

Early Literacy in all-Irish
Immersion Primary Schools:
A micro-ethnographic case study
of storybook reading events
in Irish and English

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Seán Ó Cathalláin

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Abstract

This thesis examines ways in which literacy practices are shaped by local norms in all-Irish immersion schools, as evidenced in storybook reading events in Irish and English. Within a sociocultural framing, the thesis takes as presuppositions that (i) reading is not a set of autonomous, transferable skills but is embedded in social settings; (ii) contexts and literacy practices co-emerge; (iii) children learn ways of being readers through participation in classroom literacy events; and (iv) language, literacy, and identity are inextricably linked in all-Irish immersion programmes. In a classroom the teacher and pupils co-construct their own particular models, understandings, and definitions of literacy through their actions and the events they engage in. In the present study literacy is theorized as a performative accomplishment co-constructed by the participants in the event including those not directly present such as authors and illustrators. A micro-ethnographic case study approach was used to examine literacy practices in infant classes in all-Irish schools. Taking a phenomenological approach data were gathered using video-recording, observation, and pupil and teacher interviews and data were analysed using inductive analysis and interpretive discourse analysis. Key findings from the study are that (1) local norms, filtered through teachers' intentions and motivations, shaped the storybook reading events; (2) classroom literacy practices constructed during the Irish events were being transferred to the English events; and (3) children selected from their first and second language linguistic resources during storybook reading events to support their reading development. These three processes together were part of how children negotiated their socially situated identities as bilinguals and as bilingual readers. Parental support for speaking Irish as well as social proximity to the Gaeltacht community, were factors closely associated with positive attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in Irish. One implication of the findings is that teachers in all-Irish schools will need to make explicit their views of knowledge and of what it means to be a reader in an all-Irish school as they consider young children's agency in constructing their interpretations of texts.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to Study

Irish-medium education has been a key feature of the education system in the Republic of Ireland since the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922. One of the key policy initiatives of successive governments in the early years was the promotion of Irish-medium education wherever there were teachers competent and qualified to teach through the medium of Irish. The result has been a long tradition of Irish-medium education in the Republic of Ireland. There have been periods of growth and decline in the number of all-Irish schools¹ over the years. However, the past 35 years have witnessed a period of sustained growth in the number of all-Irish schools mainly in response to parental demand rather than through state initiative.

In all-Irish schools all subjects apart from English are taught through the medium of Irish. Because Irish is the language children use to access the full curriculum, literacy in Irish, the children's second language (L2), is fundamental to children's success in school. Literacy in English, their first language (L1), is fundamental to children's participation in the wider society. In the 1988 National Assessment of English Reading, the difference in the mean score for fifth-class pupils in a standardised test of reading achievement between pupils in ordinary schools² and pupils in all-Irish schools was statistically significant, in favour of the latter (Department of Education, 1991). Research by Harris *et al.* (2006) revealed that sixth-class pupils in all-Irish schools achieved a significantly higher score than their counterparts in Gaeltacht schools³ and ordinary schools in measures of reading achievement in Irish. A study of second-class and fifth-class pupils attending all-Irish

¹ The term 'all-Irish schools' is used throughout the report to refer to schools outside the Gaeltacht where Irish is the medium of instruction. All subjects apart from English are taught through the medium of Irish.

² 'Ordinary schools' are schools located outside the Gaeltacht and English is the medium of instruction for all subjects apart from Irish.

³ 'Gaeltacht schools' are schools located within the Gaeltacht where Irish is the community language. Usually all subjects except English are taught through the medium of Irish. These three terms have been in common usage in Ireland since the 1970s to denote the three different school types.

schools found that their scores on standardized English reading tests were significantly above the national average (Ó hAiniféin, 2007). Very recently Shiel *et al.* (2011) have reported that the English reading mean scores achieved in 2010 by pupils in Second and Sixth classes in all-Irish schools were significantly higher than the corresponding mean scores achieved by pupils in 2009 in the national assessments involving nationally representative samples of schools and pupils. While such research results are encouraging for parents, pupils and teachers very little is known about classroom literacy practices in all-Irish schools and their impact on pupils' ways of taking from texts and pupils' attitudes to reading.

Much research has demonstrated that children learn ways of taking from texts through participation in literacy events under the guidance of more literate members of the reading community (Bloome, 1992/1994; Bloome *et al.*, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Gee, 2001b; Gregory *et al.*, 2004; Hall, 2003; Heath, 1982, 1983; Kenner, 2000; Putney, 1996; Teale, 1984). In literacy events, participation structures become routinized and habitualized through repetition (Bloome *et al.*, 2005; Bloome *et al.*, 2008). Many studies of bilingual education and second language and literacy acquisition focus on technical questions about the correct input to produce desired outputs and ignore the important social processes at work. Few studies have attempted to connect the growing literature on literacy and identity to issues of language and literacy acquisition in bilingual contexts (Bartlett, 2007). The current small-scale study aims to address these lacunae in the context of all-Irish immersion primary schools.

1.2 Focus and Objectives of Study

Vygotskian sociocultural theories of learning have influenced my understanding of literacy development and my research approach. Key constructs informing the research

include literacy practices and literacy events. A classroom literacy practice may be defined as ‘a cultural practice involving the use of written language associated with “doing classroom life”’ (Bloome *et al.* 2005: 50) (emphasis in the original). Literacy practices are not static or bounded temporally or spatially, and they encompass knowledge, feelings, embodied social purposes, values, and capabilities that are utilised during the literacy event (Mannion and Ivanič, 2007). A literacy event is an event ‘in which written language plays a nontrivial role’ (Bloome *et al.* 2005: 5). Literacy events can be experienced differently by the participants depending on their previous experiences and the nature of the event (Goodman *et al.*, 2006). In the present study, literacy is theorized as a performative accomplishment co-constructed by the participants in the event including those not directly present such as authors and illustrators. Literacy is not viewed as a set of individual skills but as emergent and situated in specific contexts (Barton *et al.*, 2000).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that children in all-Irish schools are reluctant readers in L2, particularly as a leisure pursuit. Having taught in an all-Irish school and working in initial teacher education I was aware of the anecdotal evidence. I became interested in learning more about the ways of being readers children experience in all-Irish school immersion contexts given that most of their reading in L2 occurs in school. The overall aim of the study was to examine all-Irish infant classroom literacy practices in L1 and L2, as evidenced in classroom literacy events with a view to informing theory and practice.

At the beginning of the study when I commenced observations in 2004 the children in the Junior Infant classes (Class A and Class B1) were five years old. These children would have been five to six years old when I video recorded the storybook reading events in June 2005. And they would have been eight to nine years old when I interviewed them in June 2008. The children in Senior Infants (Class B2) were six years old when I began observations in 2004. These children would have been six to seven years old in June 2005

when I video recorded the storybook reading events and they would have been nine to ten years old in June 2008 when I interviewed them.

1.3 Outline of Study

The dissertation is set out in five chapters. In the next section of Chapter 1, the main characteristics of immersion education as they pertain to all-Irish schools are outlined, including the schools in the current study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the broad sociolinguistic context of the study including a discussion of varieties of spoken Irish, use of and attitudes to Irish among the general population, and the role of the Irish language in the education system, with particular emphasis on Irish-medium education. A more detailed discussion of the sociolinguistic context of the study is included in Appendix 1.

The field of literacy research is wide-ranging and quite diverse and it is beyond the scope of the present study to review all of the literature. The literature review in Chapter 2 reflects the evolving nature of the current study. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the psycholinguistic paradigm of reading followed by a more comprehensive review of cognitive-psychological perspectives on reading. Sociocultural perspectives on learning, language learning, reading development, and identity are also discussed because language, reading, and identity are inextricably linked. The main source of data for the present study was storybook reading events. Therefore, I have included a review of the literature on storybook reading in L1 and L2.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology. A micro-ethnographic approach informed by the principles of ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) and grounded in pupils' and teachers' experiences and accounts was favoured. The research approach was qualitative in nature and aimed to produce "thick descriptions" (Denzin and Lincoln

1994) in order to illuminate the context in which literacy events are co-constructed. As the study progressed it became more important that teachers' and pupils' voices would be heard so the teachers and pupils came to be considered more as research participants than research subjects.

In Chapter 4 data from six literacy events as well as data from teacher interviews are presented. The data presentation is interspersed with interpretive analysis drawing on Gee's (2005) approach to discourse analysis. Data from pupil interviews are also presented and analysed. In the concluding chapter the main findings from the study are discussed along with implications for pedagogy, research, and theory.

1.4 Key Features of Immersion Programmes in Ireland

In the majority of cases L2 immersion has a powerful underlying sociocultural rationale that fuels it and creates the commitment to it (Johnstone, 2002). For example, immersion education in Ireland is seen as a major contributory factor to language revitalization (Harris *et al.* 2006). The core features of all-Irish schools parallel those of prototypical immersion programmes, as identified by Swain and Johnson (1997).

1. Children are taught through the medium of their second language, Irish.
2. The immersion curriculum parallels the national curriculum.
3. Overt support for English (L1) is an integral component of the curriculum.
4. All-Irish schools promote additive bilingualism.
5. Exposure to Irish is confined mainly to the classroom.
6. The vast majority of children entering all-Irish schools are monolingual English speakers.
7. Teachers are fluent in both languages.
8. The school culture reflects the culture of the local community and the wider Irish society.

The sociolinguistic background of children attending all-Irish schools is similar in many respects to that of French immersion students in Canada or to Gaelic immersion students in Scotland.

1.5 Sociolinguistic Context of Study

1.5.1 The Irish Language

Irish has been spoken in Ireland for over two millennia (Romaine 2008). It is a Celtic language and can be traced back to the Indo-European family of languages (Katzner 2002; Ó hUiginn 2008). Irish underwent many changes down through the centuries and many attempts were made to standardize the literary language. Much progress was made during the twentieth century with the publication of a standard spelling in 1947 and a volume combining regulations on grammar and spelling in 1958 (Mac Mathúna 2008; Ó Cuív 1969). The standardization of the spoken language has proven much more elusive (Mac Mathúna, 2008; Ó Baoill, 1999). While a number of varieties of spoken Irish are in use today, there are three main dialects used in the three largest Gaeltacht areas in Munster, Connacht and Co. Donegal.

Mac Mathúna (2008) gives some interesting insights into how spoken Irish in the Gaeltacht is evolving, in particular as a result of increasing lexical pressure from English. He also notes the varieties of Irish spoken outside the Gaeltacht including the reasonably fluent but grammatically incorrect variety spoken by pupils in *gaelscoileanna*⁴ (all-Irish schools). This variety of Irish is heavily influenced by English syntax and has disapprovingly been labelled *Gaelscoilis* (Mac Mathúna 2008; Nic Pháidín, 2003). However, Mac Mathúna (2008) suggests that there is more to this speech variety than failure to achieve a common goal. Because most second language learners of Irish residing outside the Gaeltacht speak almost exclusively with other second language learners, he questions what the ideal language form should be. Ó Baoill (1999) suggests that the growth of all-Irish schools and the evolution of the language variety spoken in these schools may pose difficulties for the long-term integrity of the language itself.

⁴ The term *gaelscoileanna* is also used to denote all-Irish schools.

1.5.2 Use of Irish among the General Population in Ireland

Hindley (1990) suggests that Irish was probably being used in native homes up to 1750 except in a very small number of towns and Irish was still the spoken language of almost all of the native population around 1800. Many commentators agree that the exclusively English-medium national school system established in 1831 as well as the Great Famine of 1845-1849 contributed to the decline of a language that became associated with poverty, low social status and illiteracy (Ó Buachalla, 1988; Ó hUiginn, 2008; Ó Tuathaigh, 2008).

Today the use of Irish as a first language continues to decline while the number of secondary bilinguals is growing slowly, particularly in the Dublin area (Ó Baoill, 1999; Punch, 2008; Romaine, 2008). Overall, a very small percentage of the population uses Irish on a regular basis outside the school system, and an even smaller ratio reads in Irish regularly (Murtagh, 2003). Irish does not prevail as the normal community language in any town in Ireland (Hindley 1990). Table 1.1 shows the number of Irish-speakers and daily Irish-speakers as recorded in the 2002 and 2006 Censuses of Population.

Table 1.1 Irish speakers and daily Irish speakers recorded in the 2002 and 2006 Censuses of Population

	2002			2006		
	National total	Gaeltacht	Elsewhere	National total	Gaeltacht	Elsewhere
Total population	3,917,203	86,517	3,830,686	4,239,848	91,862	4,147,986
Irish speakers						
5-19	527,751	17,580	510,171	550,474	17,373	533,101
3-4 and 20+	1,043,143	44,577	998,566	1,106,316	46,892	1,059,424
Total	1,570,894	62,157	1,508,737	1,656,790	64,265	1,592,525
Percentage of total population	40.1%	71.8%	39.4%	39.1%	70%	38.4%
Daily speakers						
5-19	260,716	12,163	248,553	416,090	14,026	402,064
3-4 and 20+	78,825	21,626	57,199	109,265	22,471	86,794
Total	339,541	33,789	305,752	525,355	36,497	488,858
Daily speakers as percentage of Irish speakers	21.6%	54.4%	20.3%	31.7%	56.8%	30.7%
Daily speakers as Percentage of total population	8.7%	39.1%	8%	12.4%	39.7%	11.8%

Sources: www.cso.ie (accessed Friday 26th June, 2009) and Punch 2008: 52

In general Irish people's attitudes to the language tend to be ambivalent. They value the language as part of their cultural heritage but feel it doesn't have any relevance for them in modern Ireland. People want Irish to be taught in schools and to be used by native speakers as a community language in the Gaeltacht but they are disinclined to make any personal investment or commitment to the language revival effort. Large numbers of the population claim to be able to speak the language but rarely or never use it (Ó Buachalla, 2008; Ó Riagáin, 2008). In the words of Kelly (2002: 13) 'this national cultural irony best underpins the complexity of identity in relation to language in Ireland'.

1.5.3 Irish in the Education System

1.5.3.1 Irish in the Education System from 1922 to 1970

On 1st February 1922 the new Free State government took over responsibility for the administration of national education. The First National Programme of Primary Instruction was introduced in 1922 and placed great emphasis on the teaching of Irish as a

school subject as well as promoting Irish as a medium of instruction. The many bilingual schools that existed were encouraged to make Irish the sole medium of instruction with English being taught as an ordinary subject. Reading in Irish was to be wide and varied covering all genres including poetry and drama (Hyland and Milne 1992). The programme for infants was to be entirely in Irish. The main aim of this movement to teach infant and primary school classes through the medium of Irish was the revival of the language as a spoken language among Irish people.

