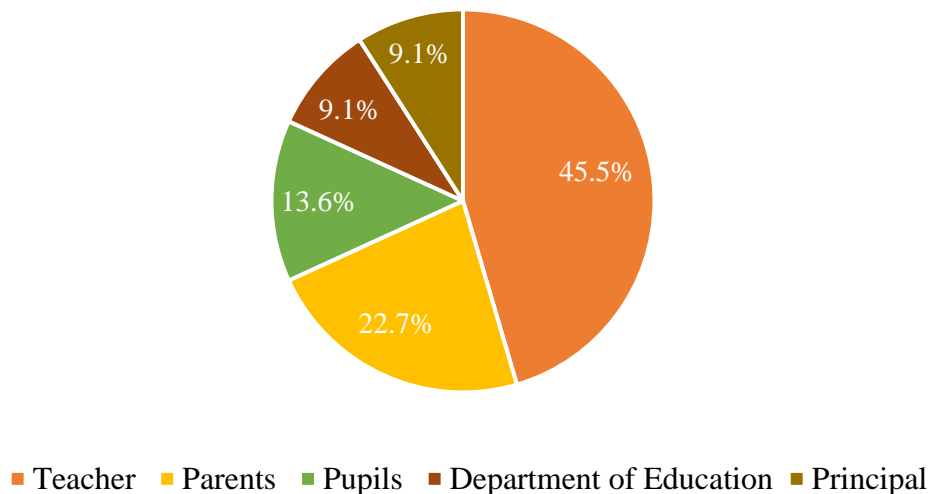


Figure 4.2. Pupils’ opinions on decision-making in learning

When asked to provide a reason for their answer, some students mentioned that teachers should make decisions because ‘it’s their job and they know the curriculum and what children should learn.’ Other pupils stated that parents should make decisions because ‘they know what’s best for their children and they pay the school.’ Finally, certain students remarked that pupils should decide what to learn in school because ‘if pupils have an input, school will be more fun and students know what they need and want.’

The final section of the semi-structured questionnaire required respondents to express their

viewpoints about sharing their opinions about learning with teachers. Of the twenty-two individuals who returned questionnaires two pupils did not complete this section. Of the remaining twenty respondents, eighty percent expressed the belief that pupils' opinion mattered in learning. In support of this view, respondents suggested:

1. If you don't have an opinion then the teacher won't know what you like.
2. When we share our opinions in class our lessons will be more interesting.
3. If students didn't have an opinion it wouldn't be fair.
4. More people will listen to something they are interested in.

In response to the statement, *'List different ways that pupils can share their opinions about learning in school'*, a range of suggestions was elicited. The majority of participants recommended 'speaking with the teacher, setting up a decision box or organising a class vote'. When pupils were asked what might make it easier for students to share their opinion, a small percentage of respondents (15%) remarked that 'listening to other pupils' could be beneficial. Another small group of participants (15%) advised students to 'write down their ideas for the teacher'.

Finally, in response to the sentence completion task: *'Pupils should be given a chance to have their say in school because ...'*, the following answers were elicited among others:

1. If students don't get to have their say, school won't be a fun, relaxing place to learn anymore.
2. School should be democratic.
3. Pupils have rights.
4. It gives the teacher an idea about where the student needs help.
5. Students could learn about what is interesting to them and get better at things.

As mentioned above, the semi-structured questionnaire was utilised as part of an initial screening process in this study. Six pupils were chosen by the researcher to partake in follow-up semi-structured interviews. Among the selection criteria was a high level of engagement with the questionnaire. Of the pupils chosen to take part in an interview three were female

and three were male. All of the respondents were aged eleven and were in 5th Class.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

As outlined in the previous chapter, the process of thematic analysis culminated in the identification of a series of themes pertaining to each of the three research questions. Pupils' responses in the semi-structured interviews were transcribed, read and re-read by the researcher. The data were coded by the researcher and a general list of patterns was identified. Following this, the codes were collated into potential themes in relation to each of the three research questions. The themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure the data within themes were coherent and that there were clear differences among the various themes. This iterative process resulted in the establishment of various themes in response to each research question (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Summary of Themes

Research question	Themes
How do children define the term <i>learning</i> ?	Memorising material Attending to the teacher Career aspirations Pupils' opinions matter
How do children articulate their sense of identity as learners?	Being well behaved Being smart The core subjects
What factors do children attribute to the development of their learner identities?	Peer influence Learning from mistakes Teacher praise

4.4 First Research Question: How do pupils define the term *learning*?

This section will outline respondents' understanding of the term *learning*. Pupil voice was elicited as a conduit for exploring children's learner identities in this study. Therefore, when

examining pupils' understanding of learning the researcher was interested in exploring pupils' prior experience with learner voice; the value pupils ascribed to the learner's voice in the learning process; and pupils' ideas about how the idea can be promoted in school. Four main themes were identified in relation to this first research question. Each theme will be discussed in detail. The four themes which address pupils' understanding of learning are:

- Memorising material
- Attending to the teacher
- Career aspirations
- Pupils' opinions matter

Following the discussion of each individual theme, a summary will be provided in response to the first research question prior to the exploration of the subsequent research question.

4.4.1 Theme: Memorising Material

The notion of remembering information featured prominently in pupils' explanations of the word *learning*. G2 stated that in order to learn, an individual needed to 'remember the information.' This pupil utilised the phrases 'work, learning something and writing down stuff' to explain the term learning. However, G2 stated that the collection of knowledge alone was not enough in order to demonstrate effective learning. Instead she suggested that 'an effective learner is someone who can gather up information and use the information later.'

A similar understanding of the term learning was offered by B3. This student stated that an effective learner was someone who could 'learn stuff quickly and remember the information.' B3 suggested that 'a good memory' was one of the skills required to be effective at learning. Similarly, G1 understood learning to involve attending to the teacher to obtain all necessary information. This pupil stated that when an individual had gathered this information from the

teacher they would 'know the right or wrong answers.' Furthermore, G1 maintained that with this knowledge gained from the teacher 'a student would be fine to do their homework and tests like Sigma-Ts and stuff.'

Likewise, when commenting upon effective learning skills, B2 alluded to the teacher as a source of information. The pupil remarked that in order to be effective at learning, pupils needed to 'get all the instructions and information off the teacher.' In addition, B2 stated that he understood the word learning to mean 'remembering from the past.'

4.4.2 Theme: Attending to the Teacher

The importance of focusing and concentrating on the teacher emerged as a significant feature of pupils' understanding of learning. For example, B1 defined learning as something which involved an individual being 'focused whenever the teacher is speaking.' Adding to that, the pupil remarked that to be effective at learning 'a student needs to try not get distracted by other people and their friends.'

A similar viewpoint was echoed by G1 who utilised the terms 'focus and concentration' and the phrase 'eyes on the teacher' to explain the term learning. When discussing the topic of effective learning, this pupil frequently referred to the need for students to attend to the teacher. G1 maintained that if a pupil 'paid attention to the teacher' and if the teacher explained all the work then the student would understand. This pupil added that 'if the person doesn't concentrate and listen, they'll be stuck and their mam won't know so they won't ever know.'

Likewise, B2 utilised the words concentration and focus to explain learning. When discussing the skills required to be effective at learning, B2 alluded to the importance of focusing on the teacher. B2 stated that 'you need to pay attention to the teacher at all times so you can get all

the instructions off him or her.’

In a related manner, G3 understood learning to involve concentration and attention. Unlike B2, G3 did not explicitly state to whom the student needed to pay attention. Similar to the pupils above, G3 described an effective learner as an individual who ‘concentrated, listened and only spoke when they needed to.’ G3 also alluded to the importance of concentration in learning.

For many of the pupils in this study learning was viewed as a process that involved listening to the teacher as a means of obtaining knowledge and information. For example, B2 suggested that effective learners ‘listen to the teacher at all times’ in order to gain information. This pupil put forward the idea that an effective learner is someone with a ‘large attention span.’ Similarly, G1 stated that if a pupil listens to their teacher and their teacher explains everything then ‘the pupil will understand everything.’ Adding to this, G1 proposed that an individual should ‘ask their teacher questions about things they do not understand because their teacher would help them out.’ G1 shared her experience of utilising this strategy during her own learning experiences stating that ‘I sometimes get stuck on stuff and then my teacher always helps me because he’s fast at maths and he knows how to do it very fast.’

The skill of listening emerged as an important skill for effective learning in many of the pupil interviews. B1 suggested that an effective learner demonstrates the skill of listening to others. He pointed out that in order to learn, an individual must be a good listener. In a similar manner, G1 equated listening with learning. She stated that if a student listened in school they would ‘be able to complete their homework and tests.’ B2 proposed that if individuals are to be effective at learning, ‘they need to listen to the person who’s speaking at all times ... and have their ears open at all times.’

4.4.3 Theme: Career Aspirations

Career Aspirations is the penultimate theme which will be discussed in relation to the first research question. In response to questions about learning beyond formal education, most of the respondents expressed the belief that they would continue to learn as an adult. B3 proposed that if he continued learning during his time in school he would continue learning as an adult. G3 associated learning during adulthood with careers. She mentioned that ‘adults learn in their job ... they learn more things and they learn new things from other people as well.’ G2 remarked that she would only continue learning as an adult in order to gain more knowledge stating, ‘I think I’ll keep on learning just to have more information but I think I’ll eventually stop.’

When discussing the learning skills which students should be taught in order to prepare them for the future most pupils referred to their career aspirations. For example, B1 stated that he would need to be taught maths and history so that he could ‘become an engineer.’ In a related manner, B3 believed he should learn about ‘numbers, percentages and science’ in order to work as a ‘sports result reader.’ G2 advocated the need for teachers to incorporate more group work into pupils’ learning to prepare them for their future careers. She remarked that ‘it would help people to know how to work in a group in their job and to know that you’re not always alone and that you don’t always have to do stuff by yourself.’

4.4.4 Theme: Pupils’ Opinions Matter

Most pupils in this study believed in the importance of pupil voice in the educative process. For example, when asked about the value of learner voice in the classroom, B1 acknowledged its importance and stated that ‘everyone’s opinion matters.’ Similarly, B3 discussed the significance of pupil voice in school and illustrated an example of its benefit for learners stating:

I think that it is important because there could be a strategy that you could struggle at or how the people or the teacher learns it differently than you ... they can help you with some kind of stuff.

Likewise, G2 mentioned the value of pupil voice and supported her choice by explaining that the pupils' opinions could provide the teacher with information about the students' learning preferences:

I think that our opinions matter a lot because if we didn't have an opinion in our class, our teacher will just think we like something when we don't and they won't know if we're good at something or not.

G2 pointed out that if pupils were not entitled to share their opinion in class they would feel 'bored or disinterested.' She explained that pupils needed to be given a chance to voice their opinion in school in order to ensure that the teacher knew what the students were interested in learning about. She suggested that 'students need to learn about things that they like and are interested in some of the time so that they don't feel bored.'

Similarly, G3 expressed the view that students should be encouraged to share their opinion with their teachers to increase interest and enjoyment levels among pupils. She suggested that 'when the teachers know your opinion, then schools are more interesting and more fun.' G3 proposed that pupils are more interested in learning when they are given an opportunity to have their say. She stated that 'when you do what you want, you learn more and you're more interested.'

Throughout the discussions pertaining to the respondents' prior experiences of learner voice many pupils suggested different methods of encouraging the practice in schools. Many respondents advised that students could share their opinion with their teacher by raising their hand in class. B1 stated that pupils could raise their hand in class and added that 'listening to others might make students want to say their own thing.' Likewise, B2 mentioned that 'pupils could put their hand up and they could tell the teacher and principal how they feel.'

Adding to that, G2 suggested that students could have ‘a decision box so that they could write and share their decisions.’ She explained that this was a strategy which had been employed by her previous class teacher. Furthermore, G2 proposed that a class vote could be used as a method of promoting learner voice in the classroom. This idea was also alluded to by G3 who described her experience of partaking in a class vote to voice her opinion:

When something like history comes they could say I’m interested in something. One time, we were supposed to learn something else in history but then we did a class vote and most people in the class were interested in World War 2 so we decided to do World War 2. We did a class vote.

The difficulties faced by some students in sharing their opinions in school arose in many of the discussions with respondents in the study. B2 described how he would feel embarrassed if he suggested an idea which was rejected by his peers or teacher. He stated that ‘if I said something that my teacher or friends said was wrong I’d be blushed.’ In a similar vein, G2 described how pupils’ fears of rejection or dissatisfaction from the teacher might prevent them from expressing their views. She suggested that ‘some pupils don’t want to because they’re afraid the teacher won’t like it or the teacher might get annoyed with their opinion and they’re afraid that it might be a bad opinion.’ A comparable viewpoint was proposed by G3. She explained that students might be reluctant to voice their suggestions because they fear their ideas might be dismissed by their peers. She suggested that ‘some pupils feel that if most people are like no that’s not good then no one will listen to their ideas.’

4.4.5 Summary of First Research Question

In summary, pupils demonstrated several different viewpoints in relation to their understanding of the term learning. Firstly, many pupils suggested that learning involved gathering, retaining and recalling information. For most pupils, teachers were identified as the primary source of knowledge. Secondly, pupils described learning as a process in which

students needed to concentrate and attend to the teacher. This was related to the subsequent view that learning comprised of listening. The skill of listening was cited by many pupils as a feature of effective learning. In addition, many pupils alluded to their career aspirations when discussing learning during adulthood. Finally, pupils appreciated the importance of learner voice in the classroom, acknowledging its role in informing teachers of students' preferences and cultivating interesting learning opportunities for pupils. Respondents explained some of the difficulties faced by pupils when sharing their opinion in school. Pupils offered a variety of suggestions for the incorporation of learner voice in schools.

4.5 Second Research Question: How do children articulate their sense of identity as learners?

This section will outline respondents' understanding and awareness of their learner identities. Three main themes were identified in relation to this second research question. Each theme will be discussed in detail. The three themes which address pupils' understanding and awareness of their learner identities are:

- Being Well Behaved
- Being Smart
- The Core Subjects

Following the discussion of each individual theme, a summary will be provided in response to the second research question prior to the exploration of the final research question.