Modifications were made to the programme in 1926 and again in 1934. But despite the concerns voiced by parents, some politicians and teachers regarding the unsuitability of Irish-medium education for children who spoke English at home, successive governments pursued the language revival policy through the school system in a vigorous, rigid and unyielding fashion (Ó Buachalla, 1988). By the late 1930's the number of all-Irish primary schools in English-speaking areas had reached a peak of almost 300.

In January 1960 a circular (Circular 11/60) was issued to schools informing teachers that they were at liberty to change the emphasis from teaching through the medium of Irish to the teaching of Irish Conversation, if they thought that their pupils were more likely to make more progress in oral Irish as a result. Circular 11/60 marked a major change in relation to the development of Irish-medium education at primary level. Heretofore the Department of Education had pursued a policy of facilitating ordinary schools to make the transition to Irish-medium education as a central part of the state's overall language revival policy. This policy had very limited success in producing competent secondary bilinguals. From 1960 on Irish-medium education would be supported by the state where there was a demand for it from community groups, but it would no longer be pursued vigorously as a state education policy. So the top-down, proactive, compulsory approach to Irish-medium education pursued by the State for almost

forty years was being replaced by a more benign reactive policy of supporting bottom-up, voluntary initiatives. This was in line with how state policy towards the Irish language developed from being proactive to being responsive focusing more on maintenance and less on revival (Ó Riagáin, 2008; Ó Tuathaigh, 2008). From a peak of almost 300 in the late 1930's the number of all-Irish schools fell to a low of 11 in 1972.

1.5.3.2 Irish in the Education System since the early 1970s

A 'New Curriculum' for primary schools was introduced in 1971 espousing a child-centred ideology. With this curriculum the time allotted to teaching Irish decreased and many teachers are of the opinion that standards in Irish have declined as a result (Coolahan 1981). Support for Irish-medium education was reiterated in a number of policy documents published during the 1980s and 1990s including The White Paper on Educational Development (1980). In these policy documents it was proposed to expand the number of all-Irish schools and to support ordinary schools to deliver part of the curriculum through Irish. It was also proposed to strengthen the place of Irish in the Colleges of Education to ensure enough teachers were competent to teach Irish and to teach through the medium of Irish.

More recent recommendations for Irish-medium education policy have emanated from robust, scientific research. For example, Harris and Murtagh (1999) and Harris *et al.* (2006) recommend the development of partial and intermediate immersion programmes for ordinary schools. A similar recommendation is made by the Department of Education and Science Inspectorate in the report *Irish in the Primary School* (Department of Education and Science 2007). The Council of Europe/DES Language Education Policy Profile 2005 – 2007 suggests a number of useful and creative ways in which this policy might be realised

based on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that break with the traditional approaches applied heretofore.

Under the 1998 Education Act schools have a statutory obligation to use available resources to promote the development of the Irish language as a means of contributing to the realisation of a national policy of extending bilingualism in Irish society and to promote greater use of Irish in schools and in the community. Schools located in the Gaeltacht are obliged to ‘contribute to the maintenance of Irish as the primary community language’ (Education Act 1998: 13). Support for the teaching of Irish and for teaching through the medium of Irish, both within and without the Gaeltacht, through the provision of textbooks and aids, and through conducting research are also enshrined in the act. *An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta* (COGG) was established in 2002 to carry out these functions in accordance with Article 31 of the Education Act (1998).

The growth of all-Irish schools since 1972 indicates a considerable amount of state support for access to Irish-medium education. For example, the organisation *Gaelscoileanna Teo.* was established in 1973 to support the development of all-Irish schools and is state funded through *Foras na Gaeilge*. Its principal aim is ‘to develop, facilitate and encourage Irish-medium education at the primary and post-primary level throughout the country’ (www.gaelscoileannateo.ie, accessed 03/09/2011). Latest statistics from *Gaelscoileanna Teo.* indicate that currently there are 139 all-Irish primary schools outside the Gaeltacht in the Republic of Ireland.

A revised Primary School Curriculum was published in 1999. Here a communicative approach to the teaching of Irish is outlined in two documents (*Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge* and *Gaeilge: Treoirínite do Mhúinteoirí*). The first of these documents specifies two distinct Irish curricula, one for ordinary schools and one for all-

Irish and Gaeltacht schools. This was a welcome improvement on the 1971 curriculum. To support the implementation of the Irish-language curriculum in all-Irish schools and Gaeltacht schools a scheme (*Scéim na nDearthóirí*) was initiated to develop an integrated approach to the teaching of the four macro-skills of language appropriate for the circumstances that obtain in these schools. So far this scheme has been warmly received by teachers.

In 2007 the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, issued a circular (Circular 0044/2007) to all-Irish and Gaeltacht primary schools directing them to provide a minimum of 2.5 hours instruction per week in English, in accordance with the Primary School Curriculum (1999), such provision to be introduced no later than the start of second term in Junior Infants. Effectively this put an end to early total immersion in all-Irish schools. *Gaelscoileanna Teo.* vehemently opposed the DES policy favouring the early total immersion model instead. The circular was subsequently withdrawn by the minister's successor, Minister Batt O'Keeffe, a member of the same government, indicating a lack of coherence in state policy.

So, with the foundation of the state in 1922 the national school system became the main instrument of language revival. However, the policy of pursuing compulsory Irish-medium education was abandoned in 1960. The compulsory element of teaching and learning Irish has had minimal success in producing secondary bilinguals and induced negative attitudes towards Irish and towards the learning of Irish among a large percentage of the population. State policy continues to support the development of Irish-medium education where a demand for such exists.

The foregoing discussion outlines the cultural, socio-historical, sociolinguistic macro-context of the current study. The children who participated in the study are learning

to speak and read in a language that is of huge cultural and symbolic value to the nation but of very limited practical use outside the school system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter outlines the theoretical framework which has framed the study. The participating children were learning to read in Irish (L2) first, with formal reading in English (L1) delayed until the second term of their second year in school. Classroom observations revealed that teachers' approaches to reading instruction in L2 were consistent with L1 theoretical models of reading. This is not surprising given the lack of a comprehensive theory of L2 reading development (Geva *et al.*, 1997). The present study is concerned mainly with ways of being a reader and what it means to be a reader in an all-Irish school. Therefore, I am foregrounding the sociocultural dimension of literacy development. However, because the young participating children were in the very early stages of reading development a brief overview of research on the cognitive processes of reading, including the psycholinguistic and cognitive-psychological models of reading is also included. A more extended discussion of this research is included in Appendix 2. The extended discussion in the appendix also includes a review of research into cognitive reading processes in bilinguals as well as a discussion of research results on literacy development in immersion programmes, including all-Irish immersion schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Three theoretical positions are important to the present study. Firstly, I view reading development as a social process. A sociocultural view of reading development is grounded in Vygotsky's socio-historical approach to human development. Therefore, the review includes a discussion of Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian perspectives on reading development. Secondly, as Goodman (1992), who embraces Vygotskian social learning theories suggests, the theories of literacy development we espouse should be consistent with our theories of language learning and with more general theories of learning. For this

reason brief overviews of sociocultural theories of learning and language learning have been included. Thirdly, I take the view that reading development, language learning, and identity formation are inextricably linked in all-Irish immersion programmes. Therefore, some theoretical perspectives on identity formation are discussed.

Because the main data gathered for the study were video-recordings of storybook reading events in Irish and English a discussion of research results on storybook reading in L1 and L2 is included. One of the teachers read an Irish language version of the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel. Therefore, I have also included a section on the enchantment of fairy tales. The chapter summary synthesises the main themes which informed the current study.

2.2 Cognitive Reading Processes

2.2.1 A Psycholinguistic Perspective on Reading

Using miscue analysis as the basis for his research Goodman (1967: 127) characterised reading as ‘a psycholinguistic guessing game’ involving ‘an interaction between thought and language’. The reader is an active participant in the reading process and interacts with the text in various ways. Readers bring with them to the task the sum total of their experience, their language and their thought development (Goodman, 1967). When reading they use graphic, syntactic and semantic information in an integrated fashion (Goodman, 1967; Goodman and Goodman, 1977). A reader ‘predicts and anticipates on the basis of this information, sampling from the print just enough to confirm his guess of what’s coming, to cue more semantic and syntactic information’ (Goodman, 1967: 131).

Similar to Goodman’s characterisation of reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game, Smith (1971) suggested that readers made informed predictions about a text based on their syntactic and semantic knowledge. Children use non-visual as well as visual

information to identify words (Smith, 1978; 1983). Suggesting that visual information was of secondary importance, he claimed that ‘readers do not use (and do not need to use) the alphabetic principle or decoding to sound in order to learn to identify words’ (Smith, 1973: 105) (emphasis in the original). In fact, controversially, Smith (1983) proposed that learning to read means learning to use as little visual information as possible.

Psycholinguists rejected the behaviourist characterisation of reading as a ‘linear process of letter-by-letter deciphering, sounding out, word recognition and finally text comprehension’ insisting that reading was a constructivist problem-solving activity (Hall, 2003: 42-43). The psycholinguistic view of reading development is often referred to as a *top-down* model of reading. Such a view of reading assumes that dividing reading into subskills reduces clarity, meaning and simplicity and advocates that such skills be taught within a wider context of language development (Hall, 2003).

In North America this holistic approach to literacy development of helping children to activate syntactic and semantic knowledge as well as graphophonic knowledge, of integrating the four macro-skills of language, and of teaching skills in context on a need-to-know basis came to be known as *whole language*. The whole-language movement in England can be traced back to the ‘language experience’ approach (LEA) initiated by the Schools Council Initial Literacy Project (Hall, 2003). Instructional practices associated with whole-language include

- The use of children's literature and predictable books which have real, natural, meaningful language (Goodman, K., 1989, 1992; Goodman, Y., 1989; Moustafa 1993; Smith 1978; Watson 1989);
- Engaging children in authentic literacy events (Bergeron 1990; Goodman, K., 1989, 1992);

- Emphasis on comprehension and the construction of meaning during reading (Bergeron 1990; Goodman, 1992; Goodman and Goodman, 1977; Watson 1989);
- No teaching of subskills in isolation but in the context of authentic literacy events when the need arises (Cambourne and Turbill 1990; Goodman, K., 1989; Moustafa, 1993; Smith, 1978).

Perhaps the legacy of the psycholinguistic perspective is best summed up by Pearson and Stephens (1994) who identified four important influences of the psycholinguistic paradigm on the field of literacy. First, it raised our awareness of the value of literacy experiences that focus on meaning making. Second, it helped us value texts that are rich in natural language patterns and predictable text. Third, the psycholinguistic perspective gave us greater insight into the reading process. In analysing miscues, errors were seen as ‘generative rather than negative’ (Pearson and Stephens, 1994: 29). And fourth, psycholinguists gave us a theory of reading development (i.e. reading as a constructive process) that differed greatly from previous theories.

2.2.2 A Cognitive-Psychological Perspective on Reading

2.2.2.1 Introduction

First, three theoretical models of reading development are discussed briefly because these models have made important contributions to our understanding of the reading process and have had considerable influence on reading theory (Stanovich, 1992). Second, the influential work of Linnea Ehri on stage models of reading development is reviewed. Third, two aspects of children’s metalinguistic knowledge that are closely linked to reading development are discussed, namely the alphabetic principle and phonological awareness. Although these two components of reading will be looked at separately it must be noted that they are interdependent components in the reading process (Bialystok, 1997). Fourth, a

section on comprehension is included, as the ultimate goal of reading is to derive meaning from texts (Block and Pressley, 2007; Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006; Stanovich, 1992). Finally, the review concludes with a summary of the two contrasting perspectives on reading, namely the psycholinguistic perspective and the cognitive-psychological perspective.

2.2.2.2 Theoretical Models of Reading Development

Both Gough (1976) and LaBerge and Samuels (1976) developed information-processing models of reading. Gough's (1976) model is *bottom-up* where the reader reads letter by letter, word by word, left to right and 'the evident effects of higher levels of organization (like spelling patterns, pronounceability, and meaningfulness) on word recognition and speed of reading should be assigned to higher, and later, levels of processing' (Gough, 1976: 512-513) (emphasis in the original). Initially the beginning reader must learn to recognise the letters of the alphabet. This is a necessary but insufficient component of reading. Beginning readers must then learn to decode. And, because slow word identification impairs comprehension, beginning readers need to learn to identify words quickly in order to increase reading speed and thus improve comprehension.

Similar to Gough, LaBerge and Samuels (1976) also developed a bottom-up model of reading. They see reading acquisition as a series of skills, and at each stage of the reading process the reader must achieve both accuracy and automaticity. According to their model all readers must go through similar stages in learning to read but at different rates. Pedagogically they favour an approach which 'singles out these skills for testing and training and then attempts to sequence them in appropriate ways' (LaBerge and Samuels, 1976: 574).

In outlining his interactive model of reading Rumelhart (1994) criticises both the Gough (1976) model and the LaBerge and Samuels (1976) model because neither model can account for the interactive nature of the various sources of information including sensory, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information. According to Rumelhart, word perception is dependent on the syntactic and semantic environments in which the words are encountered. Processing of word pairs is much faster when the two words are semantically related thus revealing that processing at the semantic level can modify processing at the word level. Rumelhart (1994) also illustrates how the semantic context affects our apprehension of syntax, a factor that cannot be explained by bottom-up models of reading. And finally, the author demonstrates how the meaning of what we read is context-dependent.

2.2.2.3 Stage Models of Reading Development

Cognitive psychologists see reading development as progressing through stages. As they progress through the stages readers gain more knowledge about the orthographic system and consequently they develop more efficient ways of identifying words (Juel, 1995). Several stage models of reading have been proposed but I will focus on the influential work of Linnea Ehri on how children develop sight vocabulary, for two reasons. Firstly, the development of sight vocabulary is important because accurate and automatic word recognition is necessary to develop fluency in reading (Gaskins and Gaskins, 1997; Gough, 1976) and for comprehension (Durgunoğlu *et al.*, 1993; Gough, 1976). Secondly, Ehri's portrayal of learning to read as developing in four stages corresponds closely with the four stages in the development of speech and all other mental functions involving the use of signs, outlined by Vygotsky (1962).

Sight words are words that children come to read and understand automatically having encountered them several times previously, including words that are easy to decode as well as irregularly spelled words. Other means of reading including decoding and reading by analogy are also used by beginning readers. When reading a text some or all of these sources of information may be used to identify a word (Ehri, 1995). But ‘sight word reading is invoked the most because the process is fast and automatic’ (Ehri, 1995: 116). And sight words are read from memory, not by a process of decoding, because the words are familiar to the reader (Gaskins *et al.*, 1996/1997).

In outlining four phases of development in learning to read words by sight, Ehri (1995) suggested that a ‘connection-forming process’ is central to sight word learning. Readers connect the written representations of words with their pronunciations and meanings. They then store the acquired information in their lexicons. Different types of connections preponderate at different stages of development and Ehri (1995) has labelled these stages pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic.

During the *pre-alphabetic phase* beginning readers form connections between salient visual features in the written representations of words and their meanings or pronunciations. Readers are unaware of sound-symbol correspondences and are discovering the function of print, i.e. that it contains a message, before they discover its form.

In the *partial alphabetic phase* children develop increasing awareness of how some letters in written words correspond to pronunciations. They read words by focusing on the more salient grapheme-phoneme cues, usually initial and final letters. Ehri (1995: 119) labels this ‘phonetic cue reading’. Partial phase readers’ knowledge of the spelling system is incomplete. They are learning to segment initial and final sounds but have difficulty with vowels.

Readers in the *full alphabetic phase* now understand phoneme-grapheme correspondence. They can segment words into their constituent phonemes and they can blend the sounds to pronounce the words. Word reading now becomes much more accurate and rapid. Full phase readers can decode previously unseen words. However, the process of decoding is replaced by sight word reading for words that are read sufficiently often.

Readers who have reached the *consolidated alphabetic phase* can now read words by identifying multiletter units representing morphemes, syllables, or subsyllabic units such as onset and rime. Recurring letter patterns become consolidated and readers' print lexicons grow quickly. This lessens the memory load involved in storing words in memory and enables readers to read familiar words more quickly and more accurately. In general poor readers in the intermediate grades do not have good decoding or word recognition skills (Pearson, 1993). Therefore it is crucial that children get to the consolidated alphabetic phase and learn to read fluently if they are to become avid readers.

2.2.2.4 The Alphabetic Principle

Children need to learn the alphabetic principle, i.e. the symbolic relationship between letters and sounds in order to learn to read alphabetic languages such as English and Spanish (Adams, 1990; Ball and Blachman, 1991; Bialystok, 1997; Durgonuğlu, 1997; Ehri, 1987; Ehri *et al.*, 2001; Gough, 1976; LaBerge and Samuels, 1976; Perfetti, 1995; Stanovich, 1986). Such knowledge is important because it 'provides children with the foundation for beginning to process graphic cues in printed words' (Ehri, 1987: 13). Alphabetic knowledge is not acquired incidentally through exposure to letters but requires explicit instruction and practice (Ehri, 1987) and it is likely to be a slow learning process (Ehri, 1987; Ehri *et al.*, 2001; LaBerge and Samuels, 1976; Perfetti, 1995). Because the alphabetic principle is generative, when the child learns that spelling corresponds to sound,

this enables the self-teaching mechanism inherent in an alphabetic orthography, thus allowing the child to move towards independent reading (Stanovich, 1986; Stanovich and Stanovich, 1995). Interestingly, Bialystok (1997) found that 4-year-old bilingual children were more advanced than 5-year-old monolinguals in their understanding of the symbolic function of print.

2.2.2.5 Phonological Awareness

The importance of phonological awareness in learning to read an alphabetic language has been well established by research (Adams, 1990; Bentin *et al.*, 1991; Bialystok, 1997; Bryant and Bradley, 1985; Bryant *et al.*, 1990, Bruck and Genesee, 1995; Campbell and Sais, 1995; Durgonoğlu, 1997; Goswami, 2000; Goswami and Bryant, 1990; Maclean *et al.*, 1987; Perfetti, 1995; Stanovich, 1986, 1992; Stanovich and Stanovich, 1995). Phonological skill predicts early reading ability of words (Maclean *et al.*, 1987) and early training to develop sensitivity results in a significant increase in word recognition as well as spelling skills (Goswami, 2000; Stanovich, 1992). Both syllabic awareness and sensitivity to onset and rime contribute to success in both reading and spelling (Bryant, 1998; Bryant and Bradley, 1985; Bryant *et al.*, 1990; Goswami, 2000; Goswami and Bryant, 1990). More specifically, there seems to be a definite relation between children's awareness of rhyme and alliteration and their ability to use analogies to read words (Goswami and Bryant, 1990). There is also evidence to suggest that the relationship between reading acquisition and phonological awareness is reciprocal (Bentin *et al.*, 1991; Durgunoğlu *et al.*, 1993; Hall, 2003; Stanovich, 1986). And evidence suggests that 'early identification and subsequent training in phonological awareness can partially overcome the reading deficits displayed by many children whose phonological skills develop slowly' (Stanovich, 1986: 393). Experience with oral language through rhymes, songs, word games

and invented spelling is instrumental in developing children's phonological awareness (Bryant and Bradley, 1985; Durgunoğlu *et al.*, 1993; Hall, 2003).

One specific aspect of phonological awareness that has received particular attention from literacy researchers is phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is a very strong predictor of reading achievement (Adams, 1990; Ball and Blachman, 1991; Bryant, 1998; Bryant *et al.*, 1990; Durgunoğlu *et al.*, 1993; Goswami, 2000; Goswami and Bryant, 1990; Juel, 1988; Stahl, 1992). This is true for many languages other than English (Durgunoğlu *et al.*, 1993). More specifically, Juel (1988) found that children who entered first grade with little phonemic awareness became poor readers and those who were poor readers in first grade were also poor readers in fourth grade. In the meta-analysis evaluating the effects of phonemic awareness instruction on learning to read and spell conducted by the National Reading Panel, Ehri *et al.* (2001) concluded that phonemic awareness instruction made a statistically significant contribution to reading acquisition. It impacted moderately on readers' ability to comprehend text and it also transferred to spelling. Concentrating on the rapid and early attainment of the lower level skills will most likely help children develop higher order comprehension skills (Juel, 1988).

Some phonemic awareness develops as children learn to read (Goswami and Bryant, 1990) so the relationship between phonemic awareness and alphabetic coding skill may well be reciprocal (Bruck and Genesee, 1995; Campbell and Sais, 1995; Caravolas and Bruck, 1993; Durgunoğlu *et al.*, 1993; Ehri, 1987; Ehri *et al.*, 2001; Stanovich and Stanovich, 1995). Therefore, Ehri (1987) suggests that phonemic awareness should be taught as children learn to read. Perfetti (1995) and Perfetti *et al.* (1987) also noted a reciprocal relationship between phonemic knowledge and learning to read. Specifically, they found that the ability to blend phonemes enables reading development more than vice versa, whereas learning to read enables phoneme deletion.

2.2.2.6 Comprehension

The ultimate goal of successful reading is comprehension, i.e. ‘to extract and construct meaning’ from texts (Stanovich, 1992: 4). All texts carry multiple meanings (Gee, 2005) and readers draw on their past experiences and schemata as they construct meaning in the transaction with the text (Pardo, 2004; Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1991; Rowe and Rayford, 1987). All readers will differ in terms of the background knowledge, cognitive development, culture, skills, purpose and motivation they bring to the reading act. For example, comprehension may be affected depending on how closely aligned the reader’s culture is to the culture espoused in the text (Pardo, 2004). Therefore, there can be multiple readings of any one text (Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006).

Texts vary at the surface level of structure, genre, language, dialect, vocabulary and such surface features can affect understanding. Texts also differ in terms of themes, messages and the author’s intent. The ‘gist’ is often mediated by the teacher, for example when teachers read aloud to children. But there can be many commonalities across texts as well, particularly in children’s literature. Teaching children to attend to story grammar elements such as structure, setting, characters and problem resolution can improve their comprehension and ability to recall (Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006). Helping children make intertextual connections can help children derive more meaning from texts (Pardo, 2004).

Rosenblatt (1991) distinguishes between *efferent* reading and *aesthetic* reading. The former primarily involves reading for information. The latter refers to the affective domain of what we think, feel and experience as we read. Rosenblatt portrays this as a continuum rather than a dichotomy and suggests that all students need to be taught to read both

efferently and aesthetically so that they can adopt a position on the continuum appropriate to their personal purposes. Therefore, the primary purpose for reading should always be clear to the reader. Our purpose for reading, our previous experiences and the type of text being read all affect the stance we take which can change during the reading of a text (Rosenblatt, 1991; Stanovich, 1992).

Instruction in word recognition and teaching decoding skills help develop fluency and thus improve comprehension (Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006; Stanovich and Stanovich, 1995). But comprehension requires more than accurate decoding (Pressley and Wharton-MacDonald, 2006). Readers need to learn to ‘monitor the emerging meaning’ using metacognitive and repair strategies including assimilation, accommodation and rejection (Pardo, 2004: 277).

Lewis (2001) cautions against separating reading comprehension and literary interpretation as if the former was a precursor to the latter. She argues that interpretation is a ‘deeply social act’ and challenges the idea frequently portrayed in educational literature of the classroom as a ‘unified learning community’ (Lewis, 2001: xii). The social act of interpretation involves ‘people constructing knowledge together through social interaction’ and also ‘involves readers who have been constructed through social codes and practices that shape their relationships to texts ... and how such texts might be defined’ (Lewis, 2001: 4). The interpretation of texts is constituted in contexts, social codes, and identities (Lewis, 2001).

So comprehension is a process whereby readers construct meaning in their transactions with texts through a combination of prior knowledge and experience, information in the text, and the stance a reader takes in relation to the text within a sociocultural context (Pardo, 2004). And from a sociocultural perspective creating an environment that is rich in texts, where literacy is valued, where pupils are encouraged to

take risks, and where reading aloud and independent reading are practised can promote meaning making (Pardo, 2004).

2.2.2.7 Summary: Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up Models of Reading

Much evidence now exists that contradicts the view of reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game (Hall, 2003; Juel, 1995; Stanovich, 1986; Stanovich, 1992; Stanovich and Stanovich, 1995). Contrary to what the psycholinguists suggested, we now know that mature readers do not skip words when reading. Eye-movement studies have shown that readers fixate on almost all words in a text. Poor readers fixate on every word (Just and Carpenter, 1987; Perfetti, 1995; Stanovich, 1986, 1992). And every word is processed (Weber, 1970, cited in Ehri, 1987). So, graphic information plays a much greater role in reading than was suggested by psycholinguists. Good readers have developed automatic word recognition and, therefore, do not rely on context to identify words. While context may be used for higher order processes such as comprehension, it is not used much to identify words (Perfetti, 1995). Better readers are better at using context to facilitate their comprehension processes (Stanovich, 1992). Successful reading involves a balanced interaction between top-down interpretation drawing on relevant schemata and bottom-up processing skills, a process referred to as ‘parallel processing’ (Eskey, 2005).

2.3 A Sociocultural Perspective on Learning

In the present study I take the view that learning, including language learning and learning to read and write, is social. This view of the ‘social formation of mind’ (Wertsch, 1985) is rooted in the work of the soviet sociocultural psychologist Lev Vygotsky and the soviet philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin. It posits that mental functioning in individuals is mediated (Lantolf, 2000), having its origins in social, communicative

processes (Wertsch, 1991). As Bakhtin (1986: 92) writes, 'our thought itself - philosophical, scientific, and artistic - is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well'.

Vygotsky placed much emphasis on adopting a historical perspective because of the mediating role of artefacts in activity (Wells, 2000). These artefacts are the cultural tools created by a community. They include material tools, semiotic systems and the institutions within which the activities of a culture are organised (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf and Thorne, 2007; Wells, 2001). In studying human development one must consider more than genetic biological inheritance because human development 'is immeasurably enriched and extended through the individual's appropriation and mastery of the cultural inheritance as this is encountered in activity and interaction with others' (Wells, 2000: 54). Literacy is a cultural inheritance and learning to read is the appropriation and mastery of the cultural inheritance through interacting with others.

However, the process is more complex than mere socialisation to the collective culture. Group members construct cultural tools and practices, including literacy practices, through engaging in joint activity. Similarly, individuals learn how to construct knowledge through engaging in joint activity. In doing so, individuals transform the culture as they employ and transform the cultural resources for their own use. Pupils construct the world in which they live as well as the opportunities for learning within that world (Putney *et al.*, 2000). And the cultural tools we use both restrict and empower us (Wertsch, 2000). So, Vygotsky saw human development as a 'sociogenetic process by which children gain mastery over cultural tools and signs in the course of interacting with others in their environment' (Hogan and Tudge, 1999: 39).

According to Vygotsky humans do not act directly on their environment. Signs and tools mediate our actions on the environment to fulfil personal goals. ‘In concept formation that sign is the *word*, which at first plays the role of means in forming a concept and later becomes its symbol’ (Vygotsky, 1962: 56) (italics in the original). Speech is primary symbolic representation and all other sign systems, including written language, are created on the basis of speech. The cultural tools created by humans expand people’s cognitive abilities promoting more focused attention, better memory, and better reasoning. At school children learn to use alphabet charts to remind them of letter-sound correspondences and they learn rhymes and songs to aid their memory of the sequence of letters in the alphabet (Bodrova and Leong, 2006).

A central thesis of Vygotsky’s work is that all higher psychological functions, including language and literacy development, appear first on an interpersonal level between a person and other people and their cultural tools, and then are appropriated and internalised by the individual on an intrapersonal plane. The pattern of development is from the social, collective activity of a person to the more individualised activity. Children are socialised into the intellectual life of the community in which they live (Vygotsky, 1978). Higher psychological functions are historically shaped, socially formed and culturally transmitted. The mediating tools used for constructing meaning, including concepts, knowledge, strategies, and technology, are historically and culturally constructed (Lee and Smagorinsky, 2000). Internalisation is the process of coming to understand something in one’s own mind, independently of another person’s thoughts or understanding (Ball, 2000). And, ‘children transform the internalized interaction on the basis of their own characteristics, experiences, and existing knowledge’ (Hogan and Tudge, 1999: 44).

In demonstrating the social and cultural nature of higher psychological development and how such development is dependent on co-operation with more knowledgeable others and on instruction, Vygotsky (1962; 1978) labelled the child's capacity to learn and develop through interaction with others the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD).

'It is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky, 1978: 86) (italics in the original).