4.5.1 Theme: Being Well Behaved

For many pupils, their view of themselves as a learner in the educative process related to aspects of their behaviour. When B1 was asked to describe himself as a learner in the classroom, he began by stating that he 'sometimes misbehaves in school' but that he is also

capable of ‘paying attention at times.’ B1 believed that his teacher would describe him as ‘a focused learner’ who sometimes demonstrated off-task behaviour with his peers.

In a similar manner, B3’s view of himself as a learner incorporated aspects associated with his classroom behaviour. When describing himself as a learner, B3 mentioned that he can ‘sometimes be forgetful.’ He added that he often finds himself constructing matches on his desk out of pieces of stationary equipment:

When I actually want to learn ... when I’m not playing with my rubber, I’m bright. I can just be a bit forgetful about stuff and I’m usually one of the last people to take out my books ... because I like thinking about matches and stuff in my head ... I can make matches out of crumbs from my rubber.

Similarly, when responding to a question aimed at eliciting the respondents’ view of how their teacher might describe them as a learner, B3 referred to aspects of his behaviour. He noted that in his parent-teacher meetings teachers normally informed his parents that he was ‘a nice boy.’ He also pointed out that most teachers stated that he ‘doesn’t get into trouble in school.’ B3 believed his teachers’ opinions of him were accurate reflections of him as a learner.

Likewise, G3 alluded to her behavioural tendencies in her description of herself as a learner. G3 stated that she was a good learner because she ‘usually listened to what the teacher was saying.’ She demonstrated a similar view of herself when explaining how her teacher might describe her. G3 mentioned that most of her teachers said she ‘listens and co-operates’ in school. Similar to B3, G3 deemed her teachers’ views of her as a learner to be precise descriptions of her.

Finally, G2’s opinion of herself as a learner in the educative process related to her behaviour. G2 stated that she is ‘good at listening but she sometimes gets distracted.’ When discussing how her teacher might describe her as a learner, G2 referred to how she acted in the

classroom. She noted, 'My teacher would say I'm smart and that I also need to put up my hand a bit more and that I should contribute my opinions more often.'

4.5.2 Theme: Being Smart

The matter of intelligence arose in many of the descriptions offered by pupils concerning their views of themselves as learners in school. When B1 described the type of learner he would like to become in the future, he mentioned, 'I would like to be a smart one and a successful one ... and do well in tests and exams in secondary school.' In addition, B1 stated that as an adult he would need to be a smart learner to 'make decisions and solve problems.'

In a similar manner, B3 described himself as a 'bright or smart learner' and stated that he 'nearly always gets good scores, especially in maths.' B3 believed that his teachers would concur with his description of himself. When explaining how his teacher might describe him, B3 referred to feedback he had received from his previous class teachers. He stated, 'In nearly every parent-teacher meeting the teachers say I'm a bright boy.'

Likewise, G2 alluded to the issue of intelligence in her portrayal of herself as a learner. She stated that her teacher would describe her as 'a smart learner.' G2 did not discuss the matter of intelligence in her own description of herself as a learner. When considering the type of learner she would like to become in five years, G2 noted that she sought to have 'more confidence as a learner.'

On the other hand, B2 referred to work ethic and effort in his description of himself as a learner. He mentioned, 'I would describe myself as a really, really hard worker that finishes every subject easily.' This pupil also explained that he believed an effective learner was someone who 'worked very hard.' B2 was confident that his teacher would agree that he was a hard worker in school.

4.5.3 Theme: The Core Subjects

Most pupils' illustrations of their learner strengths pertained to the core subjects. In other words, when asked to identify their personal strengths as learners, the majority of pupils referred to specific school subjects including maths, Irish and English. For example, G1 predicted that her teacher would state that she was a good learner of Irish:

My teacher might say I'm a good learner for Irish. I put all my hands up. If he calls me up he says "you just need to practise on this and if you practise on that then you'll be fine."

G1 self-identified the subject areas of Irish and English reading as her strengths at school.

Commenting on her learner strengths she remarked:

Definitely my Irish and you know like English reading because it's interesting and at the moment we're reading a novel about World War 2 and I know a lot of things already about World War 2.

Similarly, G3 observed that some specific core subject areas were among her strengths as a learner in school. She noted that several teachers informed her that she was 'good at maths.'

G3 identified 'English writing, maths and certain parts of Irish' as her strengths at school.

She noted, 'I usually listen to what the teacher is saying and I can usually understand what the teacher is teaching.'

Likewise, when discussing his learning strengths, B3 referred to maths. He mentioned that he felt positive about maths stating, 'Nearly a lot of people ... when there's a subject like maths they're like "ugh it's maths." I don't mind maths though.' In a similar manner, B1 reported that his strengths and talents at school included Irish and English. Like B3, this student demonstrated a positive attitude towards these subjects and mentioned that he 'felt happy when doing these subjects' and that he found them 'easy to do.'

Most pupils demonstrated some ability to express the difficulties they encountered during the

learning process. Similar to their learning strengths, the majority of students referred to the core subjects in their discussions about their learning difficulties. G2 identified Irish as an area of difficulty for her as a learner. She mentioned that she ‘sometimes can forget the words and mix up which one’s which.’

In addition, this pupil mentioned that she often experienced difficulty when engaging in independent tasks. She explained that she preferred to collaborate with peers and to partake in group work. She stated, ‘I like working in groups. I find it hard to do independent work. For me, it helps me more if we do group and partner work.’

In a similar manner, G3 remarked that she found certain aspects of Irish difficult. She reported that while she found oral language activities easy in Irish, she struggled with comprehension tasks. She explained that this was because she found the words ‘hard to read’ and often did not understand ‘the meaning of questions in the comprehension tasks.’

Finally, G1 said that she did not believe she was an effective learner in maths. She explained that she found it ‘difficult to follow all of the steps in the question.’ G1 stated that she intended to ‘continue working at maths in school’ and noted that she would seek the help of her teacher to address this target.

4.5.4 Summary of Second Research Question

In summary, this section outlined respondents’ descriptions of the meanings they constructed about themselves as learners. These results show that respondents associated their views of themselves as learners with the types of behavioural tendencies they demonstrated in the classroom. Additionally, their self-understandings of their identities as learners related to whether they perceived themselves to be smart or not. In general, pupils’ self-reported strengths and difficulties as learners pertained to the core subject areas.

4.6 Third Research Question: What factors do pupils attribute to the development of their learner identities?

The next part of the interview was concerned with respondents' awareness of aspects of the learning experience which informed their self-understandings as learners. This section will outline respondents' explanations of the factors that influenced the development of their learner identities. Three main themes were identified in relation to this final research question. Each theme contains a number of sub-themes (see Table 4.2). Each theme will be discussed in detail. The three themes which explore the factors pupils attribute to the development of their learner identities are:

- Peer Influence
- Learning from Mistakes
- Teacher Praise

Following the exploration of each individual theme, a summary will be provided in response to the final research question prior to the discussion of findings.

Table 4.2. Third Research Question: Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

Research question	Themes	Sub-themes
What factors do children attribute to the development of their learner identities?	Peer influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support • Peer comparison
	Learning from mistakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling angry at first • An opportunity to try again • <i>Effort versus intelligence</i> • Family support
	Teacher praise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proud learners • Source of encouragement

4.6.1 Theme: Peer Influence

4.6.1.1 Peer Support

Peer support was identified as a key factor in the construction of pupils' learner identities. B1 reported that his peers made him feel 'more comfortable' in school. He acknowledged that his peers had a positive influence on how he felt about himself as a learner and that they always 'encouraged [him] to do [his] best.' Similarly, G1 mentioned that her peers had a positive effect on her learning experience. She explained how her peers were a source of support to her during challenging moments in school:

If I get a bad test mark I would normally sit on the bench in the yard ... my friends will ask me what's wrong ... and when I'm stuck they'll normally tell me what they got for that answer and how they did it.

In addition, G1 reported that her friends supported her learning in school by helping her to understand topics with which she was struggling. With specific reference to maths, G1 explained that she often sought help from her friends when she was unable to complete a problem. She recalled, 'When I have a question that I can't do my friends tell me and they'll say "Oh this is what this means and this equals that" and this helps me.' G1 explained that the support she received from her peers with regard to aspects of her education improved her attitude to learning.

Relatedly, B2 identified his peers as a source of inspiration and encouragement for him as a learner. B2 mentioned that his best friend inspired him to 'do [his] best in school.' B2 stated, 'My best friend is a very good learner and he always tells me if the answers are right.' He noted that when his friend informed him that his answers were correct he 'felt good' in himself and it encouraged him to continue learning.

Similarly, G2 acknowledged that the majority of her classmates had a positive influence on

her view of herself as a learner. Commenting on how her classmates affected how she felt about her learning in school, G2 stated:

Most of my classmates make me feel happy but there's some people that make me feel really annoyed ... but most of the people in my class aren't that bad. They're really positive about stuff and we all kind of help each other.

She subsequently explained that her peers were positive about learning which encouraged her to adopt a positive attitude towards learning experiences. In addition, G2 reported that her classmates supported her as a learner stating, 'We always praise each other and we also help each other out when we are stuck.' Finally, G3 reported that her peers had a positive influence on her beliefs about herself as a learner. She noted that her friends encouraged her to do her best and praised her when she was 'successful.' G3 said that because her friends were positive about her learning she 'felt better about [herself]' as a learner.

4.6.1.2 Peer Comparison

The issue of peer comparison was identified by pupils as a factor which affected the view they had about themselves as learners. For example, when describing himself as a learner B3 reported that he was sometimes a 'forgetful learner.' He explained that his observation of his peers in his classroom informed this opinion stating that 'I'm usually one of the last people to take my books out.'

Adding to that, B3 noted that he engaged in peer comparison to monitor his individual progress in school. He said he was 'usually fast finishing [his] work and stuff.' He explained that this informed his decisions about whether he was 'good at [his] work or not.'

Additionally, when discussing the impact his peers had on his thoughts about his learning B3 drew attention to the significance of the after-school maths club. He noted that individuals who attended the maths club were perceived to be better at maths than those who did not

attend:

Sometimes people say this person is really good at this thing or that person is really good at that thing especially because some people in the class go to the maths club after school and they're really good at maths.

B3 remarked that he liked that his classmates considered the individuals who attended the club to be 'better maths learners' than their counterparts. He agreed that attendance in the maths club provided an accurate benchmark upon which pupils' maths abilities could be measured.

4.6.2 Theme: Learning from Mistakes

4.6.2.1 Feeling Angry at First

When discussing their mistakes and challenges as a learner, many pupils alluded to their learning mistakes. Some respondents reported that they experienced heightened levels of frustration on realising their mistakes. For example, B1 stated, 'When I find out that I've made a mistake I feel a little bit annoyed. I feel like I need to quickly change the answer.'

When asked by the researcher about why he felt annoyed with himself for making a mistake B1 mentioned that 'these were normally things [he] should have known how to do properly.' Adding to that, B1 noted that although he did not like to make mistakes in school he preferred to engage in challenging activities as opposed to easy tasks. He remarked that he 'felt relieved' when he mastered the 'hard stuff.'

Similarly, G2 mentioned that she experienced anger and frustration when she realized she had made a learning mistake stating, 'Sometimes I kind of feel angry with myself for getting it wrong.' However, this student proceeded to explain how her attitude towards her mistake changed after some time mentioning that she 'realises it's just one mistake and it will help [her] later on.' Finally, G2 mentioned that she read 'inspiring daily quotes' to enable her to

deal with difficulties and setbacks. She explained that the quotes helped her to ‘feel more confident in class.’

4.6.2.2 An Opportunity to Try Again

In a related manner, B3 reported that he felt an initial sense of frustration and disappointment when he observed his learning mistakes. However, he explained that his experience of sport had helped him to overcome his disappointment and to learn from his mistakes:

Researcher: How do you feel when you make a mistake as a learner?

B3: In maths if I ... the odd time I can get questions wrong that I can easily know ... so the odd time I can get disappointed ... I’m like “ugh I should have known that”. But I’m used to sport where I’m like “oh well”.

Researcher: How do you feel when you make a mistake in sport?

B3: I’m disappointed but as our coaches say always keep your head up and keep learning.

Researcher: Would you agree with your coach?

B3: Yeah ... and my dad says always learn from your mistakes.

When commenting upon learning challenges, B3 reported that he preferred to engage in challenging tasks in subject areas at which he believed he was strong:

Researcher: Do you prefer to learn things that are easy or hard in school?

B3: In maths I like difficult tasks because I’m good at maths. In subjects like English which I mightn’t be as good at, I like an easier task.

Similarly, other pupils stated that they viewed mistakes as an opportunity to try again. For example, G1 remarked that when she experienced a mistake as a learner she felt that this was ‘a chance to try again.’ Similarly, B2 reported that when he experienced a mistake he ‘wanted to start again.’ Finally, when commenting upon her feelings towards making a mistake, G3 stated, ‘Next time I do it I’ll try not to make the mistake and when I make the mistake I try not to do it again.’

4.6.2.3 *Effort versus Intelligence*

The debate concerning *effort* versus *intelligence* arose among pupils in many discussions pertaining to their learner identities. When asked which she believed was more important in learning, intelligence or effort, G2 offered this reply:

I think it's more important for someone to be a really hard worker because if they're just smart they wouldn't really try enough on their work and someone who's not as smart if they still try then they might actually get a higher score because they worked hard.

Similarly, G3 expressed a belief that effort was more important than intelligence for learners. She stated, 'Being a hard worker is more important than being intelligent because when you're a hard worker you usually get smart and when you're hard working you can get smart.' Furthermore, this pupil mentioned that 'Without hard work you can't be intelligent'.

4.6.2.4 *Family Support*

Many pupils alluded to the significance of family support in their efforts to succeed and overcome mistakes in learning. For example, G1 stated that her parents were the biggest source of inspiration for her as a learner. She noted that her parents inspired her to do her best at school. She mentioned, 'I want to make my parents proud for like tests and the report cards and stuff.' Furthermore, G1 pointed out that her sister was one of the most important people in her life to tell her that she was good at something. G1 explained that her sister helps her with her learning at school. In particular, she described how her sister supported her learning in the area of Irish:

At home my sister writes out questions on a piece of paper and then she normally gets me to answer them and then if I get them wrong she goes back to the sentence and she says this is what this means and stuff.

G1 identified Irish as one of her strengths at school. She mentioned that her sister informed

her about her progress in this subject area. Finally, she explained how her sister encouraged her to become a better learner at school stating, 'My sister always tells me to practise on this or that and then I just try my best to practise a lot.'

A similar viewpoint was echoed by B1 who discussed the positive influence his sister had on his learning. B1 stated that 'his sister was the most inspirational person for him' with regard to his learning. He explained how he was inspired by her work ethic and the achievements she had accomplished:

Researcher: How does your sister encourage you to do your best?

B1: She stays up so late studying at night and she keeps working hard even when she is tired.

Researcher: Would you consider your sister to be a role model for you as a learner?

B1: Yeah because she is older than me and she is a successful learner ... and I can learn a lot from watching her and seeing how she studies.

B3 recognised that his family were supportive of his learning at school. He explained that his father influenced his attitudes to the mistakes he made at school. B3 mentioned that he often 'felt frustrated when [he] made a mistake' as a learner. He reported that he was trying to apply the advice he received from his father regarding mistakes. B3 suggested, 'Sometimes I can be slating myself ... but my dad always says learn from your mistakes.'

Adding to this, B3 explained how the support he received from his parents encouraged him to foster a positive attitude towards learning. In a similar manner to G1, B3 identified his parents as one of the greatest sources of inspiration for him as a learner. Finally, he discussed how his father helped him to become a better learner:

There's always stuff to work on as my dad says to me ... he tells me to look over my answers when you're done because as I said earlier I can sometimes put down the wrong answer when I always know normally.

B3 reported that he was reassured by the constant support he received from his parents and

that it helped him to feel good about his learning.

4.6.3 Theme: Teacher Praise

4.6.3.1 Proud Learners

Teacher praise emerged as a significant factor in the construction of pupils' learner identities. Most pupils reported that receiving praise from their teacher had a positive effect on them as learners. For example, B1 remarked that when he was praised by his class teacher he felt 'happy and proud.' Similarly, when asked about how he felt when his teacher praises him, B2 stated that he 'always felt 'proud' of himself.

In a related manner, G2 mentioned that being praised by her teacher increased her confidence as a learner. As she remarked, 'I feel really happy that I actually got it right because sometimes I feel like I'm not going to get something right but I end up getting it right.' She added that she intended to remind herself more often of the praise she had received from her teacher. G2 referred to this again when she described the type of learner she would like to become in the future:

I'd like to be more confident in the work that I do and think that I'm going to do this right as my teacher tells me rather than thinking "oh I'm going to get it wrong all the time" like the way I normally think.

4.6.3.2 Source of Encouragement

Other pupils explained that their teacher's praise inspired them to continue improving as learners. For example, G1 mentioned that her teacher was one of the most important sources of inspiration for her as a learner. She discussed how her teacher not only praised her efforts but also provided her with feedback about ways in which she could improve as a learner. G1 described how her teacher helped her to identify areas of her learning with which she was

struggling. She recalled, ‘My teacher always tells me to practise on this or that thing that I cannot do properly and then he shows what I need to practise doing.’ This student also mentioned that when she self-identified an error in her work she sought the advice and support of her teacher:

I would normally tell my teacher I did this wrong. Then my teacher would be like “Ok go on write the question again” and he’ll just give me a new piece of paper and show me ... and when I do it right he’ll say “good work”.

Finally, G1 expressed that when her teacher praises she ‘just tries [her] best to practise a lot.’

Some other pupils echoed similar responses to receiving praise from their class teacher. B3 expressed a liking for praise from his teacher because it reassured him that he was competent at the task. He stated, ‘I like being praised by my teacher because that means I’m able to do that again.’ In a similar vein, G3 noted, ‘When my teacher praises me, I feel positive and I feel like doing it again and doing it better as well.’

When both pupils were asked how they would feel if they did something good and they were not praised by their teacher, they expressed dissimilar responses. B3 noted that he would ‘feel disappointed that [his] teacher had not seen [his] work’ but that he would ‘still be happy that [he] could do it.’ On the other hand, G3 remarked that if her teacher did not praise her she would ‘feel sad because [she] did all that work and they never saw it.’

4.6.4 Summary of Third Research Question

In short, this section outlined some of the aspects of the learning experience which influenced respondents’ understandings of themselves as learners. These results suggest that the self-understandings formed by the pupils were informed by the support they received from peers, parents and siblings; the direct and indirect messages communicated to them by teachers; their attitude towards mistakes; and their beliefs about intelligence.

4.7 Summary of Analysis and Findings

This chapter began with an overview of the responses provided by pupils in the semi-structured questionnaire. Following this, the themes and sub-themes relating to each research question were identified and addressed. Each theme was explored in light of the responses provided by pupils in the semi-structured interviews. The results show that pupils associated learning with the acquisition of knowledge and appreciated the importance of learner voice. Furthermore, pupils' perceptions of themselves as learners referred to whether they perceived themselves to be smart or not and their learner strengths pertained to their curricular performances. Finally, the results indicate that pupils' interactions with teachers, peers, parents and siblings contributed to the meanings students constructed about themselves as learners. The next chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss the implications, significance and limitations of these findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the Literature Review, the overall purpose of this study was to illuminate the concept of learner identity by exploring Irish children's current understanding and awareness of their learner identities. Another core objective of the study was to examine how practices in everyday school life can promote or demote the development of pupils' self-identities as learners. Previous research has criticised traditional learning practices for merely facilitating the construction of a shallow level of subject knowledge among students (McGuinness 2018). According to Freire (1993), this type of learning involves teachers depositing information into the minds of students which is received uncritically by students and automatically memorised. There is much literature contesting the sufficiency of this type of learning for today's pupils. McGuinness (2018) states that 21st century education requires pedagogical practice which encourages enhanced creativity, problem-solving abilities, resilience and nurtures a 'learning to learn' approach.

Learner identity, an evolving and dynamic construct, facilitates the construction of meanings about oneself as a learner and nurtures individuals' engagement with the process of becoming a learner (Coll and Falsafi 2010). Promoting learner identity encourages learners to reflect on their experience of learning and to develop personal competencies required to navigate the complex challenges and learning opportunities in life (Kolb and Kolb 2009). In reviewing the literature, however, no previous data was found on Irish primary school children's perceptions of learner identity or on the factors that inform their self-identities as learners.

As detailed in previous chapters, this study sought to address three research questions of specific interest. The first research question aimed to explore children's understanding of learning. Prior to the exploration of learner identity, the researcher was interested in eliciting

pupils' viewpoints on learning. In this chapter, pupils' understandings of learning are considered in light of visions for learning espoused in both traditional and modern curricula.

The second research question sought to expose children's perceptions of their learner identities. Within this chapter, children's self-understandings of themselves as learners are discussed with regard to theoretical perspectives on identity. The composition of pupils' self-ascribed identities as learners is considered in light of definitions of learner identity documented in academic literature. Associations formed by pupils between their learner identities and their intelligence, strengths and challenges are discussed.

The third research question aimed to identify some of the factors that pupils utilised to inform their self-identities as learners. The elements which shaped the construction of children's learner identities are discussed in detail. The influence of messages received from teachers, peers and parents on pupils' identity formation is discussed. The impacts of mindset and praise on students' self-understandings are considered in light of findings from previous research.

This chapter discusses each of the three research questions individually. While the questions will be addressed in isolation, certain aspects of each question are interrelated. Following the discussion of each question in relation to previous research, implications for pupils, teachers and policy-makers arising from the data are suggested.

5.2 First Research Question: How do pupils define the term *learning*?

5.2.1 Pupils' Understanding of Learning

The current study found that most pupils understood learning as a process which involved gathering and remembering information. It is interesting to note that the teacher was identified as the main source of information for most pupils. Unsurprisingly, one pupil

asserted that effective learning required the memorised information to be recalled and used at a later point. These findings are consistent with suggestions proposed by researchers (e.g. Gholami 2016; Thomas and Brown 2009) that traditional learning practices promote the transmission of knowledge. While modern visions for primary education advocate the nurturing of pupils' learning skills, values and dispositions (Parkinson 2019), the findings from this study indicate that students still demonstrate traditional understandings of the concept. The findings suggest that pupils placed greater emphasis on the product of learning as opposed to the process. The influence that teachers may have had on students' understanding of the term *learning* will be explored in detail when discussing the third research question in this chapter.

5.2.2 Learner Voice

On the question of pupils' understanding of learning, it is interesting to note that most respondents acknowledged the importance of learner voice in the classroom. In support of this, many pupils discussed the value of learner voice in informing teachers about students' preferences or needs. This finding correlates with Fleming's (2015) understanding of learner voice whereby students engage in dialogue on issues that concern them in regard to their education. Consistent with expectations, the results of this study found that pupils associated the inclusion of learner voice with fun and enjoyable learning because they were exploring topics of their own choice. This finding appears to reflect the language of a rights-based perspective for learner voice which was advocated in Article 12:1 of the *United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC 1992), one of the earliest publications on the topic. Another interesting finding in this study was that pupils reported increased levels of engagement and interest when they were given an opportunity to have their say about their learning content. This finding was supportive of the proposal by Stenhouse (1975) that

children would perform better at school if their ideas were listened to and taken seriously by teachers. Overall, data collected in this study resonate with literature on the links between students giving their opinion and the sense of ‘feeling valued’ (e.g. Flynn 2013; Simmons, Graham and Thomas 2015).

On the question of pupils’ experience of learner voice, some further interesting findings were observed. Respondents’ prior experience of the practice was limited to instances where they shared their opinion about learning topics or subject preferences with teachers. Indeed, all strategies discussed by respondents to include their voice in their learning involved sharing ideas with their teacher. It is worth considering whether pupils’ limited experience of learner voice was restricted by their lack of vocabulary or language to express themselves as learners.

It could be argued that the findings concerning students’ experiences of learner voice in this study are not supportive of all the proposals suggested by the Inspectorate (2016) regarding the facilitation of pupil voice in schools. The Inspectorate (2016) proposes that students should be actively consulted in order to enable schools to enhance their teaching, learning and assessment practices. However, within the findings of this study minimal emphasis was placed upon opportunities for students to have their views valued and appreciated. This was because participants had highlighted their fear of their ideas being rejected by the teacher. Furthermore, while pupils described examples of participating in class votes and utilising decision boxes, there is reason to question whether these practices would suffice to provide schools with a valuable ‘means towards their own improvement’ (McIntyre *et al.* 2005 p. 165).

Indeed, the promotion of learner voice in Irish primary education has been challenged by issues of performativity and accountability. The inclusion of learner voice in models of

external evaluation and school self-evaluation processes over the past two decades in Ireland may have constrained the potential of learner voice construct to support pupil agency (Fleming 2015). The use of top-down approaches as a means of introducing a novel concept into education may cause teachers to neglect the fundamental essence of the concept (Flutter 2007). In this case, enforcing practices of learner voice upon teachers and positioning them as evaluation criteria for effective teaching may distract their attention away from the most important element – learners and how they learn best.

Another interesting finding in this study emerged from the discussion of the difficulties encountered by pupils when sharing their opinions in school. It was found that pupils may struggle to express their opinion due to the fear of rejection or dismissal of the idea by their teacher. Specifically, the findings in relation to the teacher's disapproval accord with the results of a study carried out by McIntyre et al. (2005). These researchers described the unsuccessful implementation of learner voice demonstrated by some teachers as 'uncomfortable learnings.' In these situations, learner voice was constrained because the pupils' suggestions did not support the teachers' current practices. McIntyre et al. (2005) added that 'uncomfortable learnings' required changes in classroom power or student autonomy.

In addition, the findings in the current study are consistent with work conducted by Fisher (2014). Offering a possible explanation for ineffective inclusion of learner voice in schools, Fisher (2014) concludes that teachers may be selective in their decisions to listen to pupils' ideas. He outlines that teachers may be more willing to listen and respond to students' suggestions about extra-curricular activities or sports equipment than the structure of team teaching. Fisher (2014) attests that teachers may be unwelcoming of pupils' ideas which they perceive as negative reflections on their work. In this study, it was found that some students

were reluctant to share their opinion due to the fear of annoying their teacher. This result may be explained by the fact that the student's idea might not be consistent with the teacher's current pedagogical practice.

The results of this study indicated that learner voice may be inhibited by fear among pupils that their ideas may not be respected or listened to by their peers. This finding seems to be compatible with the ideas of Lundy (2007) who outlined four factors needed to fulfil the aims of a rights-based perspective for learner voice. According to Lundy (2007), pupils require a space in which they can voice their views; they must have a voice to share their opinions; there must be an audience to listen to pupils' ideas; and their suggestions must prompt a response and action. If learner voice is meaningfully incorporated into the classroom, it has the power to nurture pupil agency and enable pupils to inspire changes in their education. On the contrary, if any of the core conditions necessary for learner voice (space, voice, audience, action) are absent, opportunities to promote pupil agency and autonomy are constrained. The findings in this study highlighted the fact that the respondents did not always have an audience to listen to their views and their ideas did not always lead to action. In such a situation, one of McIntyre et al.'s (2005) core principles of learner voice would not have been upheld. That principle states that pupils have a right to be consulted and their voices heard.

5.2.3 Implications

An important implication of the above findings is the need for learner voice in Irish education discourse to move beyond matters of accountability and performativity. If the inclusion of student voice in education is to be upheld by a children's rights-based perspective, schools must ensure that there is a democratic, collaborative process in education development. This practice, however, should not be implemented by means of generic, pupil questionnaires that record pupils' perspectives on aspects of teaching and learning; rather it should be

incorporated as a habitual, sustainable practice that embraces and responds to student voices. It has been acknowledged in this study that learners have the power to inspire meaningful, enjoyable and interesting learning experiences when they are invited to share their views on matters relating to their education. However, it is the responsibility of all education stakeholders to ensure that giving pupils a say in their learning and schooling is not confined to research and evaluation projects (Shanahan 2019).