Vygotsky emphasised the need for instruction that would lead the child from one zone of proximal development to the next. Such instruction has been labelled *scaffolding* by Bruner and colleagues (e.g. Bruner, 1983; Wood *et al.*, 1976). Language plays a crucial mediating role in the collaboration between novice and expert as do other modes of joint meaning-making and the use of artefacts (John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000; Lee and Smagorinsky, 2000; Wells, 2000).

From a Vygotskian point of view knowledge and coming to know do not merely involve transmission or what Freire (1999) referred to as a 'banking' conception of knowledge, but should be viewed as transformation. A transmissionary view of knowledge does not allow for 'dialogic interaction' (Wells, 2000). Understanding is achieved through co-construction as opposed to transmission (Wells, 2001). From a constructivist perspective knowledge represents 'what we can *do* in our *experiential world*' and 'knowing is an adaptive activity' (von Glaserfeld, 1995: 7) (italics in the original). von Glaserfeld (1995) does not deny the existence of reality but argues that we cannot experience the world ontologically. Rather than trying to capture the 'truth' we should focus on 'viability'. 'To the constructivist, concepts, models, theories, and so on are viable if they prove adequate in the contexts in which they were created' (von Glaserfeld, 1995: 7-8).

However, as Wells (2000) notes, dialogic interaction is not evident in most classrooms because knowledge is frequently misconceived as transmissionary. Wells (2001: 181) suggests the emphasis should be on ‘situated knowing’ i.e. ‘*knowing in action undertaken jointly with others*’ (italics in the original) and on opportunities to reflect on what has been learned during the process. And, it is the ‘cultural situatedness of meanings that assures their negotiability and, ultimately, their communicability’ (Bruner, 1996: 3).

Knowledge does not exist in the head of any individual but is distributed among members of the community (Bruner, 1996; Gee, 2000; Moll, 2000). Such collective intelligence is ‘always mediated, distributed among persons, artifacts, activities, and settings’ (Moll, 2000: 265). Gutiérrez and Stone (2000) challenge the more static notions of expertise that suggest that group expertise is merely the sum of the participants’ knowledge. They suggest that in literacy events pupils’ knowledge and expertise are distributed among individuals as the nature of their participation changes. Expertise is not located in any one individual but exists ‘both in the individual and in the group and their subsequent interactions’ (Gutiérrez and Stone, 2000: 160).

Social constructivism implies a collaborative and exploratory approach to teaching and learning (Wells, 2000). ‘Learning is not an end in itself, but an integral aspect of participating in a community’s activities and mastering the tools, knowledge and practices that enable one to do so effectively’ (Wells, 2000: 62), and ‘learning is a process of *transformation of participation* itself’ (Rogoff, 1994: 209) (italics in the original). Classrooms and schools should be seen as communities of inquiry and activities should have personal significance for pupils (Wells, 2000; 2001). As Vygotsky (1978: 117) wrote, ‘reading and writing must be something the child needs’.

Learning involves moving from ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ to ‘full participation’ in communities of practice under the guidance of established members of the

community (Lave and Wenger (1991). Similarly, Rogoff (1990, 1995) has characterised her observations of developmental processes during sociocultural activity in three planes of analysis, namely apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation. In schools ‘a community of learners in a classroom is a more self-conscious effort by adults to produce and manage learning by the children’ (Rogoff, 1994: 213). Through their exploration of reciprocal teaching strategies Brown (1994) and Brown and Campione (1994) developed the concept of a ‘community of learners’ to describe how teachers and children generate group understanding through engaging in joint activity and inquiry, which they label ‘guided discovery’. Based on this characterisation of learning I would view the groups I observed as communities of readers. Under the expert guidance of the teacher the children are apprenticed to the ways of reading privileged by the school.

Capacity and context are inextricably linked in the act of learning highlighting the need to look at contexts of learning in their totality including the participants and their goals, the quantity and quality of the interactions, the setting, the artefacts, the nature of the task, the psychological and cognitive tools available and how all of these interact in the construction of meaning (Lee and Smagorinsky, 2000). Therefore, in analysing data I will be considering the manner in which the specific context of all-Irish school, the task of storybook reading, the storybook itself, and the setting in which the literacy event takes place all contribute to the act of learning. I will also be considering the teachers and children, who may not always share the same goals, the nature of their interactions, as well as the cognitive and psychological tools available to them, in particular their bilingual capacities, and how all of these elements contribute to the act of learning.

In examining contexts of learning Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological approach to human development can be a useful complement to Vygotsky’s cultural-historical approach to understand children’s learning ‘in relation to how they relate to other persons

in their social situation of interaction in specific activities' (Hedegaard and Fleer, 2009: 259). In presenting his theory of environmental connections and their influence on forces affecting cognitive growth Bronfenbrenner (1979: 22) conceives of the ecological environment as 'a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next', including micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. Bronfenbrenner (1979: 22) emphasises a phenomenological conception of the ecological environment because 'the scientifically relevant features of any environment include not only its objective properties but also the way in which these properties are perceived by the persons in that environment'.

'A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 22) experienced by the child in a setting in which the child actively participates, such as the home, preschool or school. The roles, relations and activities enacted by persons such as a teacher and pupils constitute the elements of the microsystem. Role expectations pertain to the content of activities as well as to the relations between the teacher and pupils in terms of the parameters of 'degree of reciprocity, balance of power, and affective relation' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 85).

A mesosystem is comprised of the interrelations between two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrener, 1979). For example, children's language and literacy development in immersion contexts will depend not just on their experiences in school but also on the links that exist between the school and the home. In the context of second language acquisition the mesosystem may also comprise interrelations between the home and/or the school, and the target community, including native speakers of the language as well as networks of secondary bilinguals.

The third level of the ecological environment, the exosystem, refers to settings the child does not participate in but which nevertheless affect what happens in the child's

microsystems. In immersion education settings the exosystem might include the school Board of Management where decisions are taken affecting the child's experience in school such as whether initial literacy instruction will be in L1 or L2. The school attended by an older sibling would also be part of the exosystem. It also includes the context for teacher education including initial teacher education and continuing professional development. These exosystems, which are part of the teachers' microsystems, influence in no small way children's and teachers' experiences and development in school. The presence of a researcher in the classroom can impact on children's and teachers' behaviours when being observed and recorded. This means that the researcher's place of work and/or study comprise part of the children's and teachers' exosystem.

Finally, the macrosystem refers to ideologies and the 'organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 8), such as the school system. In relation to the present study it includes the network of immersion schools as well as the broader sociolinguistic context in which the schools are operating, as outlined in Chapter 1. While these elements of the macrosystem do no doubt, impact on children's and teachers' experiences in all-Irish schools they are not central to the present study.

The capacity of a school 'to function effectively as a context for development is seen to depend on the existence and nature of social interconnections between settings, including joint participation, communication, and the existence of information in each setting about the other' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 5-6). This focus on joint participation is congruent with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, Bruner's (1983) scaffolding, Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'legitimate peripheral participation' and Rogoff's (1990) cognitive apprenticeship. Bronfenbrenner (1979: 9) defines development as 'the person's evolving conception of the

ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties'.

Hedegaard's (2008a) holistic theory of children's development is grounded in Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach and emphasises societal, institutional and individual influences on children's learning. Children acquire specific motives and competencies when participating in institutional practices but their intentional activities may sometimes conflict with the institutional practices. And opinions of what constitutes good practice may vary between teachers in the same school (Hedegaard, 2008a). Drawing on Vygotsky, Hedegaard (2008a: 27) emphasises the importance of children's 'experience and appropriation of capacities through imitation and activity with others', suggesting that it is the availability of possible developmental paths that exerts most influence on children's development. In relation to language acquisition for example, Hedegaard (2008a) argues that it will be the children's experiences of early attempts at verbal communication in interactions that will exert most influence on their appropriation of language as opposed to any disposition for language.

Hedegaard's (2008a) approach differs to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory in that she attributes greater significance to children's active role in influencing their own 'developmental pathways'. She conceives of children's development as a dialectical relation between the child's intentional activities and the institutional practices 'where a child through its own activities contributes to the practice and thereby to its own developmental conditions' (Hedegaard, 2008b: 183).

Jytte Bang's (2008, 2009) environmental affordance perspective conceptualises the learning environment as a dynamic unit of '*artefacts, social others, and self*' (Bang, 2009: 162) (italics in the original). Both Bang and Hedegaard share a focus on participants' intentionality and on the child's agency in making affordances available and in shaping the

learning environment. And as well as experiencing a literacy event the child experiences herself experiencing the literacy event, a '*quasi-otherness* of self' that may or may not be self-stimulating (Bang, 2009: 176) (italics in the original).

So, for children attending all-Irish schools the learning environment may be conceived of as an interrelated system of social spaces, including the classroom, the school, the network of all-Irish schools, the national school system, and society, each embedded within the next. Within these social spaces the social actors, through their interacting with each other, are constantly re-constructing the learning environment. For me inter-acting (as opposed to interacting) foregrounds the intentionalities of the teacher and children during the storybook reading event. And although each child's experience is unique, because the children are participating in shared cultural events and institutional practices as community members they develop shared characteristics (Hedegaard, 2008a).

Mind and culture are mutually constitutive. Children are strongly predisposed to culture and to adopting the "folkways" they observe around them. As apprentices they are willing to imitate their parents and their more expert peers. At the same time adults and other experts are disposed to demonstrating correct performance for the benefit of the apprentice (Bruner, 1996). Cultural ways of life are expressed through language and are 'an integral part of the interaction between language and thought' (Ó Baoill, 1999: 191).

School, itself, is a culture (Bruner, 1996) and teachers and students should be seen as 'cultural agents' (Souza Lima, 1995). School is both a place where sociocultural structures are reproduced and also 'a cultural-historical space for transformations of sociocultural consciousness' (Souza Lima, 1995: 446). Those who have been instrumental in constructing the classroom culture approach new events, including literacy events, with expectations gleaned from having participated in previous classroom events. Therefore, all events have a past, a history, and class members have preconceived ideas about how to

achieve these events (Collins and Green, 1990; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992a).

In classrooms, life becomes patterned as members of the culture develop common knowledge and ways of acting and interacting (Collins and Green, 1992). In doing so, they construct their situationally defined roles and relationships as teachers and pupils. Over time they also develop a referential system that facilitates more effective communication. Classroom events can be viewed as texts constructed by participants interacting with each other to achieve personal and collective goals, and connections across events may be seen as intertextual relationships. These intertextual ties are established and sanctioned by group members and may be planned or may occur spontaneously (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992a). Teachers and pupils ‘construct a common language and set of experiences that influence their interpretations of future actions and interactions’ (Collins and Green, 1992). The classroom is the setting but the class is a dynamic entity, a social group constructed by the individual members. Participating in classroom events does not equate with learning but provides the ‘potential condition for learning’ (Collins and Green, 1992: 72).

Based on the foregoing it can be concluded that learning is ‘a way of referring to the transformation that continuously takes place in an individual’s identity and ways of participating through his or her engagement in particular instances of social activities with others’ (Wells, 2000: 56). Meaning will only become a reality when consciousness is transformed (Souza Lima, 1995). Learning is an integral part of participating in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Knowledge is distributed among group members as they construct a shared dynamic classroom culture. Participants make contributions in accordance with their current capacities as they solve problems and provide mutual support for each other to achieve their goals as they emerge in any situation

(Wells, 2000). And learning is not a benign activity because conflict, tension and contradiction contribute to the idiosyncratic nature of learning activities (Gutiérrez and Stone, 2000).

2.4 Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Acquisition

Literacy development cannot be viewed in isolation from language learning, particularly in immersion contexts. As Grabe and Stoller (2002) have noted, many L2 students begin to read almost at the same time that they are learning to speak the language. Indeed such was the case for many of the children in the present study. Therefore, I present here a brief overview of some of the main tenets of sociocultural theory as they have been appropriated by scholars and applied to second language learning including internalisation, mediation, and imitation. A more detailed discussion of sociocultural theory (SCT) and second language acquisition (SLA) as well as psycholinguistic perspectives on SLA is included in Appendix 3.

A sociocultural theory of SLA does not view language cognition as either a linguistic or psychological mental faculty but as a social faculty. Human cognition develops from the material, social, cultural, and historical context of human experience. Learning occurs as knowledge is appropriated from environmental affordances which are fundamentally social. Knowledge is appropriated through participation in social events. Learning and cognition involve consciousness, agency and intentionality (Ortega, 2007).

Internalisation and mediation are core concepts in sociocultural theory. As well as using tools to control the physical environment, humans use symbols such as language as tools to regulate their mental activity. While physical tools are outwardly directed, symbolic tools are cognitively directed. Symbolic tools are an auxiliary means of controlling and reorganising our mental processes. Language is the most powerful cultural

artefact that we use to mediate our connection to the world, to ourselves, and to others, allowing us to think and talk about events that are displaced in both time and space including future events (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007). And within SCT language is not viewed as a neutral form of communication, but as a complex social practice (Norton, 2000).

Vygotsky suggested that ‘the key to internalization resides in the uniquely human capacity to imitate the intentional activity of other humans’ (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007: 207). Here imitation is understood as intentional, goal-directed cognitive activity as opposed to the mindless repetition often associated with behaviourism or the audiolingual method in language teaching. Imitation plays an important role in language acquisition. It is a complex process that involves neurological and motor processing and it is intentional, self-selective behaviour by the child. Imitation is linked to internalisation in that it can occur sometime after the received linguistic input (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007). L2 learners use imitative production in the form of private speech as a means of acquiring the L2 (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007; Ortega, 2007).

The role of output in second language acquisition has been well established in theoretical discussions and also in empirical investigations (Swain and Lapkin 2002). Lantolf and Thorne (2007) note that because L1 is used to regulate cognitive processes, it is logical to assume therefore that L1 mediates second language learning (SLL). The authors indicate that evidence exists which demonstrates that social speech produced in both L1 and L2 influences L2 learning. Here the use of L1 during L2 learning events contributes to L2 learning as it is viewed as a strategy that learners can employ to achieve goals that may elude them in the L2 (Ortega, 2007).

Swain (2000, 2006) and Swain and Lapkin (2000, 2002) have documented how school L2 learners, including learners in immersion contexts, promote linguistic

development by discussing features of the L2 in both their first and second languages in collaborative dialogues. The authors view output from a sociocultural perspective on learning suggesting that output is both ‘a message to be conveyed’ (Swain and Lapkin 2002: 285), and ‘a socially-constructed cognitive tool’ (Swain 2000: 112).