One of the key issues that emerges from these findings is the need for primary education in Ireland to promote authentic learner voice in the classroom. There is a crucial need for schools to foster a culture of listening to learners in education discourse and to equip students with the language to describe their experiences of the process of becoming a learner. The findings in this study suggest that the dialogical learning space which can facilitate student voice needs to be promoted within schools. Flynn (2017) offers a model for schools to support teachers in embedding a culture of listening through the incorporation of a sustainable structure. The model, *Transformative Dialogue* (Flynn 2017, p. 30), incorporates aspects of Lundy's (2007) children's rights-based approach to learner voice: space, voice, audience and influence. However, Flynn (2017) also encourages educators to check the interpretation of what the learner has said and to provide feedback on how or if the pupils' perspectives have been impacted.

This study has highlighted the potential of learner voice in generating interest among learners in learning and inspiring student agency. However, the findings have also indicated that unless a climate of listening is embedded within schools and a sustainable structure is implemented to incorporate student voice, the potential benefits of dialogical learning will never be fully realised (Flynn 2017). An authentic and sustainable approach to learner voice that moves beyond the realms of research and evaluation needs to be incorporated as a

habitual practice in Irish primary schools.

5.3 Second Research Question: How do pupils articulate their sense of identity as a learner?

5.3.1 Absence of Awareness

Among the most unexpected findings in this study was the discovery that when describing themselves as learners, respondents omitted most of the personal attributes of learning. The skills, dispositions and values of intrapersonal competency (McGuinness 2018) which are required of learners in the 21st century were not mentioned by pupils. That is to say, respondents did not demonstrate metacognition, autonomy, self-regulation, agency, or self-reflection as learners. The absence of these core ‘non-cognitive skills’ (Rosen *et al.* 2010) in pupils’ self-understandings of themselves as learners should be a cause of concern for educators. These attributes of learning encapsulate the concept of learner identity. It is important to note however that exploring learner identity is not an explicit part of the current primary school curriculum. The intent of this study was to explore the participants’ competence in articulating their view of learning and of themselves as learners. The researcher sought to examine how the pupils, regardless of their educational needs or attainment, used language to express their views. It could be argued that the students in this study, all of whom presented with verbal competence, had not yet acquired the language of learning to express more informed senses of identity as learners. Although there were some references to persistence and an ability to learn from mistakes among respondents, these findings were representative of a minority response within the study, as will be demonstrated in the coming section.

5.3.2 Smart Learners

The current study found that pupils associated their learner identity with their perceived levels of intelligence. This was evidenced by students' describing themselves as 'smart learners' or 'bright boys.' Additionally, these students alluded to examples of being 'smart' learners which included achieving high scores in tests or having the ability to solve complex problems. These findings resonate with the notion of 'fixed identity' (Molden and Dweck 2006; Dweck 2000). These researchers have identified differences between individuals who consider their abilities to be fixed and static and others who believe they can improve and change. Kolb and Kolb (2009) reported on a study in which struggling students' perceptions of why their peers received better scores than themselves in exams were examined. It was found that these struggling students did not believe they were capable of learning by studying and instead supposed that some pupils got high scores because they were smart. Dweck (2000) refers to this as a fixed view of intelligence. Individuals with this type of view believe they are incapable of learning. Kolb and Kolb (2009) caution that 'if a person does not believe that they can learn they won't' (p. 3).

In this study, many of the pupils believed they were good learners because they were smart. It seems possible, therefore, that these students demonstrated fixed views of themselves. As suggested by Dweck (2000), pupils with a fixed belief about learning are less likely to appreciate the significance of effort. Instead, they are more likely to believe that they do not need to work hard because they are smart. On the other hand, individuals who believe they can learn incrementally foster a learning identity (Kolb and Kolb 2009). In the current study, one pupil formed the understanding of himself as a hard-working learner. He associated effective learning with hard work and effort. It seems likely that this pupil demonstrated a learning identity. His understanding of himself concurs with Kolb and Kolb's (2009) suggestion that individuals with a learning identity view themselves as learners. According to Molden and Dweck (2006), this pupil is likely to embrace challenges with a mastery response

while their fixed identity counterpart is more likely to retreat or quit.

The findings in this study, however, found that half the respondents considered effort to be more important than intelligence in learning. The students believed that through hard work and effort, an individual could become smart. While the pupils still associated effective learning with the notion of smartness, they hinted at tendencies towards a learning identity. The students exhibited a belief in their ability to learn, a starting point for the development of learner identity. Although this viewpoint was representative of a minority response within the study, it is somewhat encouraging.

5.3.3 Learner Strengths and Challenges

In this study, it was found that many students associated their identities as learners with their learning strengths and difficulties in curricular areas. In most cases, pupils alluded to their strengths in core subjects. Similarly, respondents described examples of the difficulties they encountered with specific aspects of the curriculum. These findings support the ideas of Kolb and Kolb (2009) who suggest that an individual's learning successes and failures contribute to their learning identity. Moreover, these authors propose that the self-attributions constructed by the individual about their successes and failures significantly influences their identity as a learner. As noted by Kolb and Kolb (2009), these attributions are strongly affected by the important relationships in a student's life.

Concerning learning successes and failures, evaluations from other people can contribute to the pupil's learning identity (Kolb and Kolb 2009). In this study, one pupil utilised feedback from her teacher as a means of determining her success at a task in Irish. Another student was found to use information she received from several teachers in order to identify her strength as a maths learner. In light of the suggestions made by Kolb and Kolb (2009), it seems likely that the evaluations offered by teachers to students about their learning in these areas

contributes to the pupils' understandings of themselves as an Irish learner or as a maths learner. This notion resonates with proposals by sociocultural scholars (e.g. Gee 2001; Holland and Lave 2001) who suggest that students construct a range of self-understandings, for example as a mathematical student (mathematical identity) or as a music student (musical identity). However, they also add that pupils integrate these various self-understandings to form a more general learner identity. From this perspective, the understandings formed by pupils in this study about themselves as learners in core subject areas contribute to their overall sense of identity as learners.

It is noteworthy that most respondents utilised feedback from teachers in order to monitor their progress in school. More specifically, some students were found to engage in oral discussion with their teachers about their progress while others referred to feedback given to their parents at parent-teacher meetings or through report cards. Parents subsequently relayed the information to the students. This unsurprising finding reiterates the point made by Kolb and Kolb (2009) about the significance of teacher evaluations for a pupil's construction of their learner identity. Dweck (2000) emphasises the importance of these evaluations for the student's sense of identity. She advises that teachers who commend students for successful learning by praising them for being smart encourage a fixed belief about learning among them and demote the value of effort. In short, the pupil is likely to believe that they do not need to study or work hard because they are smart. As documented above, while most pupils in this study displayed a fixed belief about learning whereby they understood themselves to be good at learning because they were smart; some students emphasised the significance of effort.

5.3.4 Implications

One of the issues emerging from the findings pertaining to the second research question is

that although policy-makers promote the process of learning (e.g. NCCA 2018; Inspectorate 2016), respondents in this study focused on the product. This is in direct contrast with the concept of learner identity. Kolb and Kolb (2009) maintain that to nurture their learner identities, pupils should embrace the learning process. This means that students should focus on the long-term process of learning as opposed to immediate outcomes or performances. Importantly, Kolb and Kolb (2009) highlight the fact that treating every task and performance as a matter of life and death cultivates a fixed identity. This has been reiterated in recent discourse on Irish primary education. For example, within the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum Draft Specification Junior Infants to Second Class* (NCCA 2018), the processes of mathematics, including reasoning, justifying, problem-solving, are promoted and considered to be essential to the mathematical experiences of all children. Yet, within this study, respondents' experiences as maths learners did not move beyond their performances in tests and tasks.

In a similar manner, the nurturing of intrapersonal aspects of pupils' learning is advocated within revised curriculum documents including the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2015), the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum Draft Specification Junior Infants to Second Class* (NCCA 2018) and the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2020). Within these publications, the nurturing of positive learning dispositions among learners is promoted. For example, the *Primary Language Curriculum* (NCCA 2015) advocates that pupils should foster a positive disposition towards reading and using Irish. Furthermore, the curriculum seeks to 'empower children to develop their thinking, expression, reflection, critique and empathy, and ... support the development of self-efficacy, identity' (NCCA 2015, p. 6). The findings from this study, however, indicated that pupils associated their experience of Irish with struggling to remember Irish words when completing tasks and to complete comprehension tasks.

The analysis of pupils' responses about their strengths and challenges as learners highlighted the fact that pupils struggled to see the benefits of the learning experiences they encountered in maths, English and Irish for anything more than tasks and tests in these areas. *Productive disposition* (NCCA 2018, p. 24) is advocated as an of mathematical proficiency in the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum Draft Specification Junior Infants to Second Class* (NCCA 2018). This disposition aims to enable pupils 'to recognise the benefits of perseverance and to see that mathematics is really useful, engaging and motivating' (NCCA 2018, p. 24). This was not exemplified in the responses of participants in this study. High scores in mathematics tasks was utilised by one pupil to confirm his sense of identity as a 'smart learner'. In addition, gathering information about subjects including mathematics from the teacher was deemed necessary by a pupil for completing homework and SIGMA-T tests. These findings reassert the need for assessment practices in primary school that move beyond the constraints of academic achievements and incorporate the broader aims of 21st century education. This should involve the inclusion of strength-based assessment (Epstein and Sharma 1998) in the classroom. Strength-based assessment enables educators to acknowledge pupils' strengths and competencies as learners and increases motivation and responsibility among students (Epstein, Rudolph and Epstein 2000).

A final dimension of learning that is embedded within the concept of learner identity and is advocated in education discourse is learner autonomy. The quality framework for primary schools, *Looking at Our School* (Inspectorate 2016), states that pupils should be enabled to 'reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning' (p. 12). This resonates with the idea of *adaptive reasoning* which is promoted in the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum Draft Specification Junior Infants to Second Class* (NCCA 2018). Both publications encourage self-reflection among pupils on their progress within the learning progress. In other words, it is expected that students should

have opportunities to assess their work realistically, describe their strengths and areas for improvement, assume responsibility to enhancing their work, set personal goals based on their reflection, and increase their autonomy as learners (Inspectorate 2016). However, these practices were not evidenced in the pupils' articulations of themselves as learners. In seeking to enhance their performance as learners, the respondents sought help, advice and feedback from their class teacher. Furthermore, the respondents did not demonstrate the ability to self-recognise their own learning strengths or challenges. Instead, they relied on information provided by the teacher either during teacher-pupil conversations, at parent-teacher meetings or through report cards. These findings reaffirm the need to equip students with the tools to engage in self-reflection as learners.

5.4 Third Research Question: What factors do pupils attribute to the development of their learner identities?

5.4.1 Peer Influence

As expected, the current study found that respondents' relationships with their peers contributed to their self-identities as learners. It was found that pupils' social interactions with their classmates influenced the meanings they formed about themselves. The role of peers in identity development has been documented by scholars from different theoretical perspectives (e.g. Fields and Enyedy 2013; Volman and Ten Dam 2007). In the current study, different identity positions were made available to students through their interactions and negotiations with peers. In many cases, pupils described how their peers praised them when they were successful or when they had the correct answers. This observation resonates with the previously mentioned ideas of Dweck (2000) who suggests that when pupils are praised for being smart, it reinforces a fixed identity. Consequently, peers may negatively impact upon the development of favourable learning identities among pupils in subtle and

unexpected ways.

Another important finding was that some pupils' membership in the after-school maths club shaped their self-understandings about themselves as learners. In one instance, a pupil reported that students who attended the maths club were better maths learners than those who did not. The finding can be explained from a sociological perspective on identity. As discussed in the literature review, sociological scholars (e.g. Coté 2002; Foucault 1980) focus on group membership among students, how these groups are evaluated by pupils and the degree to which students identify with the groups. In the current study, membership in the maths club was voluntary. Nonetheless, from a sociological perspective, it is likely that the pupils who were members of the group used their own personal agency to portray themselves in manners that they desired. Formation of the after-school maths club inevitably included some students while others were excluded. However, in line with the ideas of Coté (2002) and Foucault (1980), it is pupils' evaluation of the group that guides its impact on identity. As evidenced by the remarks of two pupils in this study, maths club group membership was associated with achievement and success in maths. Therefore, it seems that the maths group created a new membership group of failures and achievers among the pupils.

In addition, the above finding is consistent with the ideas of Holland et al. (1998) who propose that school is a sociocultural context which is governed by tools, norms and values. Moreover, the researchers suggest that norms and values, which are explicitly and implicitly communicated in the actions of peers, impact upon pupils' identities. Some researchers (e.g. Field and Enyedy 2013; Volman and Ten Dam 2007) have found that peers make certain identity positions available or unavailable to each other. In the current study, it was found that the respondents were supported by their peers in their efforts to improve as learners, particularly in the area of maths. Pupils appeared comfortable to seek help off their peers.

Consequently, the respondents' peers, through their explicit actions of offering advice and explaining concepts, made the identity positions of 'becoming a good maths learner' or a 'good maths learner' available.

5.4.2 Teacher Praise

In this study, teacher praise was found to influence the meanings pupils constructed about themselves as learners. In all cases, teacher praise was reported to enhance how the respondents felt about their learning. In some instances, pupils expressed a liking for teacher praise because it informed them that they were competent at carrying out a task. The findings in relation to teacher praise support the conceptualisation of learner identity proposed by Coll and Falsafi (2010). These researchers suggest that learner identity comprises two modalities: the first being an individual's enduring cross-situational learner identity and the second encompassing the situated process of identity adjustment in response to specific learning experiences. The latter modality, termed the *Learner Identity Process*, occurs in particular learning activities with particular characteristics and learning intentions that delineate the activity.

Consequently, an individual's learner identity becomes enacted through verbal and non-verbal actions. The former incorporates praise provided to students during overt conversations with teachers while the latter includes tone of voice, demonstration of interest through follow up questions, and acts of listening. Importantly, Coll and Falsafi (2010) declare that both discursive and non-discursive actions significantly contribute to an individual's sense of recognition. The researchers emphasise the importance of recognition in identity development. As discussed earlier, Coll and Falsafi (2010) propose that having an identity comprises a sense of recognition as someone. They add, however, that the individual must recognise the meanings that are constructed about oneself in order for them to extend

beyond the current learning activity.

5.4.3 Hidden Acts of Recognition

According to Coll and Falsafi (2010), educational environments feature a multitude of hidden acts of recognition. These include the explicit or implicit actions which are conducted on the part of the pupil to seek and obtain recognition. These acts are contrasted with goal-oriented learning actions because the main aim of these acts is to receive recognition of oneself. Coll and Falsafi (2010) make a noteworthy point explaining that pupils generally direct these actions towards teachers because in a classroom context, the teacher normally assumes a superior status as supplier of recognition. This assertion was evidenced in the current study whereby students expressed a preference towards receiving praise from the teacher.

Additionally, some students reported that they felt disappointed when work which they felt they had accomplished to a good standard was not acknowledged by their teacher.

Furthermore, one pupil reported enhanced confidence as a learner when she was praised by her teacher. Finally, another student indicated that the positive feedback she received from her teacher inspired her to continue improving as a learner. These examples which demonstrate pupils' acts of recognition being focused towards their teacher support the proposal of McCarthy and Moje (2002) who argue that 'identities are always situated in relationships ... and power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned' (p. 231).

Although it was not exemplified in this study, acts of recognition are not always aimed at providing the pupil with positive reinforcement. However, as noted by Coll and Falsafi (2010), criticism and destructive feedback are still forms of recognition. Similarly, the authors note that the lack of acknowledgement is another act of recognition. In all cases, the individual is recognised as something, either positively or negatively. The proposals by Coll

and Falsafi (2010) are consistent with the findings of a study carried out by Heyd-Metzuyanim (2013). She found that when a pupil's maths teacher consistently demonstrated low expectations and lack of interest towards the student - by not asking follow up questions - the student recognised himself as someone who was incapable of learning maths and making further progress. It is expected, therefore, that in the current study, the explicit and implicit actions communicated to the students from their teacher influenced the meanings the students formed about themselves as a learner in that current learning situation.

5.4.4 Learning Experiences

One thought-provoking issue which has intrigued researchers for many years is why some learning experiences and the meanings a pupil constructs during these experiences are more significant than others in the student's overall self-recognition as a learner. Coll and Falsafi (2010) describe learner identity as a long set of constructed meanings by an individual informed by their formal and informal educational experiences. However, the authors point out that not all experiences influence identity. Coll and Falsafi (2010) highlight important aspects of the learning experience which influence the meanings pupils construct about the experience. These include the student's perception of the school teacher, the pupil's confidence in their ability, the student's prior knowledge in a specific area, and the pupil's feelings, motivation and interests. According to Coll and Falsafi (2010), the learning experience mediates the individual's construction of meaning about the learned subject and the overall educational experience. The authors add, however, that meaningful learning also includes the formation of meanings about oneself as a learner in novel learning environments, namely, a learner identity.

In this study, one respondent identified himself as an effective maths learner. In accordance with the ideas of Coll and Falsafi (2010), it is likely that elements within this pupil's learning

experience informed this understanding. As noted by this pupil, these included the high scores he received in maths tests, his competence at doing maths tasks independently, the positive feedback he received from his teacher about his ability, and his prior knowledge of the maths tasks his teacher explained on the board. This pupil reported a positive attitude towards maths and remarked that, in comparison to other subjects, he did not get distracted during maths because it was something he wanted to learn. It seems probable, therefore, that these factors contributed to the positive meaning this student constructed about maths learning experiences and himself as a maths learner.

5.4.5 Stable Identities

Moreover, it is postulated that while learning situations change and individuals' meanings about themselves as learners shift as they engage in novel experiences, they generally maintain a stable, coherent identity (Coll and Falsafi 2010). Likewise, Bruner (1996) proposes that people strive to maintain their identities throughout their lives in order to generate coherence and stability, even when situations change. Coll and Falsafi (2010) explain that in order to maintain this consistent sense of identity, an individual will seek out acts of recognition that reinforce their overall sense of identity as a learner, rather than contest it. Hence, in contrast to an indolent pupil, a diligent student will engage in acts of recognition that support prior experiences of being a good learner. In the case of B3, who viewed himself as an effective maths learner, he reported that he liked to undertake challenges in maths because he was good at it, whereas he preferred easier tasks in English because he was not as competent at this subject. This student also demonstrated a desire to learn from his mistakes in maths and to continue looking over his work in maths, as his father advised him. It is likely, therefore, that this pupil would engage in acts of recognition that reinforce his understanding of himself as an effective maths learner.

Therefore, learning is associated with the construction of learner identity, an identity which is fluid, evolving and under continual reconstruction. However, as Coll and Falsafi (2010) point out, the identity reconstruction does not always denote change since the process may simply reinforce previously held understandings. Thus, it can be stated that while identities are constructed through learning they also mediate participation in learning. This point is precisely summarised by Coll and Falsafi (2010) who state that, ‘the identities that are formed and the learning that takes place are mutually influential ... learning forms identities and identities shape learning’ (p. 215).

5.4.6 Implications

The evidence from this study suggests that teachers play a significant role in influencing how a pupil recognises themselves as a learner. Specifically, the findings indicate that the praise and acknowledgement provided to a student by the teacher determines whether and to what extent the student will develop a self-identity as a learner. In this study, pupils’ identities as learners were restricted to their perceived intelligence levels and curricular performance. These limited self-understandings which the pupils articulated about themselves as learners were primarily attributed to the messages communicated to the students by their teachers about their successes as learners.

In general, therefore, it seems that teachers recognised and privileged the product of learning. Rather than reinforcing pupils’ attitudes towards learning, belief in their ability to learn, capacity to negotiate their own learning, or ability to construct and reflect upon personal learning goals; students were typically commended for their competence at completing a task correctly. In their explanation of the term *learning*, pupils emphasised the significance of the learning process. Most students expressed the belief that learning involved the accumulation, memorisation and regurgitation of information for tests and tasks.

While teachers were identified as a source of encouragement for students, there was an evident emphasis placed upon the accurate application of procedures in the examples of student-teacher interactions described by the participants. This shows that, although the teachers cultivated positive, supportive relationships with the pupils, they did not nurture pupils' engagement with the process of becoming and being a learner.

Another issue which emerges from the findings above is the fact that along with teachers, pupils' understanding of themselves was reinforced by the direct and indirect messages communicated to them by their peers. It seems likely that the peer norms and values prevalent in this school context may be explained by the idea that learning identity is contagious (Kolb and Kolb 2009). That is to say, a teacher with a strong self-identity as a learner is likely to foster relationships with pupils that nurture this identity in them. On the contrary, teachers with a fixed identity conduct themselves in a manner that passes on fixed views to students. Taken together, these findings give reason to suggest that sustained efforts to nurture learner identity among primary school pupils should lie in the hands of the teacher. As educators, therefore, this empowers us to equip our pupils with the confidence and capacity to become lifelong learners, armed with the attitudes, values, beliefs, dispositions and strategies needed to thrive and succeed in the ever-changing, dynamic society of the 21st century. That is, of course, if we have the will and skill to make it happen.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Research Findings and Implications

This study set out to examine primary school children's current understanding of learning; explore how they articulated their sense of identity as learners; and identify some factors that contribute to the self-understanding pupils form about themselves as learners.

The study has shown that pupils demonstrated traditional perspectives of learning, associating it with the collection and memorisation of information from the teacher. Concerning the voice of the learner in learning, it can be assumed that pupils appreciated the potential role of their voice in informing teachers about students' preferences and interests, thus cultivating enjoyable, authentic learning experiences. However, it seems likely that respondents' opportunities to utilise their voice to increase their autonomy as learners were restricted by fears of having their ideas rejected by teachers or peers. It could be argued that pupils in the study would benefit from opportunities that promote more authentic learner voice in school. That is to say, the elicitation of learner voice could be extended beyond the use of class votes, checklists or questionnaires and incorporate the use of open-ended assessment methodologies and learner narratives.

Moreover, it is incumbent upon all educators to foster a culture of listening within schools and to incorporate a sustainable, habitual approach to encourage meaningful learner voice from a children's rights-based perspective. It is probable that such a culture of listening might be embedded within school policies. While it was beyond the scope of analysis in this study to investigate the positioning of learner voice within the school policies, the researcher noted aspects of the participants' viewpoints and experiences which could be construed in ways that reflected their experience of school culture and ethos. In light of the findings presented in this study, it could be argued that the participants in this study have yet to discover the power of

learner voice in enabling them to negotiate their learning; thus, promoting their identity, agency and autonomy.

The second major finding in this study was that pupils' self-understandings as learners did not incorporate any intrapersonal aspects of learning such as motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, or autonomy. Most respondents in the study demonstrated fixed-identities as learners, focusing on their innate abilities including intelligence. In other words, pupils articulated an understanding of themselves as smart or bright learners. Moreover, pupils struggled to self-recognise their strengths or challenges as learners beyond their performances in curricular tasks and tests. The results of this study indicate that although pupils' engagement in the process of learning has been advocated in Irish education policy, the students have not yet reaped the rewards of this practice. These findings suggest that pupils need to be supported in developing a sense of themselves as learners within the learning process. However, they also need to be equipped with the capacity to articulate their developing sense of identity. New programmes for primary education such as *My Learner ID* (Parkinson 2018) augur well for promising developments in this area.

The third major finding from the study was that the meanings pupils constructed about themselves as learners were inspired by their interactions with significant individuals in their lives. In particular, pupils' self-understandings as learners were primarily shaped by the praise and acknowledgement they received from teachers about their academic abilities and competences. Respondents' views about themselves in learning situations were influenced by evaluations from teachers. The direct and indirect acts of recognition provided by teachers reinforced students' self-understandings. At times, individuals described instances where their teachers' praise strengthened their previously constructed meanings about themselves as learners. Supportive relationships between the students and their peers positively contributed

to the students' self-identities. The findings from the study indicate that teachers have significant power in influencing the meanings pupils construct about themselves as learners. In order to support the development of favourable learner identities among pupils, teachers must privilege and prioritise pupils' experience and engagement in the learning process. Yet, in an education system that rewards the learning product across all levels, from standardised testing in primary school, to leaving certificate points at secondary level through to teaching practice inspections at third level, considerable shifts in attitudes and beliefs are required among educators to achieve this aspiration. This matter is discussed in length in the final section of this chapter which explores the recommendations for future policy and practice arising from the findings.

6.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings in this study are subject to at least three limitations. Firstly, the current study is limited by the use of purposive sampling. With a small sample size, caution must be applied when interpreting the findings in the study. Given that this study recruited six respondents to engage in semi-structured interviews, the researcher did not intend the findings to be representative of all Irish primary school children. The study sought to explore learner identity in the context of a distinctive and specifically chosen group. Further research should therefore concentrate on the investigation of children's perceptions of their learner identities with greater acknowledgement of diversity. Future studies should incorporate a larger sample size and should consider the inclusion of pupils representing greater diversity of educational experiences. Further study could also explore learner identity in the context of pupils with additional educational needs or students struggling to access the primary school curriculum.

Secondly, the findings of this study are limited by the use of an interpretive research paradigm. One source of weakness in this study which could have affected the findings was

researcher bias. The researcher acknowledged the foregrounding she brought with her to the study. The researcher utilised reflexivity throughout all stages of data collection and analysis to limit the extent of researcher bias within the study. Future studies exploring pupils' perceptions of their learner identities should consider the use of a blind researcher.

Finally, one important limitation of the study lies in the fact that data was only obtained from pupils. There is abundant room for further progress in exploring teachers' understandings and expectations of the pupils as learners in learning experiences. This study examined the understandings pupils constructed about themselves as learners. However, it would be interesting to compare teachers' perceptions of these pupils as learners. In addition, future studies should explore correlations between teachers' expectations of students and pupils' learner identities.

6.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

It has been acknowledged in this study that enabling pupils to have their say on education has the potential to contribute to their overall sense of well-being, autonomy and agency.

However, in order to realise the possibilities of learner voice in Irish primary education, teachers should be provided with Continuous Professional Development opportunities to support them in promoting the language of being a learner and in fostering a culture of listening within schools. This should be followed up by the establishment of a sustainable, democratic approach to incorporate the voice of the learner in education reform. The inclusion of and response to student voice in primary education should be implemented as a regular practice within classrooms.

The incorporation of authentic learner voice in schools requires that pupils are afforded more responsibility. Fostering a maintainable approach to student voice demands dialogue, collaboration and communication among all stakeholders within the education system –

policy-makers, principals, teachers and pupils. Importantly, this dialogical process requires stakeholders to be open to new ideas and shifts in autonomy. In particular, unless there is willingness and commitment among educators to afford learners more autonomy, pupil voice will not inspire a sense of empowerment and agency among learners.

The findings in this study indicate that pupils need to be equipped with the confidence and capacity to articulate their developing sense of identity. Students need to develop awareness of themselves as learners. More importantly, however, they need to acquire the language to describe their experience of the process of becoming and being a learner. Disciplinary literacy (Moje 2008; Shanahan and Shanahan 2008; 2012) offers a potential instructional approach for enabling students to gain an understanding and appreciation of how learners use literacy to express and develop themselves. ‘Learning to be a learner’ is included in the new *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2020) as one of seven key competencies relevant for children in primary education. Considering ‘learning to be a learner’ as an academic discipline could enable educators to explicitly teach students the vocabulary and terminology associated with being an effective learner. Encouraging students to read, write and think like learners would enable students to adopt the methods of thinking and communicating that are characteristic of being a learner. Pupils need to be taught the language to describe their learner strengths and challenges, strategies, autonomy, mindset, and motivation. In other words, teachers need to explicitly teach pupils the *how* of learning.