Swain and Lapkin (2000) found that pupils in grade 8 French immersion classes used L1 to complete tasks in L2 for three main purposes including, moving the task along, focusing attention, and interpersonal interactions. They found that lower-achieving pupils made greater use of their L1 but amount of L1 usage was also related to the nature of the task. Children’s use of their L1 served important social and cognitive functions for them. The authors conclude that judicious use of L1 can support SLL arguing that if immersion programmes insist that only the L2 be used to accomplish cognitively and linguistically challenging tasks then children might be denied the use of an effective cognitive tool.

2.5 A Sociocultural Perspective on Literacy Development

2.5.1 Introduction

Gregory *et al.* (2004) note that up until the 1970s literacy was studied mainly as an intellectual skill. Researchers working in this tradition viewed literacy as a universal constant and assumed that because of its intrinsic nature acquiring literacy resulted in higher cognitive skills, improved logical thinking, critical inquiry, self-conscious reflection, improved reasoning, and abstraction (Cushman *et al.*, 2001; Street, 1993/2001; Gregory *et al.*, 2004).

A focus on the cognitive processes that occur during reading and writing has been part of the tradition of American and Western European experimental psychology (Cushman *et al.*, 2001). It is also the definition of reading most prevalent in the public domain (Gee, 2001a). Such a focus on reading as a technical skill and on the cognitive

aspects of reading has been labelled the ‘autonomous model of literacy’ by Street (1984). Within the autonomous model research focused on the individual, on the cognitive consequences of reading and writing and on the functional operation of literacy within particular modern institutions. Research on literacy was ‘embedded within the narrow confines of the debate about rationality, cognition, and relativism’ with insufficient attention paid to the social and ideological nature of literacy (Street, 1993/2001: 437).

2.5.2 An Ideological Model of Literacy

In studying the literacy practices of the Vai people of Liberia, Scribner and Cole (1981/2001) questioned the idea of literacy as an autonomous skill and argued that it was not literacy *per se* but rather the type of literacy practice with particular scripts that led to particular cognitive skills. The authors found no evidence ‘that writing promotes “general mental abilities”’ or that ‘reading and writing entail fundamental “cognitive restructurings” that control intellectual performance in all domains’ (Scribner and Cole, 1981/2001: 136) (emphases in the original). Their evidence suggests that literacy without schooling promotes specific cognitive and language-processing skills. Their work gave rise to a more complex understanding of literacy that later initiated multi-disciplinary research across various disciplines including anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics (Gregory *et al.*, 2004). The work of Scribner and Cole (1981/2001) was built on by other researchers including Heath (1983) and Street (1984). Both the Heath and Street studies demonstrate the social embeddedness of literacy practices. Literacy practices are shaped by the dominant social, political, and economic institutions in which they are embedded (Wiley, 2005).

Street (1984) documented the various rural literacy practices of people in Iran including ‘vernacular’ literacy, ‘maktab’ literacy and ‘commercial’ literacy. In rejecting

the autonomous model Street argues for theoretical models of literacy ‘that recognise the central role of power relations in literacy practices’ (Street, 1993/2001: 430). Street (1984: 1) proposes an ‘ideological model of literacy’ because reading and writing are ‘embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated as ‘neutral’ or merely ‘technical’” (emphases in the original). Following Street, Barton and Hamilton (2000: 7) contend that literacy practices ‘are not observable units of behaviour since they involve values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships’. Literacy practices are ‘inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society’ (Street, 1993/2001: 433). The new literacy studies show how literacy practices can reproduce or challenge power structures. Literacy can no longer be seen as a ‘neutral technology’ but is a ‘social and ideological practice involving fundamental aspects of epistemology, power, and politics’ (Street, 1993/2001: 435). Freire’s (1998) *Education for Critical Consciousness* insisting that curriculum and pedagogy must be grounded in the learners’ life experiences and that people should learn to read the world and the word exemplifies this stance. In Brazil literacy is seen as a right of every citizen, not just a skill necessary for economic and industrial development. ‘Literacy is the path to the development of consciousness once it provides the person with more sophisticated instruments to mediate his or her relationship with the world’ (Souza Lima, 1995: 450).

2.5.3 Literacy as Social Practice

A sociocultural perspective on literacy development holds that ‘people adopt different “ways with printed words” within different sociocultural practices for different purposes and functions’ (Gee, 2001b: 30) (emphasis in the original) giving rise to the idea that there are many literacy practices (Scribner and Cole, 1981/2001) or multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). “Ways with printed words” are always integrated with ‘ways of talking, thinking, believing, knowing, acting, interacting,

valuing, and feeling' (Gee, 2001b: 30). Therefore, to learn about how literacy develops, we need to find out 'how a specific sociocultural practice (or related set of them) embedded in specific ways with printed words develops' (Gee, 2001b: 31). This is both a question about individuals (i.e., how a child acquires this sociocultural practice) and about groups (how a sociocultural practice acquires the child as participant) (Gee, 2001b).

A sociocultural perspective on literacy development emphasises the context, both social and cultural, in which literacy occurs as opposed to focusing exclusively on the individual (Hall, 2003; Lewis, 2001). Literacy is a cultural construct, a man-made cultural tool. It is a resource used in different ways by different cultures (Bloome, 1992/1994; Cushman *et al.*, 2001). Our assumptions about literacy development and about how to teach literacy are 'products of a particular historical context' (Cushman *et al.*, 2001: 8). Reading is inextricably linked to the context in which it occurs and context is produced in the interaction between group participants (Putney, 1996). The work of Shirley Brice Heath (1983) exemplifies the cultural embeddedness of literacy practices.

Heath (1983) documented ways in which different communities living in the Piedmont area of the Carolinas in the US socialised their children into different discourse patterns and different literacy practices. Her work demonstrates the complex interplay between culture, oracy, and literacy. She also showed how teachers only valued those practices that corresponded with their own and with school practices. Heath's work provided a springboard for other studies in the US, Britain and Australia documenting the variety of language and literacy practices among young preschool children including Kenner (2000) and (Gregory *et al.*, 2004). And recently, the emergence of the New Literacy Studies has focused on 'language and literacy as social practices rather than skills to be learned in formal education. Research within this frame requires language and literacy to be studied as they occur in social life, taking account of the context and their

different meanings for different cultural groups' (Street, 2003, cited in Gregory *et al.*, 2004).

Even the silent reading of a text by an individual is social (Hall, 2003; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992b) because it involves an interaction between the reader and the writer, mediated by the text. It involves the reader in a written code that has been historically constructed and the reader's interpretation of the text is influenced by his or her previous experiences of reading (Hall, 2003). In school settings silent reading in school or as a homework exercise is a social process because very often the reading is accomplished so that the child can participate in an academically and socially appropriate manner in the class activities. So the reading of a text is influenced by what pupils anticipate others might do and say with the text and with their contributions (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992b). So, 'what 'counts' as literacy is not neutral but is historically and locally specific' (Gregory *et al.*, 2004: 12) (emphasis in the original).

Literacy development cannot be separated from the context in which it occurs, including why it happens and how it is valued by the culture (Bloome, 1992/1994; Hall, 2003). Children's initial experiences of reading are with others and gradually, through shared experiences at home and in school, they learn what counts as reading. Becoming a reader is not just about acquiring skills. It is also about learning how to interact with language and texts in school-appropriate ways (Bloome, 1992/1994; Hall, 2003). Literacy teaching is about 'apprenticing children into the discourses and social practices of literate communities' (Hall, 2003: 139). Literate practices become resources for teachers and pupils as they construct a joint understanding of what counts as literacy in and across classroom contexts (Putney, 1996).

In a classroom the teacher and students co-construct their own particular models, understandings, and definitions of literacy through their actions and the literacy events they

engage in. It is a dynamic process whereby group members construct and reconstruct what counts as literacy as part of their everyday activities. Therefore, 'literacy involves more than reading and writing processes, it also involves the communicative processes through which it is constructed' (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992b: 121). The model or models of literacy that students construct in schools (i.e., schooled literacy) may support or constrain how they approach literacy in other contexts (Bloome, 1992/1994; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992b).

Gregory *et al.* (2004) note that since the late 1970s the field of early literacy learning has been dominated by an emergent literacy perspective. Research conducted by parent-researchers in their own homes as well as studies carried out in schools support this view. Under the title 'Syncretic Literacy Studies' the multi-authored studies reported in Gregory *et al.* (2004) describe how parents, grandparents, siblings or significant others (who may be bicultural and/or bilingual) play a crucial role in mediating early language and literacy development through scaffolding, guided participation or synergy. What these studies have in common is that 'learning is a social process through which meaning is negotiated when learners are engaged with more knowledgeable others in meaningful transactions with texts' (Gregory *et al.*, 2004: 14). Children are not passive recipients of literacy knowledge and skills. Rather, they are active meaning-makers who construct their knowledge and understanding of literacy as they try to make sense of their literate environment (Gregory *et al.*, 2004).

Reading 'is simultaneously a process of socialization, enculturation, and cognition' (Bloome, 1992/1994: 104). In learning to read children learn values and culturally appropriate ways of thinking and other cognitive processes. If different literacy practices promote different cognitive skills, then we need to learn about the effects of different literacy practices privileged by schools (Bloome, 1992/1994).

2.5.4 Literacy and Discourses

Crucial to Gee's (2001b) sociocultural perspective on early literacy development, and an important concept for the current study, is the notion of "Discourses" with a capital "D". Discourses involve more than language.

'A Discourse integrates ways of talking, listening, writing, reading, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and feeling (and using various objects, symbols, images, tools and technologies) in the service of enacting meaningful socially situated identities and activities' (Gee, 2001b: 35) (emphasis in the original).

A child's primary Discourse is the ways with words, objects, and deeds the child is socialised into, usually, but not always, within the family. Discourses are ways of being in the world. People are socialised into many different Discourses during their lifetimes and Discourses can be closely aligned or in tension. Where there is conflict between Discourses this can adversely affect the acquisition and mastery of a Discourse. Discourses are acquired through enculturation into social practices that mobilise social languages, genres and cultural models, through supported and scaffolded interaction with those who have already acquired the Discourse, not by overt instruction. Identities are enacted through Discourses (Gee, 2001b, 1989/2001).

Gee also distinguishes between 'dominant Discourses' that afford people the potential to acquire social capital and 'nondominant Discourses' that bring membership of a particular social network but not wider societal status. Because they involve values and viewpoints, Discourses by their very nature, are ideological. They are 'intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society' (Gee, 1989/2001: 538). And dominant groups maintain their positions of power by setting 'entrance tests' that focus on superficial aspects of a Discourse to exclude aspiring members from the group.

People are socialised into secondary Discourses in social institutions outside the home. In schools children are socialised into many different secondary Discourses such as the Discourse of literature or the Discourse of storybook reading (Gee, 1989/2001) or becoming bilingual in an immersion programme.

Where a child's primary Discourse is not aligned with the school-based Discourse teachers will need to build 'associational bridges' between a pupil's home culture and the school culture if school literacy practices and Discourses are to resonate with the child's primary sense of self (Bloome, 1992/1994; Gee, 2001b). A teacher will need to understand a child's multiple literacies in order to fully understand and assess appropriately the child's language and literacy development. 'This most certainly means understanding children's culturally specific "ways with words" that, while rooted in home or community-based Discourses, are not "school aligned"' (Gee, 2001b: 40) (emphases in the original). And pupils will need to learn to respond to texts in terms of the experience and background knowledge in the texts as opposed to with reference to their own experiences and backgrounds (Bloome, 1992/1994).

While Discourses are acquired, superficial aspects of a Discourse, can be taught by overt instruction. Literacy is acquired through exposure to models 'in natural, meaningful, and functional settings' (Gee, 1989/2001: 542). Metalinguistic skills are best developed through explicit teaching and learning. Gee is quick to point out that a sociocultural approach to language, learning, and literacy is neither for nor against skills (such as phonics) in any general way. 'Rather, such a view cautions that skill-based learning is not some general thing, but a different thing with different effects (good, bad, or neither) as it is differently situated inside different specific social practices and Discourses' (Gee, 2001b: 37) (emphasis in the original). Literacy that involves both acquisition and learning can be powerful and liberating if it equips people with a meta-language to critique other

literacies. However, in schools mainstream, middle-class Discourses can be associated with power and prestige. For example, reading tests that only assess superficial aspects such as mastery of decontextualised skills are sometimes used to select the ‘fittest’ and refuse access to the weakest (Gee, 1989/2001).

Delpit (1995/2001) takes issue with some of Gee’s arguments. She rejects Gee’s suggestion that those not born into the dominant Discourse will find it virtually impossible to acquire that Discourse. Instead, she argues that individuals can ‘transform dominant discourses for liberatory purposes’ (Delpit, 1995/2001: 552), citing many examples of students from non-dominant groups who learned the dominant secondary Discourse in the classroom. Delpit also takes issue with the notion that a person born into a particular Discourse will experience major conflicts when attempting to acquire another Discourse that espouses different values. Her main concern is that teachers who accept Gee’s determinist position will not strive to teach the dominant Discourse to pupils from non-dominant, oppressed groups. Delpit argues that acquiring the dominant Discourse doesn’t necessarily entail rejecting one’s own primary value system because ‘discourses are not static, but are shaped, however reluctantly, by those who participate within them and by the form of their participation’ (Delpit, 1995/2001: 552). And teachers can help transform the new discourse by creating a place within it for students’ selves.

2.5.5 Summary

The perspective I am taking in the current study is that reading and writing are social acts as well as cognitive acts. People always read and write within specific social practices. Literacy is not a neutral, technical skill. Literacy practices are embedded in cultural practices and power structures. The children I observed are learning culturally appropriate ways of reading within a language learning all-Irish school context. They are

learning culturally specific ways of interpreting texts. The children actively construct their literacy knowledge, including their understanding of the purpose of reading as well as what it means to be a reader, i.e. their reader identities, within a particular immersion context. Through participation in literacy events the children are apprenticed into the local community of readers. Much of their reading is accomplished so that they can participate in classroom activities in an appropriate academic and social manner.

The school secondary Discourse that the children are acquiring is a non-dominant Discourse within the wider Irish society. Nevertheless it affords children the opportunity to acquire social and cultural capital that can bring them membership of social networks of Irish speakers as well as perhaps, leading to enhanced job opportunities (Ó Laighin 2008).

As noted earlier, immersion education in Ireland is seen as a major contributory factor to language revitalization. The focus in the current study is on local norms and how they shape literacy events and literacy practices but it is important to keep in mind that these local norms are connected to the larger cultural ideology of language maintenance and revitalization. As Barton and Hamilton (2000: 8) note, ‘literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices’. The micropolitics of reading and how institutional power privileges particular ways of reading over others have not been researched previously in all-Irish immersion primary schools.

2.6 Identity

2.6.1 Identity as a Social Construct

Based on Cummins (1996/2001), Gee (2005), Joseph (2004), Moje *et al.* (2009), Norton (2000), Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), Ricento (2005), and Riley (2007) I take the view that identities are socially constructed. The source of personal identity is social as identities are negotiated and co-constructed through social interaction between individuals

and other members of society, mediated by language. Billig (1995), quoted in Joseph (2004: 118), puts it succinctly when he writes that ‘an identity is to be found in the embodied habits of social life’. This idea is rooted in Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of ‘habitus’. The structures of society, interaction and language are the sources of personal identity (Joseph, 2004; Riley, 2007).

Joseph (2004) suggests there are two fundamental types of identity, individual and group. Various abstract group identities to which we claim affiliation constitute our deep personal identity. Individual identity is partly established by rank in relation to others with the same group identity. The group identities we enact can both nurture and smother our individual sense of self. Claims of group identity are made through performance, in particular through shared features of language. This concept of identity as a ‘performative discourse’ has become powerful in recent years (Joseph, 2004). It is grounded in Bourdieu’s (1991) conception of regionalist discourse as a ‘performative discourse’.

One’s public or social identity is the sum total of all the social groups, or Discourses (Gee, 2005), to which one belongs and of which one is recognised as being a competent member. Salient aspects of social identity are manifested by verbal and non-verbal communicative practices that require ‘insider’ knowledge to ensure competent performance and recognition and acceptance by others with the same group identity. Individuals acquire the cultural, communicative, and linguistic competence, including forms, norms and parameters of variation which constitute their group identity. For example, a child’s primary Discourse, or ‘identity kit’ (Gee, 2005), the child’s primary sense of self, consists of the communicative skills and practices he/she is socialised into during his/her primary identity formation process, usually within the family (Gee, 2005; Riley, 2007).

Drawing on feminist poststructuralist theories of subjectivity Norton (2000) argues that because the human subject has agency, the subject positions that a person assumes within a particular discourse or ideology can be contested. A person can resist a particular potentially marginalizing position within a discourse or set up a counter-discourse, thus adopting a more powerful subject position. Identity, therefore, can be seen as a site of struggle and change (Bakhtin, 1981; Norton, 2000). Identity is non-unitary and contradictory (Norton, 2000). In this sense identities are negotiated through the ‘interplay between reflective positioning, i.e. self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to position or reposition particular individuals or groups’ (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004: 20). The same authors propose a framework that differentiates between *imposed identities*, *assumed identities*, and *negotiable identities*.

Identities are marked by multiplicity, fragmentation and hybridity (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). We all have multiple identities in at least two senses. Firstly, our identity shifts according to context and interlocutors. Secondly, because we construct others’ identities, there are as many versions of one’s identity out there as there are people whose consciousness one inhabits. These other-constructed representations matter if they play a significant role in how we interact with others and how we think of ourselves and others (Joseph, 2004). The identities that others impute to us in terms of ethnicity, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status are often based on ‘otherness’ and ‘opposition’ (McCarthy, 2001; Norton, 2000).

The children in the present study are co-constructing their individual and group identities as *gaelscoil* pupils with each other and with their teachers primarily through the medium of their second language, Irish. Their identity construction includes, among other things, ways of being a pupil, ways of being bilingual, and ways of being a reader, all of which are part of the child’s secondary Discourse of being a *gaelscoil* pupil. These

identities may be imposed, assumed or negotiated. However, it must be acknowledged that in the text I am presenting here I am the one constructing and representing the children's identities through my interpretive analysis. I am not attempting to portray the identities of the children as ontological entities but rather as other-constructed.

2.6.2 Identity and Schooling

Cummins (1996/2001) distinguishes between coercive and collaborative power relations. The manner in which identities are negotiated in the school context between teachers, pupils and the wider community are interlinked with patterns of power relations in society as the discourse of societal power relations infiltrates the classroom affecting directly how identities are negotiated between pupils and teachers (Cummins, 1996/2001). Students whose primary Discourses are affirmed through classroom interactions that reflect collaborative power relations will have the confidence and motivation to succeed academically. They will participate competently in activities as a consequence of having developed a secure sense of identity and the knowledge that their voices and opinions are respected (Cummins, 1996/2001). And power relations can either constrict or enable the range of identities that language learners can negotiate in school (Norton, 2000).

The process of identity formation in school is a reciprocal one between teachers and pupils. Cummins (1996/2001) argues that similar to knowledge acquisition, the negotiation of identity formation occurs within the zone of proximal development, or what Newman, Griffin and Cole (1989), cited in Cummins (1996/2001), label the 'construction zone'. Here Cummins is extending the ZPD beyond the cognitive sphere to include affective development and power relations. However, he also warns that the construction zone can be a 'constriction zone' if pupils' primary identities are not affirmed. Activating

children's prior knowledge is one way of affirming children's identities (Cummins, 1996/2001).

Learners' historically and socially constructed identities influence the subject positions they adopt in the classroom and the relationships they develop with the teacher. The teacher's pedagogical approach will engage pupils' identities in different and contradictory ways. For the teacher to create conditions amenable to learning he/she needs to understand the histories and lived experiences of the pupils. And unless pupils believe that their investments in learning the language are an integral and valued part of the language curriculum they may resist the teacher's pedagogical approach (Norton, 2000). Dagenais *et al.* (2006) have documented how a multilingual child was constructed variously as 'literate child' by different teachers in the figured worlds of French Immersion elementary classrooms.

Cognitive engagement and identity investment are reciprocally related. When bilingual children are afforded opportunities to express themselves through two languages they see their identities reflected in how they use language and in the writings they produce. Linguistic, cognitive, and academic development are melded in the process of academic language development (Cummins, 1996/2001). What propels this development is the extent to which the children are 'enabled to invest their identities fully in the learning process' (Cummins, 1996/2001: 90-91). And the negotiation of identity is fundamental to literacy and biliteracy development (Cummins, 1996/2001; McCarthy, 2001).

2.6.3 Identity and Language

Joseph (2004) makes the case for including identity as a major function of language. His thesis is that if the analysis of the use of language is confined to representation or communication or some combination of both, something vital is missing,

namely the speakers. People ‘are always present in what they say and in the understanding they construct of what others say. Their identity inheres in their *voice*, spoken, written or signed’ (Joseph, 2004: 21) (emphasis in the original). Therefore a full account of linguistic representation should include

‘how the identity of speakers is manifested by them and read by others; it would have to recognise that speakers themselves are part of the meaning ... A full account of linguistic communication would have to start with, not a message, but again the speakers themselves, and their reading of each other that determines, interactively, their interpretation of what is said’
(Joseph, 2004: 22).

It was important therefore, to interview the participating teachers and pupils in order to have their voices heard.

Traditionally, in the literature on bilingualism, code-mixing, code-switching, and language choice have been identified as the main linguistic means of identity negotiation. Therefore, examining instances of code-mixing in the data presented in Chapter 4 could give useful insights into the ways the children use Irish and English to enact their socially situated identities as bilinguals.

Auer (1998a: 1) defines code switching as the ‘alternating use of two or more “codes” within one conversational episode’ (emphasis in the original). A conversational-analysis approach to code switching emphasises the emerging nature of meaning brought about by the participants (Li Wei, 1998). While I am not analysing conversational episodes I am analysing the alternating of L1 and L2 in the units of analysis I have identified. Many of the exchanges are conversational in nature so Auer’s definition is relevant. And in any analysis of code switching it is important to consider the reflexive nature of the process by paying close attention to ‘the details of its local production within the emerging conversational context which it both shapes and responds to’ (Auer, 1998a: 1-2).

Broadly speaking code switching can be classified into situational code switching and metaphorical code switching. The former occurs when there is a change in the

situation, e.g. a change of interlocutor. The latter occurs within a conversation to convey a particular discourse function (Li Wei, 1998; Reyes, 2004). All of the examples of code switching presented in Chapter 4 are examples of metaphorical code switching.

Reyes (2004) and Kabuto, (2010; 2011) both challenge the negative view that code switching by bilingual children indicates lack of proficiency, suggesting there is a positive relationship between code switching by bilinguals and language proficiency. Older children will code switch more frequently than younger children and for a greater variety of sociolinguistic functions. Jørgensen (1998) found that Turkish-Danish bilingual boys switched codes much more in Grade 5 than they did in Grade 1 and did so for a greater range of purposes.

Code switching is likely to increase during activities that are cognitively demanding (Reyes, 2004). Gort (2006) found that young bilinguals engaged in hybrid literacy and language practices using both English and Spanish flexibly during writing workshops in accordance with their proficiency levels in each language and they were encouraged to draw on all their linguistic registers and systems when communicating in both L1 and L2. These children's code switching 'was contingent upon several factors, including the relative strength of L1 and L2 (i.e. language dominance), their bilingual development, the linguistic context, and the corresponding language proficiencies of their interlocutor(s)' (Gort, 2006: 336) (emphasis in the original).

Therefore, code switching is a strategy used by bilingual children to extend their communicative competence for the purpose of achieving their communicative goals and should be seen as a tool for cognitive development. Like monolingual speakers bilinguals can draw on a variety of language registers. But bilinguals have the added advantage of having access to two languages as resources for sociolinguistic strategies when communicating (Reyes, 2004). Earlier in the chapter I reviewed research by Swain and

Lapkin (2000) showing evidence that children's use of L1 served important social and cognitive functions for them when completing tasks in their L2. Kabuto (2010) views code switching as a social, cultural, and cognitive tool to support early biliterate readers' learning during the social co-construction of children's identities as readers when engaged in literacy activities.

Younger children, similar to the children in the present study, demonstrate more lexical-item code switching than older children. This may be because they only know the word in one language but not exclusively so. Sometimes a child may be momentarily unable to access the vocabulary item in the language being spoken and will access it more readily in the other language (Reyes, 2004).

In a study of 7-8 year-old pupils in 2nd Class in one all-Irish school, Mac Fhlannchadha (1999) found that a large proportion of code switches were content words including nouns, verbs, and adjectives, signalling a lack of lexical knowledge on the part of those young pupils. In contrast research reported by Ó Duibhir (2009, 2011) did not find any evidence of content word switches in the corpus of spoken Irish among 11-12-year-old pupils in the all-Irish schools he studied suggesting there may be significant language acquisition in those four years of immersion. In the Ó Duibhir study children's code switches from L2 to L1 consisted mainly of affirmative or negative particles, discourse markers and other function words at an unconscious level to facilitate their communicative needs. His study is evidence of a trend where pupils in all-Irish schools tend to use the same discourse markers when speaking Irish and English.

2.6.4 Identity and Reading

Butler (1988: 519) argues that identity is instituted through a '*stylized repetition of acts*' (italics in the original). It is a performative accomplishment. Identity 'does not

prefigure action but is constituted through action, discourses or the words we speak and behave' (David *et al.*, 2006: 422). Butler's performative view of identity is broadly consistent with Gee's (2005) concept of Discourse as a socially situated enactment. A number of scholars have applied some of Butler's theories to ethnographic studies in education. Here I am appropriating some of their ideas and applying them to the concept of reader identity. In particular, Butler's concepts of performativity and subjectification are useful conceptual tools for analysing the storybook reading events I video recorded.

Drawing on Butler's ideas, one might characterize a child's identity as a reader as a performative accomplishment achieved through the stylized repetition of literacy events over time. Each literacy event is characterised by 'compulsive repetition', that is alterable and potentially subversive (Hey, 2006). While each literacy event is unique, it is connected to every other literacy event. For the children in the present study such literacy events would include bedtime reading at home and storybook reading in school, which would be a more self-conscious effort by teachers to manage children's learning (Rogoff, 1994). Readers are performatively constituted. They 'perform the self' but always in relation to the group (Lewis, 2001: 13). And a performative view of literacy holds that the individual or group performance and the context are mutually constituted (Lewis, 2001).

Becoming a reader in an all-Irish school should be considered in the light of both subject formation and subjugation to the classroom discourse. As children master the skills to participate successfully in the literacy events they are also being subjugated to the classroom discourse. The discourses deployed by participants in the literacy events may be both intended and unintended. And participants 'need not be self-consciously alert to the discourse deployed in order for their familiar and embedded meanings to be inscribed' (Youdell, 2006: 514).

Drawing on Nayak and Kehily (2006), I would argue that reader identity is the ideal reader which the school attempts to create and give meaning to. Reader identification is only meaningful within a particular system of representation such as a storybook reading event. Reader identity and reader identification never occupy the same temporal and spatial zone. Learning to do storybook reading could be viewed as ‘an intersubjective process wherein we both act and are acted upon: we are concurrently the subjects and the objects of the sign-making world’ (Nayak and Kehily, 2006: 465). An orientation to the social suggests that reader identifications are performed ‘as a *series* of performative claims on group membership’ (Hey, 2002: 236, cited in Hey, 2006) and are always being reconstituted (Hey, 2006).

While the children have agency it is a ‘radically conditioned agency’ (Davies, 2006: 426) because it is constrained by ‘available historical conventions’ (Butler, 1988: 521), namely the conventions of storybook reading within the group. In classrooms pupils ‘seek a mode of performativity in which they can be read as accomplishing themselves as autonomous, and preferably, as the right sort of subject’, however illusory this autonomy might be (Davies, 2006: 433). Pupils are in a constant struggle to accomplish mastery of the classroom discourse to attain viable subjecthood (Davies, 2006). This would include mastering ways of being a reader that are recognised and accepted by the teacher and by other students but might conflict with the ways of being a reader a child might be socialised into in the home.

2.6.5 Summary

Identity is not some kind of abstract endowment but a cultural construct that cannot be separated from national identity (Joseph, 2004). It is ‘a contingent process involving dialectic relations between learners and the various worlds and experiences they inhabit

and which act on them' (Ricento, 2005: 895). The identities of the children in the current study are inextricably linked in a reciprocal relationship to the languages they speak, and to the broader national language maintenance effort. Their language involves quite an amount of code mixing and code switching. These are key performance elements of literacy events and, therefore, analysing instances of code switching might give valuable insights into how the teachers and the children use language to index their socially situated identities as bilingual, biliterate pupils. And Butler's concepts of performativity and subjectification are useful conceptual tools for analysing storybook reading events.