However, caution must be applied to ensure that a disciplinary literacy approach does not cause ‘learning to be a learner’ to be treated merely as another subject to be taught within an already overloaded curriculum. Efforts to equip pupils with the language and tools to develop themselves as learners need to permeate all aspects of teaching and learning. Nurturing the *how* of learning in schools should not be included as part of a set of evaluative criteria for

effective teaching. 'Learning to be a learner' is not a product of the learning experience. It is the experience of becoming and being a learner.

Ultimately, the findings presented in this study concerning pupils' self-understandings as learners illuminate the existing gap in Irish education between what is advocated as highly effective practice in policy and what is implemented in the classroom. In other words, while learners' experiences of the process of learning is promoted in education policy, learners' academic accomplishments and achievements are prioritised in the classroom. Efforts to address the insufficient attention afforded to the learning experience within the classroom should be introduced at initial teacher education level. This may require a re-evaluation of the teaching and learning experiences of pre-service primary school teachers at third level. There are questions which need to be considered for example, *During teaching practice experiences, what emphasis is placed upon the primary school children's engagement with the learning process? How are pre-service teachers evaluated during school placement? How are the intrapersonal aspects of learning incorporated into lesson plan designs? What opportunities do current school placement evaluation systems provide for nurturing the primary school children's attitude toward learning, self-efficacy, awareness of learner strengths, autonomy or motivation?*

Moving towards a system of education for pre-service primary school teachers that promotes pupils' experiences of the process of becoming and being a learner requires a tentative shift in policy and practice. Once again, it raises the issue of accountability. If pre-service teachers are expected to promote children's personal attributes of learning during lessons on school placement, then students may expect this aspect of their teaching to be assessed. If pre-service teachers' grades on school placement are not considered in light of the extent to which they support the process of learning in the classroom, then students may not be

motivated to do so. These include some of the many concerns which need to be addressed before the potential of learning identity can be fully realised in the Irish primary classroom.

Today's world is unpredictable and undependable. Society is evolving at a rapid and uncontrollable rate. Nevertheless, today's children are still expected and required to thrive and succeed in tomorrow's world. The need for children to be equipped with the capacity and confidence to respond to future challenges and overcome unprecedented adversities has never been greater. Promoting learner identity in primary school classrooms enables learners to adopt the necessary attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, skills and strategies to navigate the obstacles and opportunities throughout life. And we, as educators, have the greatest power of all in making this happen.

References

- Alexander, R., M. Armstrong, J. Flutter, L. Hargreaves, D. Harrison, W. Harlen, E. Hartley-Brewer et al. (2010) *Children, Their World, Their Education*, London: Routledge.
- Andrade, H (2008) 'Self-Assessment through Rubrics', *Educational Leadership*, Dec 2007/Jan 2008, 60-63.
- Andrade, H. and Du, Y. (2007) 'Student responses to criteria-referenced self-assessment', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32(2), 159-181.
- Askar, P. and Umay, A. (2001) 'Preservice elementary mathematics teachers' computer self-efficacy, attitudes towards computers, and their perceptions of computer-enriched learning environments' in Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education, *Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference*, 2262-2263.
- Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (2010) *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills*, available: <http://atc21s.org> [accessed 11 Feb 2019].
- Assessment Reform Group (2002) *Testing, motivation, and learning*, Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.
- Bailey, K. D. (1994) *Methods of Social Research*, 4th ed., New York: The Free Press.
- Bandura, A. (1977) *Social learning theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1986) *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, New York: Freeman.

- Bandura, A. and Schunk, D. H. (1981) 'Cultivating competence, self-efficacy, and intrinsic interest through proximal self-motivation', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41(3), 586.
- Bell, J. (1991) *Doing Your Research Project*, 2nd ed., Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Berg, K. (2010) 'Negotiating identity: conflicts between the agency of the student and the official diagnosis of social workers and teachers', *European Educational Research Journal*, 9(2), 164–176.
- Bhattacharjee, A. (2012) *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods and Practices*, USF Tampa Bay: Open Access Textbooks Collection.
- Biesta, G.J. (2013) *Beautiful risk of education*, London: Routledge.
- Biesta, G.J.J. (2004) 'Against Learning: reclaiming a language for education in an Age of Learning', *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 23, 70-82.
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) 'Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment', *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(2), 139-148.
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (2009) 'Developing the theory of formative assessment', *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability (formerly: Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education)*, 21(1), 5-31.
- Blair, C. and Raver, C.C. (2015) 'School readiness and self-regulation: a developmental psychobiological Approach', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 3, 711-731.
- Blair, C. and Razza, R. P. (2007) 'Relating effortful control, executive function, and false belief understanding to emerging math and literacy ability in kindergarten', *Child*

Development, 78(2), 647-643.

Boud, D. (2000) 'Sustainable assessment: rethinking assessment for the learning society',
Studies in continuing education, 22(2), 151-167.

Boud, D. and Falchikov, N. (2007) *Rethinking assessment in higher education: learning for the longer term*, Routledge: London.

Boud, D. and Soler, R. (2016) 'Sustainable assessment revisited', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(3), 400-413.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998) *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Bruner, J. (1996) *The culture of education*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bryce, J. (2004) 'Different ways that secondary schools orient to lifelong learning',
Educational Studies, 30(1), 53-64.

Buckingham Shum, S. and Deakin Crick, R. (2012) 'Learning Dispositions and Transferable Competencies: Pedagogy, Modelling and Learning Analytics', presented at *2nd International Conference on Learning Analytics & Knowledge*, 29 Apr-2 May.

Burke, P. and Welsch, J. G. (2018) 'Literacy in a "broad and balanced" primary school curriculum: The potential of a disciplinary approach in Irish classrooms', *Irish Educational Studies*, 37(1), 33-49.

Cannell, C. F. and Kahn, R. L. (1968) 'Interviewing' in Lindzey, G. and Aronson, A., eds.,

Ethical Issues in Social Science Research, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 315-95.

Carlone, H. B., Huffling, L. D., Tomasek, T., Hegedus, T. A., Matthews, C. E., Allen, M. H. and Ash, M. C. (2015) 'Unthinkable' selves: identity boundary work in a summer field ecology enrichment program for diverse youth', *International Journal of Science Education*, 37(10), 1524–1546.

Carr, M. and Claxton, G. L. (2002) 'Tracking the development of learning dispositions', *Assessment in Education*, 9, 9–37.

Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (1994) *Qualitative methods in organizational research: a practical guide*, London: SAGE.

Cavan, S. (1977) 'Review of J. D. Douglas's (1976) "Investigative Social Review: Individual and Team Field Research"', *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 3, 809-11.

Centre for Learner Identity Studies (2014) *Learner identity studies*, available: www.edgehill.ac.uk/clis/about-clis/learner-identity-studies [accessed 3 Aug 2020].

Claxton, G. (2007) 'Expanding young people's capacity to learn', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(2), 115-134.

Claxton, G. and Carr, M. (2004) 'A framework for teaching learning: the dynamics of disposition', *Early Years*, 24, (1), 87-97.

Claxton, G., Chambers, M., Powell, G. and Lucas, L. (2011) *The learning powered school: Pioneering 21st century education*, Bristol: TLO Ltd.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*, 7th ed.,

Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed.,
Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Coll, C. and Falsafi, L. (2010) 'Learner identity. An educational and analytical tool', *Revista de Educación*, 353, 211-233.

Commission of the European Communities (2000) *Memorandum on lifelong learning*,
Brüssel: Commission of the European Communities.

Coolican, H. (1999) *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology*, London: Hodder and
Stoughton.

Côté, J. (2002) 'The role of identity capital in the transition to adulthood: the
individualization thesis examined', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5(2), 117–134.

Creswell, J. W. (2002) *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating
Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice-
Hall.

Crotty, M. (1998) *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the
research process*, Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Davis-Keen (2005) 'The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child
Achievement: The indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment',
Journal of Family Psychology, 19, 294-304.

Deakin Crick, R., Broadfoot, P. and Claxton, G. (2004) 'Developing an Effective Lifelong
Learning Inventory: the ELLI Project', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy*

& *Practice*, 11(3), 247-272.

Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M. (1985) 'The general causality orientations scale: Self-determination in personality', *Journal of Research in Personality*, 19(2), 109-134.

Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M. (2008) 'Self-determination theory: a macro theory of human motivation, development and health', *Canadian Psychology*, 49(3), 182-185.

Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (1987) 'The support of autonomy and the control of behaviour', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 1024-1037.

Department for Education & Skills (2003) *Every Child Matters*, available:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272064/5860.pdf. [accessed 14 Sept 2019].

Department of Education and Science, Government of Ireland (1999) *Primary School Curriculum Introduction*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Dewey, J. (1915) *The school and society*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Dewey, J. (1916) *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*, New York, NY: Macmillan.

Dewey, J. (1933) *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*, Boston, MA: D.C. Heath.

Diener, C. I. and Dweck, C. S. (1980) 'An analysis of learned helplessness: II. The processing of success', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 940-952.

Diener, C. L., and Dweck, C. S. (1978) 'An analysis of learned helplessness: Continuous changes in performance, strategy and achievement cognitions following failure',

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 36, 451-462.

Diener, E. and Crandall, R. (1978) *Ethics in Social and Behavioural Research*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Dochy, F.J.R.C., Segers, M. and Sluijsmans, D. (1999) 'The use of self-, peer and co-assessment in higher education: A review', *Studies in Higher Education*, 24(3), 331-350.

Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset: The new psychology of success*, New York, NY: Random House.

Dweck, C. and Leggett, E. (1988) 'A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality', *Psychological Review*, 95(2), 256-273.

Dweck, C. S. (1975) 'The role of expectations and attributions in the alleviation of learned helplessness', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 674-685.

Dweck, C. S. (2000) *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*, Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Dweck, C. S. and Molden, D. C. (2005) 'Self-theories: their impact on competence motivation and acquisition', in Elliot, A.J. and Dweck, C., eds., *Handbook of competence and motivation*, New York: Guilford, 122-139.

Edwards-Groves, C. and Murray, C. (2008) 'Enabling voice: perceptions of schooling from rural aboriginal youth at risk of entering the juvenile justice system', *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 37(1), 165-177.

Epstein, M. H. and Sharma, J. M. (1998) *Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale: A Strength-Based Approach to Assessment: Examiner's Manual*, Austin, TX: ProEd.

Epstein, M. H. Rudolph, S. and Epstein, A. A. (2000) 'Strength-based assessment', *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 32, 50-54.

European Commission (2001) *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality*, Brussels: Commission of the European Communities.

European Commission (2010) 'School education: Equipping a new generation (Doc 64)', available: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learningpolicy/doc64_en.htm [accessed 19 Nov 2018].

Fal (2013) *Learner identity: A sociocultural approach to how people recognize and construct themselves as learners*, unpublished thesis (Ph.D.), University of Barcelona, available: www.psyed.edu.es/prodGrintie/tesis/Falsafi_Thesis.pdf [accessed 4 Aug 2020].

Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., Beechum, N.O. and Consortium on Chicago School Research. (2012) 'Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance--A Critical Literature Review', *Consortium on Chicago School Research*, Chicago.

Fields, D. and Enyedy, N. (2013) 'Picking up the mantle of Bexpert: assigned roles, assertion of identity, and peer recognition within a programming class', *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 20(2), 113–131.

Fine, G. A. and Sandstrom, K. L. (1988) *Knowing Children: Participant Observation with Minors*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Fink, L.D. (2003) *Creating Significant learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to*

Designing College Courses, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Finsterwald, M., Wagner, P., Schober, B., Lüftenegger, M. and Spiel, C. (2013) 'Fostering lifelong learning – Evaluation of a teacher education program for professional teachers', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 29, 144-155.

Fisher, H. (2014) 'Using pupil perspective in the primary classroom: an exploration of some of the potential issues', *Research Papers in Education*, 29(4), 390-409.

Fitzpatrick, S., Twohig, M. and Morgan, M. (2014) 'Priorities for primary education? From subjects to life-skills and children's social and emotional development', *Irish Educational Studies*, 33(3), 269-286.

Fleming, D (2019) 'Learner Voice and Education Policy, Research and Practice', presented at *School of Education, University College Cork*, June 2019, available: https://www.instructionalleadership.ie/images/Dr_Domnall_Fleming_Learner_Voice_and_Education_Policy.pdf [accessed 14 Jan 2020].

Fleming, D. (2017) 'Student voice: An emerging discourse in Irish education policy', *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 8(2), 223-242.

Flick, U. (2009) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th ed., London: SAGE.

Fluckiger, J. (2010) 'Single Point Rubric: A Tool for Responsible Student Self-Assessment', *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 76(4), 18.

Flutter, J. (2007) 'Teacher development and pupil voice', *Curriculum Journal*, 18(3), 343–354.

Flynn, P. (2013) 'The transformative potential in student voice research for young people

identified with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties’, *Trinity Education Papers*, 2(2), 70–91.

Flynn, P. (2017) *The Learner Voice Research Study: Research Report*, Dublin: NCCA.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Freire, P. (1993) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, N.Y.: Continuum Press.

Gafney, L. and P. Varma-Nelson (2007) ‘Evaluating Peer-Led Team Learning: A Study of Long-Term Effects on Former Workshop Peer Leaders’, *Journal of Chemical Education Research*, 84(3), 535-539.

Gee, J. P. (1999) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, New York: Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2000) ‘Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research in Education’, *Review of Research in Education*, 25, 99-125.

Gee, J. P. (2001) ‘Identity as an analytic lens for research in education’, *Review of Research in Education*, 25, 99–125.

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books.

Gholami, H. (2016) ‘Self-Assessment and Learner Autonomy’, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(1), 46.

Gibbs, G. (2007) *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, London: SAGE.

Glaser, R. (1991) ‘The maturing of the relationship between the science of learning and cognition and educational practice’, *Learning and instruction*, 1(2), 129-144.