2.7 Storybook Reading

2.7.1 Introduction

Earlier in the chapter I noted the importance of explicitly teaching some reading skills to beginning readers. Hiebert (1999) has emphasised the importance of combining authentic literature with systematic skill development for young beginning readers. Literature-based instruction advocates the use of a wide range of reading materials including big books, folktales, fantasy, nonfiction books, poetry and biographies. Literature-based instruction is guided by the principle that literacy develops in a 'book-rich' environment where meaning is socially constructed through purposeful discussions about literature (Morrow and Gambrell, 2001).

One literacy event that plays an important role in literacy-based instruction is the storybook reading event (Morrow and Gambrell, 2001). The following review of the literature on storybook reading begins with a discussion of the benefits of storybook reading. Sociocultural perspectives on storybook reading are discussed and the meaning of text is problematized. A review of some studies of discourse interactional patterns during storybook reading events is included. Storybook reading in L2, including Irish is discussed.

Because one of the teachers read an Irish language version of Hansel and Gretel to the children a section on the enchantment of fairy tales is included.

2.7.2 Benefits of Storybook Reading

The storybook reading event makes a greater contribution to the young child's literacy development than any other literacy-related activity (Martinez and Teale, 1993). Reading to children stimulates a literate disposition (Scollon and Scollon, 1981). Children whose parents read books to them from an early age are more motivated to read books than children who are deprived of this experience, and this interest is sustained throughout the developing years (Bus, 2001). Reading aloud by mediating adults helps children develop attitudes, abilities, skills, and strategies over and above the decoding skills promoted by other literacy events (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Feitelson *et al.*, 1986; Heath, 1982), as the adult models the strategies necessary for successful reading (Altwerger *et al.*, 1985). Where parents read to their preschool children it is associated with language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement. Thus, like phonemic awareness, book reading is a strong predictor of reading success (Bus *et al.*, 1995).

Studies have shown that reading stories to children in a school context is positively related to decoding ability, vocabulary development, language level development, story comprehension, active use of language, and children's motivation to read, and is a reliable predictor of children's later development as readers (Dickinson and Smith, 1994; Eller *et al.*, 1988; Elley, 1989; Feitelson *et al.*, 1986; Martinez and Teale, 1993; Morrow *et al.*, 1990). Experiences with a variety of written language forms can promote vocabulary development (Eller *et al.*, 1988). In particular, vocabulary development is related to the frequency of the occurrence of the word in the text and its representations in illustrations, the helpfulness of the surrounding context, as well as teachers' explanations (Elley, 1989).

Storybook reading also improves metacognition and helps children develop positive attitudes to reading (Morrow *et al.*, 1990). As children become familiar with a story through repeated readings, they talk more about story language, titles, settings and events, their responses display increased depth of processing and interpretation, and their comments become more elaborative (Martinez and Roser, 1985; Morrow, 1988). Children also acquire information and gain much cultural capital as they become familiar with the literary heritage of their culture through experience with books and stories (DES, 1999; McKeown and Beck, 2006; Teale, 1984). This is an important element of Irish storybook reading events in all-Irish schools where children become familiar not just with the literary heritage of the majority language but also with the very rich literary heritage of the minority language. Thus the children are receiving much literacy and cultural capital.

Getting children to retell stories helps comprehension, concept of story structure, and oral language development (Morrow, 1985; Gambrell *et al.*, 2001). When children reconstruct stories and arrange pictures in sequence they form a mental representation of the story (Morrow, 1985). And, because the benefits of retelling also transfer to the processing of other texts, retelling can be an effective generative learning strategy that enhances comprehension (Gambrell *et al.*, 2001). Through participation in storybook reading events children become familiar with story structures and schemes, literacy conventions, and concepts of print all of which are prerequisites for comprehending texts (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Morrow *et al.*, 1990; Teale, 1984).

Written language differs in many ways from spoken language (Gregory, 1990/1994; Mhic Mhathúna, 2003). In books for very young children, the language used is richer and more patterned with recurring phrases or refrains (Mhic Mhathúna, 2003). The syntax of written language is more complex than that of oral language and written language uses a greater variety of sentence forms. Written language is also more complex

in terms of lexical density. During storybook reading events children will encounter literate discourse rules, literary devices (e.g., metaphors), and more complex language forms which include subordinate clauses, passive constructions, colloquialisms, idioms, and unfamiliar expressions (Bus, 2001; Bus *et al.*, 1995; Eller *et al.*, 1988; Feitelson *et al.* 1986; Feitelson *et al.* 1993). They come to realise that print differs from speech. They learn about the functions of print, that it conveys meaning, and that print mediates everyday activities (Morrow, 1988; Morrow *et al.*, 1990; Morrow and Gambrell, 2001; Teale, 1984). Developing the ability to understand and produce more elaborate and more decontextualized language is an important prerequisite to literacy development (McKeown and Beck, 2006; Snow and Ninio, 1986).

However, the act of reading to children *per se* is not sufficient for maximum benefit. Rather, it is the nature and amount of verbal interaction that surrounds the text being read that is the key to promoting literacy development (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1982; McKeown and Beck, 2006; Morrow and Smith, 1990; Morrow *et al.*, 1990; Tabors and Snow, 2001). ‘Active participation enhances story comprehension and sense of story structure’ (Morrow *et al.*, 1990: 257). Children benefit from opportunities to regulate their own learning by questioning adult readers during storybook reading and children’s comments give teachers valuable insight into how children are attempting to construct meaning from texts (Morrow and Gambrell, 2001). Pre-reading questions and discussions that involve predicting the story line and story events act as ‘advanced organizers’ and induce story schemata, leading to improved comprehension. Similarly, post-reading questions and discussions that involve retelling help children to recall and understand what has been read (Morrow, 1984; Morrow *et al.*, 1990).

Research reported by Morrow and Smith (1990) is of particular relevance to the current study. The authors found that reading to children in small groups provided children

with as much interaction as reading in one-to-one settings. Reading in small group settings also led to improved comprehension when compared with both whole-class settings and one-to-one settings. This is likely because the small group setting promotes verbal interactions that are not possible in the other settings. Other research indicates that children's comments tend to focus on meaning when listening to stories in small group settings (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Roser and Martinez, 1985). For the present study teachers were requested to read storybooks to the children in small groups. I am confident the children were not disadvantaged in any way, an important point to note in terms of research ethics.

2.7.3 A Sociocultural Perspective on Storybook Reading

Many researchers (e.g., Almasi, 1995; Dickinson and Smith, 1994; Martinez and Teale, 1993; Morrow, 1988; Morrow and Smith, 1990; Teale, 1984) draw on Vygotsky's (1978) socio-historical theory that children acquire higher psychological functions by internalising social relationships to explain how story reading promotes children's literacy development because, as Bloome (1985) notes, reading aloud to children is both a social process and a process of communication. Similar to Green *et al.* (1986), Morrow (1988), Teale (1984), and Teale *et al.* (1989), I take the view that meaning is co-constructed by the teacher and pupils as they interact with each other and with artefacts (e.g., books, pictures, and written materials) during storybook reading events. In the process the author's text is developed and shaped by the social interaction and interpretation of the participants as they negotiate and co-construct meaning from text. As the storybook reading event is jointly constructed by the adult and children, the children learn ways of being readers and are inducted into what Frank Smith (1992) called the 'literacy club', as they identify

themselves with people who read. In the process children acquire culturally appropriate ways of taking from texts (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1982, 1983; Teale, 1984).

Rosenblatt's (1991) transactional view of literacy assumes that the reader is an active agent who approaches a literacy act from an individual stance but whose interpretations are also shaped by other members of the 'interpretive community' (Fish, 1980, cited in Almasi, 1995) during literary discussions. Such discussions have the potential to enable students to construct deeper meanings that can enrich understanding for all members of the group as understanding is guided by the 'personal history, experience, and imagination that each reader brings to the text' (Eeds and Wells, 1989: 15).

Vygotsky's idea that in the learning process we share not just content but also the very psychological functions helps us understand why certain literacy practices such as reading books to children are particularly effective. Reading books to young children in small groups or in one-to-one settings promotes oral language development and literacy skills, 'especially when adult-child interaction is structured as a series of dialogic exchanges' (Bodrova and Leong, 2006: 246-247). It also helps to develop the child's focused attention, an essential competency for learning academic subjects, including reading (Bodrova and Leong, 2006).

When the adult mediates the text for the children they develop skills and strategies for understanding written texts (Feitelson *et al.* 1986). Through skilful scaffolding by adults children acquire both a model of reading and a support system to manage their transition to independent reading (Morrow *et al.*, 1990). In such social environments 'children develop the underlying cognitive processes necessary for interpreting text first on an interpersonal plane. Children are subsequently able to internalise such higher cognitive functions and learn to interpret literature and monitor their comprehension on an intrapersonal plane' (Almasi, 1995: 317). So the storybook reading event is a social, a

cognitive, and a literary event (Green *et al.*, 1986; Teale *et al.*, 1989). As the event unfolds the author's text is 'extended into the sphere of the social context of the reading event where the text is a display of author's, illustrator's, and performer's cues' (Golden and Gerber, 1990: 204). This raises the question of what exactly is the text during a storybook reading event.

2.7.4 What is a Text?

The primary goal of the storybook reading event is the construction of a comprehensible, meaningful, and relevant text for the child and not the precise reading of the print (Altwerger *et al.*, 1985). Drawing on Golden and Gerber (1990: 203) I view the author's text as the 'potential text'. The 'realized text' emerges during the reading as the teacher and children interact with the potential text because texts are language in use, 'moments of intersubjectivity' (Luke, 1995: 13). The realized text is akin to Bakhtin's (1981: 345) 'internally persuasive discourse'.

The boundaries of a story are socially constructed by those participating in the literacy event (Bloome *et al.*, 2005). When reading a storybook to children the reader becomes a creator (Bus, 2001). The author's text is not immutable (Sipe, 2002) but 'represents the meaningful, personal interpretation of the written language constructed on the basis of the reader's experiential background, knowledge, beliefs, and purposes for reading' (Altwerger *et al.*, 1985: 477). Therefore, all texts are polysemous (Luke, 1995). The reader interprets and performs the text using paralinguistic, kinesic, and proxemic cues that reflect his or her interpretation and may even alter the text (Golden and Gerber, 1990) as he/she assumes a responsive position on the part of the listener (Bakhtin, 1986). The storybook narrative, therefore, has the potential to generate multiple interpretations depending on 'how the text is mediated by participants in a social context' (Golden and

Gerber, 1990: 205). Thus the read-aloud becomes a form of ‘verbal art performance’ (Golden and Gerber, 1990: 209) and in observing a storybook reading event ‘we can overhear a conversation about text’ (Golden and Gerber, 1990: 217).

All texts are normative, demanding that readers inhabit particular subject positions (Luke, 1995; Moje *et al.*, 2009). They shape and construct rather than reflect and describe. Children’s storybooks assume and promulgate particular versions of childhood and texts ‘construct and position an ideal reader’ (Luke, 1995: 18). Children’s stories do not reflect reality but promote a particular version of reality. This is part of their ideological function (Lewis, 2001). For example, in the book *Goodnight Goodnight*, read by one of the participating teachers in the study, the main character is visited by characters from other stories and nursery rhymes assumed to be familiar to young children. Such a text serves to essentialise a particular ‘cultural model’ (Gee, 2001b) of childhood common in Western society. In selecting that text for the read-aloud the teacher was positioning the children within that cultural model.

The foregoing discussion is not meant to deny the young reader/listener their agency and authorship. Work by Sipe (2002) shows how children can take over a text during storybook reading. What the child lives through during the reading depends on their life experience, attitude, and personal literary history. Children will bring different experiences to the event and will take different meanings from a text (Eeds and Wells, 1989) in the transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1991). While the text limits what potential meanings might be constructed, ‘it is the delicate balance between the two – the text itself and the interpretations, images, and memories evoked in the reader by it – that produces the aesthetic object’ (Eeds and Wells, 1989: 5).

2.7.5 Discourse Interactional Patterns during Storybook Reading

Because storybook reading is a social activity it is also much more than a mere oral rendering of the text. Talking about the text is an integral part of the event (Martinez and Teale, 1993; Morrow *et al.*, 1990; Teale *et al.*, 1989). As stated earlier, the nature and amount of verbal interaction surrounding the texts being read are critical to promoting literacy development (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1982; McKeown and Beck, 2006; Morrow, 1988; Morrow and Smith, 1990; Morrow *et al.*, 1990; Tabors and Snow, 2001). The format used when reading stories may impact on children's ability to comprehend texts (Morrow, 1984).

The patterns of social interaction occurring during storybook reading seem to be related to the age of the child, the child's previous experience with storybook reading, the type of text being read as well as the child's familiarity with the story. The content of a story also influences the topics that teachers focus on during read-alouds. Indeed story content receives more attention than other story elements such as setting, initiating event, attempt etc. (Martinez and Teale, 1993). Adult interactive behaviours such as questioning, scaffolding dialogue and responses, providing and extending information, developing discussions, sharing personal responses, and relating story themes and concepts to life experiences all affect the qualitative aspects of storybook reading (Morrow, 1988).

While much literature indicates that the interaction between the adult and children during storybook reading is critical to children's engagement with the story and response to it, some teachers rarely promote interaction between the children and the text (Roser and Martinez, 1985; Morrow, 1988). Much interaction during storybook reading events tends to focus on literal aspects of text (Almasi, 1995) as children are subjected to 'gentle inquisitions' about the text being read to ensure their interpretations match those of the teacher (Eeds and Wells, 1989). Fostering critical reflection that encourages children to

construct considered responses and defend their interpretations, or to alter their interpretations when confronted with conflicting evidence from the text or from their interpretive community is less frequent. Consequently children have difficulty examining texts from different perspectives (Almasi, 1995).

Interestingly, Almasi (1995) found that fourth-grade children in peer-led groups were significantly better at recognising and resolving episodes of conflict than their peers in teacher-led groups. The author concluded that 'decentralized participation structures produced discussions that were richer and more complex than discussions that were centralized, resulting in internalization of the cognitive processes associated with engaged reading' (Almasi, 1995: 315).