- Government of Ireland (1995) *Charting our Education Future: White Paper on Education*, Dublin: Government Publications.
- Greig, A. (2000) 'Student-Led Classes and Group Work: A Methodology for Developing Generic Skills', *Legal Education Review*, 11, 81.
- Greig, A. D. and Taylor, J. (1999) *Doing Research with Children*, London: SAGE.
- Guthrie, J. T., A. Wigfield, P. Barbosa, K. C. Perencevich, A. Taboada, M. H. Davis, N. T. Scaffidi and Tonks, S. (2004) 'Increasing Reading Comprehension and Engagement Through Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(3), 403-423.
- Hall, L. A. (2010) 'The negative consequences of becoming a good reader: identity theory as a lens for understanding struggling readers, teachers, and reading instruction', *Teachers College Record*, 112(7), 1792–1829.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography Principles in Practice*, London: Routledge.
- Heritage, M. and Wylie, C. (2018) 'Reaping the benefits of assessment for learning: achievement, identity, and equity', *ZDM*, 50(4), 729-741.
- Heyd-Metzuyanim, E. (2013) 'The co-construction of learning difficulties in mathematics teacher-student interactions and their role in the development of a disabled mathematical identity', *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 83(3), 341–368.
- Hogan, K., B. Nastasi and M. Pressley (2000) 'Discourse patterns and collaborative scientific reasoning in peer and teacher-guided discussions', *Cognition and Instruction*, 17, 379-432.

- Holland, D. and Lave, J. (2001) *History in person: enduring struggles, contentious practice, intimate identities*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Holland, D., Lachicotte, W., Jr., Skinner, D. and Cain, C. (1998) *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hopkins, E.A. (2008) 'Classroom conditions to secure enjoyment and achievement: the pupils' voice. Listening to the voice of Every child matters', *Education 3–13*, 36(4), 393-401.
- Inspectorate, Department of Education and Science (2004) *Whole-School Evaluation in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Schools*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills (2011) *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills (2012) *School Self-Evaluation: Guidelines for Post-primary Schools*, Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills (2016) *Looking at Our School*, Department of Education and Skills: Dublin.
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation (2008) 'Assessment in the Primary School', presented at *Consultative Conference on Education*.
- Irwin, J. (2018) *Towards a values-led redevelopment of the primary curriculum*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- Kerlinger, F. N. (1970) *Foundations of Behavioural Research*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

- King, N. (1994) 'The qualitative research interview', in Cassell, C. and Symon, G., eds., *Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research: A Practical Guide*, London: SAGE, 14-36.
- Kolb, A. and Kolb, D. (2009) 'On becoming a learner: The concept of learning identity' in Bamford-Rees et al., eds., *Essays on Adult Learning Inspired by the Life and Work of David O. Justice. Learning Never Ends*, Chicago, IL: CAEL Forum and News, 5-13.
- Lamb, T.E. (2011) 'Fragile Identities: Exploring Learner Identity, Learner Autonomy and Motivation through Young Learners' Voices', *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 68-85.
- Landers, M. G. (2013) 'Towards a theory of mathematics homework as a social practice', *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 84(3), 371–391.
- Lap, T. Q. (2005) *Stimulating learner autonomy in English language education: A curriculum innovation study in a Vietnamese context*, unpublished thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- Leadbeater, C. (2017) "*Student Agency*" section of *Education 2030 - Conceptual learning framework: Background papers*, Parise: OECD.
- Lee, H. Y., Jamieson, J. P., Miu, A. S., Josephs, R. A. and Yeager, D. S. (2018) 'An entity theory of intelligence predicts higher cortisol levels when high school grades are declining', *Child Development*, 89(6)1- 19.
- Levin, B. (2000) 'Putting Students at the Centre of Education Reform', *International Journal of Educational Change*, 1(2), 155–172.

- Littlejohn, A. (2008) 'Digging deeper: learners' disposition and strategy use' in Cane, G., ed., *Strategies in Language Learning and Teaching*, Singapore: RELC, 68-81.
- Long, M., Wood, C., Littleton, K., Passenger, T. and Sheehy, K. (2011) *The psychology of education*, Routledge: London
- Lüftenegger, M., Schober, B., van de Schoot, R., Wagner, P., Finsterwald, M. and Spiel, C. (2012) 'Lifelong learning as a goal – Do autonomy and self-regulation in school result in well prepared pupils?', *Learning and Instruction*, 22(1), 27-36.
- Lundy, L. (2007) 'Voice is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, 33, 927-942.
- Maier, S. F., Seligman, M. E. P. and Solomon, R. L. (1969) 'Pavlovian fear conditioning and learned helplessness' in Campbell, B. A. and Church, R. M., eds., *Punishment*, New York: Appleton Century-Crofts.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943) 'A theory of human motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- McCallum, B., Hargreaves, E. and Gipps, C. (2000) 'Learning: The Pupil Voice', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(2), 265–272.
- McCarthy, S. and Moje, E. (2002) 'Conversations: Identity Matters', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 37(2), 228–37.
- McGuinness, C. (2018) *Informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum*, Dublin: NCCA.

- McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. and Rudduck, L. (2005) 'Comfortable and Uncomfortable Learnings for Teachers', *Research Papers in Education*, 20, 149-168.
- Moje, E. B. (2007) 'Developing Socially Just Subject-Matter Instruction: A Review of the Literature on Disciplinary Literacy Teaching', *Review of Research in Education*, 31(1), 1-44.
- Moje, E. B. (2008) 'Foregrounding the disciplines in secondary literacy teaching and learning: A call for change', *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 52(2), 96-107.
- Molden, D. C., & Dweck, C. S. (2006) 'Finding "meaning" in Psychology: A lay theories approach to self-regulation, social perception and social development', *American Psychologist*, 61(3), 192-203.
- Montessori, M. (1949) *The absorbent mind*, Adyar, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House.
- Mueller, C. M. and Dweck, C. S. (1998). 'Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1), 33-52.
- Murayama, K., Pekrun, R., Lichtenfeld, S. and Vom Hofe, R. (2013) 'Predicting long-term growth in students' mathematics achievement: The unique contributions of motivation and cognitive strategies', *Child development*, 84(4), 1475-1490.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001) *Teaching and learning vocabulary in another language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- National Research Council. (2000) *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*,

Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

NCCA (2007) *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools*,
Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

NCCA (2009) *Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework*, Dublin: National Council
for Curriculum and Assessment.

NCCA (2015) *Primary Language Curriculum*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and
Assessment.

NCCA (2018) *Primary Mathematics Curriculum: Draft Specification Junior Infants to
Second Class*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

NCCA (2020) *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, National Council for Curriculum and
Assessment: Dublin.

Negru-Subtirica, O., Pop, E. I. and Crocetti, E. (2015) 'Developmental trajectories and
reciprocal associations between career adaptability and vocational identity: a three-
wave longitudinal study with adolescents', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 88, 131–
142.

Nicol, D. (2009) 'Assessment for learner self-regulation: enhancing achievement in the first
year using learning technologies', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*,
34(3), 335-352.

O' Sullivan, L. (2016) 'Social pretend play and self-regulation', *Early Education Journal*, 80,
12-15.

OECD (2005) *The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies Executive Summary*, Paris:

OECD.

OECD (2008) '21st century learning: Research, innovation and policy directions from recent OECD analyses', available: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/39/8/40554299.pdf> [accessed 15 Nov 2018].

OECD (2019) *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 OECD Learning Compass 2030: A Series of Concept Notes*, Paris: OECD.

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) (2005) *Framework for the Inspection of Schools in England from September 2005*, London: HMSO.

Oliver, P. (2003) *The Student's Guide to Research Ethics*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Oppenheim, A. N. (1992) *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*, London: Pinter.

Parkinson, S. (2018) *My Learner ID*, available: <https://mylearnerid.com/home/> [accessed 3 Oct 2018].

Parkinson, S. (2019) *My Learner ID*, Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland.

Parkinson, S. (2020) 'Teaching, learning and technology' [letter], *The Irish Times*, 6 Apr, available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/teaching-learning-and-technology-1.4221311> [accessed 10 Apr 2020].

Parkinson, S. and Brennan, F. (2020) 'Exploring the positioning of educational psychology practice in 21st century learning', *The Debate, Division of Educational and Child Psychology, The British Psychological Society*, 175, 16-22.

- Patall, E. A., Cooper, H. and Wynn, S. R. (2010) 'The effectiveness and relative importance of choice in the classroom', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(4), 896.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990) *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, 2nd ed., Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Perry, N.E. (2013) 'Understanding classroom processes that support children's self-regulation of learning' in Whitebread, D., Mercer, N., Howe, C. and Tolmie, A., eds., *Self-regulation and dialogue in primary classrooms. British journal of educational psychology monograph series II: Psychological aspects of education-current trends*, Leicester: British Psychological Society, 45-68.
- Poland, B. D. (2002) 'Transcription quality' in Gubrium, J. F. and Holstein, J. A., eds., *Handbook of Interview Research: Context & Method*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 629-649.
- Punch, K. F. (2009) *Introduction to Research Methods in Education*, London: SAGE.
- Ring, E., O'Sullivan, L., Ryan, M. and Burke, P. (2018) *A melange or a mosaic of theories? How theoretical perspectives on children's learning and development can inform a responsive pedagogy in a redeveloped primary school curriculum*, Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- Robb, N., Dunkley, L., Boynton, P. and Greenhalgh, T. (2007) 'Looking for a better future: identity construction in socio-economically deprived 16-year olds considering a career in medicine', *Social Science & Medicine*, 65(4), 738-754.
- Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell.
- Robson, S. (2011) 'Producing and using video data with young children: a case study of

- ethical questions and practical consequences’ in Harcourt, D., Perry, B. and Waller, T., eds., *Researching Young Children’s Perspectives Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*, London: Routledge, 178-192.
- Rosen, J., Glennie, E., Dalton, B., Lennon, J. and Bozick, R.N. (2010) *Non-cognitive skills in the classroom: New perspectives on educational research*, Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI Press.
- Rubin, B. C. (2007) ‘Learner identity amid figured worlds: constructing (in)competence at an urban high school’, *The Urban Review*, 39(2), 217–249.
- Rudd, L. L. (2012) ‘Just “slammin!” adolescents’ construction of identity through performance poetry’, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 55(8), 682–691.
- Rudduck, J. and Fielding, M. (2006) ‘Student Voice and the Perils of Popularity’, *Educational Review*, 58(2), 219-231.
- Rudduck, J. and Flutter, J. (2004) *How to improve your school: Giving pupils a voice*, London: Continuum.
- Rudduck, J., Chaplain, R. and Wallace, G. (1996) *School improvement: What can pupils tell us?*, London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.
- Ryan, R. M. and Deci, E. L. (2000) ‘Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions’, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- Sadler, D.R. (1989) ‘Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems’, *Instructional science*, 18(2), 119-144.
- Sadler, R (2002) ‘Learning Dispositions: Can we really assess them?’, *Assessment in*

Education: Principles, Policy and Practice, 9(1), 45-51.

Salmela-Aro, K. (2009) *Personal goals and well-being during critical life transitions: The four C's—Channelling, choice, co-agency and compensation*, Paris: OECD.

Salmela-Aro, K. (2017) “Co-agency in the context of the life span model of motivation” section of *Education 2030 - Conceptual learning framework: Background papers*, Paris: OECD.

Sarup, M. (1996) *Identity, Culture, and the Postmodern World*, Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Schoon, I. (2017) *Conceptualising Learner Agency: A Socio- Ecological Developmental Approach*, Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, London: LLAKES Centre.

Schunk, D. H. (1995) ‘Self-efficacy and education and instruction’, in Maddux, J.E., ed., *Self-efficacy, adaptation, and adjustment: Theory, research, and application*, New York: Plenum, 281-303.

Schunk, D. H. and Cox, P. D. (1986) ‘Strategy training and attributional feedback with learning disabled students’, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 78(3), 201.

Schunk, D. H. and Zimmerman, B. J. (1994) *Self-regulation of learning and performance*, Hillsdale, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Shanahan, C. and Shanahan, T. (2014) ‘Literacy Research and Classroom Instruction column: Does disciplinary literacy have a place in elementary school?’, *The Reading Teacher*, 67, 636-639.

- Shanahan, T. (2019) *Disciplinary Literacy in the Primary School*, Dublin: NCCA.
- Shanahan, T. and Shanahan, C. (2008) 'Teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents: Rethinking content-area literacy', *Harvard Education Review*, 78(1), 40-59.
- Shanahan, T. and Shanahan, C. (2012) 'What is disciplinary literacy and why does it matter?', *Topics in Language Disorders*, 32, 1-12.
- Simmons, C., Graham, A. and Thomas, N. (2015) 'Imagining an ideal school for wellbeing: Locating student voice', *Journal of Educational Change*, 16, 129–144.
- Solomon, Y. (2007) 'Experiencing mathematics classes: ability grouping, gender and the selective development of participative identities', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 46(1–2), 8–12.
- Solomontos-Kountouri, O. and Hurry, J. (2008) 'Political, religious and occupational identities in context: placing identity status paradigm in context', *Journal of Adolescence*, 31(2), 241–258.
- Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An introduction to curriculum research and development*, London: Heinemann.
- Stiggins, R. J. (2001) *Student-involved classroom assessment*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Strange, V., Forest, S., Oakley, A. and the Ripple Study Team (2003) 'Using research questionnaires with young people in schools: the influence of social context', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(4), 337-46.
- Strauss, A. (1987) *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*, Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press.

Talreja, V. (2017) “*Learner Agency: The Impact of Adversity*” section of *Education 2030 - Conceptual learning framework: Background papers*, Paris: OECD.

Teddlie, C. and Yu, F. (2007) ‘Mixed methods sampling: a typology with examples’, *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77-100.

Thomas, D. and Brown, J.S. (2009) ‘Learning for a World of Constant Change: Homo Sapiens, Homo Faber & Homo Ludens Revisited’, presented at *University Research for Innovation: Proc. 7th Glion Colloquium*.

Tuckett, A. G. (2005) ‘Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: A researcher's experience’, *Contemporary Nurse*, 19(1-2), 75-87.

United Nations (1992) *United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child*, available:

https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions_reports/files/UNCRCE_english_0.pdf [accessed 3 Nov 2019].

Van Esch, P. and Van Esch, L. (2013) ‘Justification of a qualitative methodology to investigate the emerging concept: The dimensions of religion as underpinning constructs for mass media social marketing campaigns’, *Journal of Business Theory and Practice*, 1(2), 214-243.

Veal, A. J. (2005) *Business Research Methods: A Managerial Approach*, 2nd ed., Frenchs Forest, Australia: Pearson Education.

Verhoeven, M., Poorthuis, A.M. and Volman, M. (2019) ‘The role of school in adolescents’ identity development. A literature review’, *Educational Psychology Review*, 31(1), 35-63.

- Volman, M. and Ten Dam, G. (2007) 'Learning and the development of social identities in the subjects care and technology', *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 845–866.
- Vygotsky, L. (1962) *Thought and language*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitebread, D. (2012) *Developmental psychology and early childhood education*, London: SAGE.
- Whitebread, D. (2013) 'Self-regulation in young children: Its characteristics and the role of communication and language in its early development' in Whitebread, D., Mercer, N., Howe, C. and Tolmie, A., eds., *Self-regulation and dialogue in primary classrooms. British journal of educational psychology monograph series II: Psychological aspects of education-current trends*, Leicester: British Psychological Society, 35-44.
- Whitebread, D., Bingham, S., Grau, V., Pino-Pasternak, D. and Sangster, C. (2007) 'Development of metacognition and self-regulation in young children: the role of collaborative and peer assisted learning', *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 6(3), 433-455.
- Wilson, N. and McLean, S. (1994) *Questionnaire Design: A Practical Introduction*, Newtown Abbey, Co. Antrim: University of Ulster Press.

Wirth, K.R. and Perkins, D. (2008) *Learning to learn*, Malcaester College, available:

<https://www.macalester.edu/academics/geology/wirth/learning.pdf> [accessed 20 Feb 2018].

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Preliminary Inquiry to the Principal



Department of Educational Psychology,
Inclusive and Special Education
Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road
Limerick
//20

Principal
School
Street
County

Dear Principal,

My name is Fiona Brennan I am a postgraduate student currently completing an MA in Education by Research at Mary Immaculate College under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Parkinson. I wish to apply for permission to conduct research in your school with pupils in 5th/ 6th Class.

The title of my research project is *'Listening to the Learner: An Exploration of Primary School Children's Learner Identity.'* As part of my thesis, I am exploring children's awareness and understanding of aspects of learning that make up their learner identity. These include learner responsibility, efficacy, motivation, strategies and skills.

In order to explore children's current level of understanding and awareness about their learner identity, I will need approximately thirty pupils in 5th/ 6th Class to complete a questionnaire containing open-ended and multiple-choice questions relating to learner attitudes, beliefs, strategies and skills. Following administration of the survey, I will need approximately six pupils to partake in a follow-up interview with the researcher to further explore the topics presented in the survey. The interviews will be taped for research purposes only. This will enable me as researcher to transcribe the interview and analyse the data.

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants in my research will:

- enhance teachers' understanding of how children can explore and develop their identities as learners
- enable students to reflect on the process of learning and to construct a richer view of themselves as learners

If you have any questions or need further information regarding the study, please feel free to get in touch with me via the contact details stated above. Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. I will forward to hearing a positive response from you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,
Fiona Brennan

Appendix B: Parental/ Guardian Information Sheet

Listening to the Learner: An Exploration of Primary School Children's Learner Identity

What is the project about?

Previous methods of teaching and learning have focused generally on providing pupils with information and measuring their intelligence with little consideration given to exploring how children learn. 'Learner Identity' is a new approach that attempts to fill this gap by considering the child's abilities, motivation and attitudes to learning and by exploring how these can be cultivated and improved. Learner Identity moves beyond the mere testing of knowledge and seeks to identify and develop the personal qualities that will help children cope better with the educational challenges that an ever-changing world presents.

However, as the elements that make up an individual's learner identity are only now emerging, this research aims to:

- examine children's understanding of learning
- explore children's awareness of their learner identity
- identify the factors which children attribute to the development of their learner identity

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Fiona Brennan I am a postgraduate student currently completing an MA in Education by Research at Mary Immaculate College under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Parkinson. This current study will form part of my thesis.

Why is it being undertaken?

The purpose of the study is to explore children's awareness of the process of becoming and being a learner, to identify the elements which children attribute to the construction of their learner identity and to encourage pupils to reflect on the process of learning.

What are the benefits of this research?

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will (a) enhance teachers' understanding of how children can explore and develop their identity as learners, (b) enable students to reflect on the process of learning and to construct a richer view of themselves as learners and (c) create a new awareness among policy-makers of how children learn and of the value of considering the learners' beliefs, attitudes, strengths and skills throughout the educative process.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)

The study will involve a short questionnaire and will take approximately thirty minutes to administer. It will take place during school time. Your child will be invited to respond to questions relating to aspects of learning including learner responsibility, motivation and learning strategies. Some participants will be invited to partake in an optional follow up interview to further discuss the items presented in the survey. The interview will be taped for research purposes only. This will enable the researcher to transcribe the interview and analyse the data. All audio data will be anonymised and will be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Right to withdraw

Your child's anonymity is assured and your child is free to withdraw from the experiment at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

Your child's data will be combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of the report. Summary data only will appear in the report and individual participant data will not be shown.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random identity number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than your child's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.

What will happen to the data after research has been completed?

In accordance with MIC Data Retention Policy, anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Contact details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study my contact details are as follows:

Fiona Brennan, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Email: fiona.brennan@mic.ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact my research supervisor, you may contact:

Dr. Suzanne Parkinson, Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204958 / E-mail: suzanne.parkinson@mic.ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent individual, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator, Research and Graduate School, Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Road, Limerick, Telephone: 061-204980 / E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Appendix C: Parental/ Guardian Informed Consent Form

Listening to the Learner: An Exploration of Primary School Children’s Learner Identity

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As outlined in the **parental/ guardian information sheet**, the current study will examine children’s understanding of the process of becoming and being a learner and the factors which they attribute to the development of their learner identity.

Details of your child’s participation in the study are contained in the **parental/ guardian information sheet**. The parental/ guardian information should be read fully and carefully before consenting for your child to take part in the study.

Your child’s anonymity is assured and he/ she will be free to withdraw from the study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with MIC Data Retention Policy, anonymised data may be retained indefinitely as required by the researcher.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the **parental/ guardian information sheet**.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of **all** of the procedures involving my child and of any **risks and benefits** associated with the study.
- I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that he/ she can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that my child’s results will be kept confidential.
- I am aware that part of this study involves the use of audio recordings for research purposes. Only the researcher will have access to this data and it will not be shared with any third party. Neither my child’s name nor any identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or the transcript.

○ I agree to audio taping

○ I DO NOT agree to audio taping

Name (PRINTED): _____

Name (Signature): _____

Date: _____



Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Learner Identity

I have designed a survey for my college work. It's like a project you might do in school. I am doing this project to find out some of the best ways to help boys and girls like you to learn in school. So, if you agree, I would like you to answer some questions about how you think or act in school. This project will help teachers discover the best ways to teach boys and girls.

All of the children in your class who agree to help out will fill in the survey at the same time. The survey is not like a test - there are no right or wrong answers. It will take about thirty minutes to read and answer the questions. If you need extra time to fill it in, that's okay. After the survey, I might invite a few children in your class to have a short chat with me about the questions on the survey. I will need to tape this chat to make sure I can remember everything you might say.

If you don't want to talk about the questions on the survey that's okay. If, when you are reading and answering the questions, you want to stop that's okay and you don't have to say why you want to stop. If you don't want to answer some of the questions that's no problem.

The answers you fill in on the survey will only be seen by me. I will not let anyone else see your answers because that is our College rule.

When people want to find out some things about the survey I might talk about some of the ways you like to learn or things you are good at doing in school. But I won't use your name so people won't know who you are.

If you have any worries after filling in your answers on your survey you can come to talk to me, your teacher or your parents/guardians.



Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent Form

Learner Identity

My name is _____.

- I am going to do an activity that involves reading and answering about how I learn in school.
- I know that I don't have to do the activity if I don't want to.
- I know that whenever I feel like stopping that's okay, I won't get into trouble and I don't have to say why I feel like stopping.
- I know this isn't a test and that there are no right or wrong answers.
- I know that if I have a chat about the survey it will be taped so they don't forget anything I say.

• I would be happy to chat about the questions on the survey

• I would NOT be happy to chat about the questions on the survey

Appendix F: Pupil Questionnaire

Identity Code: _____

Age: _____

Gender: Boy Girl

This survey invites you to read and answer questions about how you learn in school. There are four parts to the survey. Each part has a different focus. Please read the description of each section before answering the questions. Remember - there are no right or wrong answers to the questions!

PART 1: WHAT 'LEARNING' MEANS TO ME

The word 'learning' can mean different things to different people. Think about what the word 'learning' means to you and answer the following:

1. What words come into your mind when you think about the word 'learning'?

2. How would you describe someone who is an effective learner?

3. What skills do you need to be effective at learning in school?

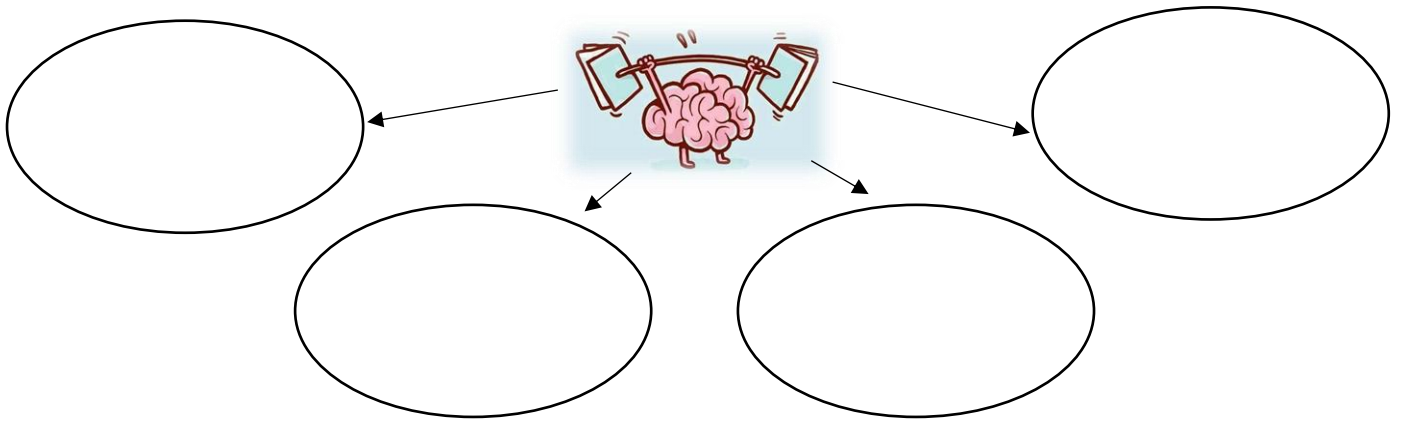
PART 2: MYSELF AS A LEARNER

Being a learner involves more than test results and grades. It also includes important things such as your strengths, talents, attitudes and beliefs. Part 2 focuses on some of these important parts of learning.

1. How would you describe yourself as a learner in school?

2. If your teachers described you, what do you think they would they say?

3. What are your strengths or talents at school?



a. How do you know that you are good at these?

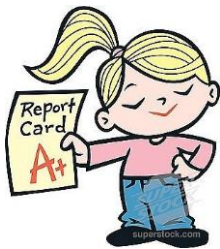
4. What do you find difficult in school?

a. Why do you find this difficult?

PART 3: MY THOUGHTS ABOUT MY LEARNING

Our thoughts and feelings about our learning can be changed by different people and experiences in our lives. Some people or experiences can make us feel positive about our learning while others can make us feel negative about our learning. Part 3 focuses on the most important people and experiences in our learning journey so far.

1. Who inspires you most to do your best at school?



2. How do you find out about how you are getting on in school?

3. When I am praised by my teacher, I feel ...

4. Who do you think should make decisions about what you learn?

a. Why should they make decisions?

PART 4: SHARING MY OPINION

'Pupil Voice' means that pupils make decisions or have their say about their learning in school. Pupils might share ideas with their teachers or principal about what topics they are interested in learning about, what types of projects they might like to do or what strategies they find useful. This might be something you are used to doing or it might be a very new idea for you. Part 4 focuses on how you feel about sharing your opinions about learning with teachers.



1. Does your opinion matter in learning? Why?

2. List different ways that pupils can share their opinions about learning in school.

3. What might make it easier for pupils to give their opinion?

4. Pupils should be given a chance to have their say in school because ...

A final thought ...

What type of learner would you like to be in five years?



Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix G: Pupil Interview Starter Questions

- When you think about the word *learning*, what words come to mind?
- How would you describe someone who is an effective learner?
- How do you think your teacher would describe an effective learner?
- What skills do you need to be effective at learning in school?
- Does your opinion matter in learning? Why?
- How pupils can share their opinions about learning in school?
- Why might some pupils find it difficult to give their opinion?
- Why should pupils be given a chance to have their say in school?
- How would you describe yourself as a learner in school?
- If your friends in school described you, what do you think they would they say?
- If your teachers described you, what do you think they would they say?
- What are your strengths or talents at school? How do you know that you are good at these things?
- What do you find difficult in school? Why do you think you find this difficult?
- How do you feel when you make a mistake?
- Do you prefer when things are easy or hard to learn?
- Which is more important – intelligence or effort?
- Who inspires you most to do your best at school?
- How do you feel when you are praised by your teacher?
- How might you feel if you were not praised for something you did well?
- How do you find out about how you are getting on in school?
- Do you ever set learning targets for yourself? How do you know if you have reached your targets?
- Do your classmates influence how you feel about yourself as a learner?
- Who do you think should make decisions about what you learn?
- What type of learner would you like to be in five years?
- What do you think are the most important things that you should learn in school to prepare you for the future?