Research by Morrow, O'Connor & Smith (1990) suggests that different instructional approaches will most likely lead to different patterns of development both cognitively and affectively. A survey in nursery schools and kindergartens by Morrow (1982) (cited in Morrow, 1984) revealed that teachers rarely facilitated discussions during story time. Teachers' questions tended to focus on eliciting story details. They rarely posed questions about the structural elements of a story or questions that elicited interpretive or critical thinking.

More recently based on their observations of kindergarten and first-grade teachers, McKeown and Beck (2006) report that many teachers read books from beginning to end with little or no input from the children. Any interaction that occurred revolved around simple questions to elicit ideas from texts that had just been read. Post-reading discussions focused on affective and evaluative questioning and text-to-self connections. Very little emphasis was placed on ascertaining to what extent the children had understood the story events and ideas. Based on such evidence it would appear that many teachers tend to focus on what Rosenblatt (1991) has described as efferent reading. McKeown and Beck (2006)

developed an approach to read-alouds called Text Talk to scaffold children's abilities to construct meaning by interacting with story ideas and events, and to enhance children's language development. In classes where teachers used Text Talk throughout the year the complexity of children's responses increased gradually (McKeown and Beck, 2006).

McKeown and Beck (2006) note that children often draw on their prior knowledge when responding to teachers' questions about text even when such knowledge is irrelevant. The authors surmise that it is sometimes easier for children to access their prior knowledge than to focus on newly presented decontextualized information about events and characters. Children also draw on knowledge established during previous discussions as it is more accessible to them. Very often children's responses are text based but do not address fully the question or they may not make explicit connections between information in the story and their responses. When this happens it is important to prompt the children to elaborate and clarify their responses. Doing so will help children articulate their ideas more clearly and can also promote the comprehension of other children who may not have fully understood the text (McKeown and Beck, 2006).

However, the authors found that teachers frequently reacted to children's incomplete responses by providing the information themselves. Such a strategy may be less effective than enabling the children to articulate the ideas themselves as 'a major purpose of read-aloud discussion is to develop children's ability to make sense of and respond to decontextualized language' (McKeown and Beck, 2006: 287). A move to interactions that are more conversational in pattern changes the function of the teacher's response from evaluation of the accuracy of the child's response to a consideration of the meaning of the response (McKeown and Beck, 2006).

Teachers need to 'skillfully deal with responses, aiming to get children to explain, elaborate, and connect their ideas' (McKeown and Beck, 2006: 293). This can be a

difficult task when children are listening to stories in their L1 as their responses tend to be very sparse. Teachers need to pay careful attention to the content of children's responses because understanding the decontextualized language of written texts is a major source of learning and ultimately determines academic success (Feitelson *et al.*, 1993; McKeown and Beck, 2006). It is likely that constructing meaning from written texts will be even more challenging for children during storybook reading events in L2.

Work by Morrow (1988) shows that very young children are capable of sophisticated responses to stories. In her study 4-year-olds attending urban day-care centres demonstrated that they were capable of interpretive responses including prediction, association, and elaboration. The foregoing discussion highlights the need for teachers to facilitate interpretive discussions as well as focusing on the mechanics of reading and on literal meanings.

2.7.5.1 Teachers' Instructional Strategies during Storybook Reading

Martinez and Teale (1993) investigated the storybook reading styles of six kindergarten teachers, all of whom read the same four stories. In their analysis they focused on three aspects of the teachers' styles: a) the focus of the teacher talk during the events; b) the kinds of information the teachers and children spoke about during the events; and c) the teachers' instructional strategies. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that all six teachers had distinctive storybook reading styles and each teacher's style was fairly consistent across all stories read. One teacher's style did lead to better story retelling by the children. This teacher focused on important story information before, during, and after reading and elicited responses from the pupils about story episodes.

In their investigation of storybook reading to four-year-olds in 25 preschools Dickinson and Smith (1994) found variations in interactional patterns that exhibited three

distinctive reading styles. The authors classified these styles as a) co-construction, where teachers and children engaged in extended, cognitively challenging talk about the text; b) didactic-interactional, when the teacher elicited factual answers to questions about the text and encouraged the children to reproduce parts of the text as choral responses; and c) performance-oriented, where the teacher performed the text with very little discussion during the reading but with extended post-reading discussion. The children in the performance-oriented classes made greater gains in vocabulary development than the children in the didactic-interactional classrooms. The researchers also found that in classrooms where there is more total talk, there is also more cognitively challenging talk by teachers and pupils. Their analyses revealed a strong correlation between vocabulary development and talk that is analytical in nature.

Martinez and Teale (1993) conclude that teachers' different reading styles may move their pupils along different pathways in literacy development. Similarly Green *et al.* (1986) found that the ways in which teachers and pupils interacted with texts to construct story reading resulted in different outcomes in the degree and nature of children's comprehension. Because children in kindergartens and first grade classrooms participate frequently in storybook events with the same teacher, then storybook reading is an important means by which children are initiated into ways of taking from text, and how to interact with stories. Over time children are likely to reflect and internalise the adult interactive behaviour as 'the discourse processing strategies, literary responses, and ways of constructing meaning that are consistently modelled and scaffolded by the literate adult in the storybook interaction ... become ... internalized by the child' (Martinez and Teale, 1993: 178).

2.7.5.2 Children's Engagement with Stories

A study by Morrow *et al.* (1990) found that involving children actively in the process of story reading promotes comprehension of narrative and enhances a sense of story structure. Sipe (2002) focused on young children's oral responses during interactive read-alouds of picture storybooks. He interprets these oral responses as 'expressive, performative engagement' (Sipe, 2002: 476). Children demonstrate their performative engagement with words and physical actions as they become active participants in the storybook reading event. He developed a typology of expressive engagement responses comprising five conceptual categories.

1. Spontaneous *dramatising* of the story with both verbal and nonverbal expressions.
2. *Talking back* to the story and characters.
3. *Critiquing/controlling* where the children as authors suggest alternative plots, settings, and characters.
4. *Inserting* themselves or their friends in the story.
5. *Taking over* the text and manipulating it for one's own purpose. This form of response is usually quite humorous and subversive.

Sipe (2002) suggests that the five categories lie along a continuum where the degree of participation gradually increases as children's responses increasingly dominate and become increasingly 'carnavalesque' until they wrest control from the teacher. At this point of the continuum 'stories function as merely incidental tools for children's performances' (Sipe, 2002: 479). While it is likely that teachers will view 'taking over' as inappropriate and off-task, Sipe (2002: 482) suggests that 'taking over the text is engagement at a high level of creativity, when children feel at ease and empowered in the context of a classroom read-aloud'.

Just as fairy tales through their enchantment enable children to overcome psychological problems by allowing them to compensate in fantasy for their real or imagined shortcomings (Bettelheim, 1979), encouraging children to talk back and take over helps them to confront 'the problems and opportunities of life in new, creative ways'

thus ‘forging strong links between stories and children’s lives’ leading to a deeper understanding of the story (Sipe, 2002: 482).

2.7.6 Storybook Reading in L2

Children’s literature, including folktales can provide L2 learners with interesting, meaningful, comprehensible language input through familiar stories written in language that is slightly in advance of learners’ current levels. Stories already familiar to children in their L1 can activate children’s prior knowledge. This helps to reduce anxiety and improve self-confidence and motivation, factors associated with learners’ affective filters, thus enabling children to process input more effectively. Reading aloud provides pupils with opportunities to listen, speak, and write in the target language in purposeful, authentic contexts and promotes language acquisition through communication, social interaction, and risk taking in a supportive environment (Morrow and Gambrell, 2001).

Mhic Mhathúna (2003) discusses some of the challenges surrounding storybook reading in L2. As noted earlier, written language is denser lexically than spoken language. Young L2 learners will more than likely have very limited lexical knowledge of a range of both familiar and unfamiliar items and experiences thus making text comprehension more difficult. Other factors such as syntax, complexity of sentence structure, story line and age suitability must also be considered (Romney *et al.*, 1988). Because books present decontextualized language, the child must be more active in processing his/her language than in everyday oral interactions. While this is true for L1, it is more so for L2. And although the child can use pictorial clues as well as the voice and actions of the adult reader, nevertheless ‘there is still a lot of cognitively challenging work to be done if he/she is to understand and enjoy the story’ (Mhic Mhathúna, 2003: 142). It is not surprising then that Hickey (1997, 1999) reports that although *stiúrthóirí* (Irish language preschool

leaders) in *naíonraí* (Irish language preschools) both within and without the Gaeltacht value story reading as a language enriching experience, approximately 50% of them do not read stories to the children on a daily basis.

Tabors and Snow (2001) note that much evidence suggests that a child's lexical knowledge is a good indicator of their general language knowledge. But for young bilinguals their vocabulary knowledge can be somewhat restricted in both languages. Consequently teachers of young bilinguals need to work on expanding bilinguals' vocabulary in both languages. And because vocabulary knowledge is a very good predictor of reading ability, any limitations on a bilingual child's vocabulary knowledge may have implications for literacy development (Tabors and Snow, 2001).

Feitelson *et al.* (1993) conducted an interesting study of the effects of listening to story reading on aspects of literacy acquisition among Arab kindergarten children. The context of their study is interesting because while the children all spoke a local vernacular (Aamiyya), literacy development was in literary Arabic (FusHa). In their study the children in the experimental group participated in daily story reading events whereas the children in the control group followed a Ministry of Education programme to enhance productive language skills. Posttest measures of listening comprehension and picture-storytelling revealed that the children in the experimental classes outperformed the control group on measures of comprehension and active use of language. Their study along with previous work by some of the authors with kindergartners who spoke Hebrew indicated that listening to stories for young children promotes language acquisition and children can acquire a second language register in school without their mother tongue being stigmatized or replaced.

Romney *et al.* (1988) examined the effects of reading aloud in French to Grade 2 immersion children on their second language acquisition. Their results showed that reading

aloud to the children for thirty minutes each day for twelve weeks was clearly beneficial. The children in the experimental group made clear gains in their receptive vocabulary, free recall, and ability to communicate compared with the control group. They did not improve their reading comprehension significantly relative to the control group. The authors speculate that this was because the reading test was possibly too difficult for the children. Research by Elley and Mangubhai (1983) demonstrated rapid second language growth by 9-11-year-old elementary school English language learners in eight rural Fijian schools when they were exposed to many storybooks through 'book floods'. The pupils who were exposed to many high-interest illustrated storybooks made significant gains in reading and listening comprehension. In a study of literacy acquisition in Gaelic-medium schools in Scotland, Pollock (2006) found that cultural and critical literacy could be introduced in the early stages of literacy acquisition but functional literacy usually took precedence.

2.7.7 Storybook Reading in Irish

The Irish language curriculum recommends reading Irish stories to children, including fairy tales, as a prerequisite to literacy development because stories provide rich language input and help develop children's communicative competence in Irish. Stories also contribute to children's cognitive and emotional development (DES, 1999).

Máire Mhic Mhathúna (2003, 2008, 2010) has examined the value of reading Irish stories to 4- to 5-year olds in an Irish-language preschool. Her work focuses on personal and linguistic development as well as possible connections between story-telling sessions and key factors in second language acquisition for young children in a preschool setting. She found that repeated readings increase levels of pupil participation, and promote language acquisition and text-to-self connections (Mhic Mhathúna, 2010). Similar to some of the teachers in the present study Mhic Mhathúna (2008, 2010) found that when the

stiúrthóirí read stories to the children in the *naíonra* they encouraged the children to participate by completing sentences with lexical items. In the process they frequently focused on vocabulary for naming objects, colours, and numbers, as well as vocabulary related to size and emotions.

Discussions around texts that involve children in analysing events and characters, predicting a story line, and helping children make text-to-self connections are cognitively challenging (Schickedanz, 1999, cited in Mhic Mhathúna, 2003). Mhic Mhathúna's (2003: 143) own research shows that 'children can recognise and follow the episodic nature of stories in a second language and indeed predict and move on to the next episode quickly, if the action palls'. They find it much more difficult to discuss the inner motives of characters and must reach a certain unspecified threshold language level in order to engage in such discussions (Mhic Mhathúna, 2003).

Children can also make connections between events in the story read in Irish and similar experiences in their own lives, under the teacher's guidance. Such guidance needs to be given in a supportive atmosphere where the child's thoughts and ideas are valued as much as how they are conveyed (Mhic Mhathúna, 2003, 2008, 2010). This necessitates the teacher's willingness to accept the child's contribution in English and then 'scaffolding the situation so that the child can contribute a word or a phrase in Irish, and then following on with a reply in Irish at a level that the child can understand' (Mhic Mhathúna, 2003: 143). Such L2 input is likely to be very effective as it occurs when the child is actively engaged in the lesson (Mhic Mhathúna, 2010).

Mhic Mhathúna's (2003, 2008) work shows that children can gain much from listening to stories in Irish, not least in terms of their developing language ability. The children in the Irish preschool were able to understand much of the language in the stories when accompanied by visual aids and other support. They used their limited knowledge of

Irish to relate to the story, initiated text-to-self connections, demonstrated an understanding of story structure and showed empathy with the story characters. The process was facilitated by repeated readings of favourite stories that guaranteed regular comprehensible input enabling the children to build on their understanding of the stories and the language.

2.8 The Enchantment of Fairy Tales

2.8.1 Introduction

The fairy tale has been a dynamic part of the historical socialization process for millennia. The traditional fairy tale ‘is a *literary* appropriation of the older folk tale’ and reproduces some ‘*folkloric* features’ (Bacchilega, 1997: 3) (emphases in the original). Stylistically Bacchilega (1997: 3) characterises the fairy tale as ‘a “borderline” or transitional genre’ that contains ‘traces of orality, folkloric tradition, and socio-cultural performance’ even when edited as children’s literature.

2.8.2 The Socio-Historical Context of Fairy Tales

In interpreting fairy tales from a socio-historical perspective Zipes (1979) notes that fairy tales have been in existence as *oral folk tales* for millennia and first became *literary fairy tales* towards the end of the seventeenth century. Both the oral and literary traditions have endured to this day but the roles they play differ from their function in the past. Originally the folk tale was an oral narrative form told by gifted nomadic storytellers with audience participation. Zipes (1979) notes that these oral narratives were not conceived originally for children nor did they spring from a supernatural realm. The content of the tales reflected the social order of a given historical era and symbolised the utopian aspirations of the common people. They addressed issues of exploitation, hunger, and injustice, issues all too familiar to the lower classes in pre-capitalist societies (Zipes, 1979).

Down through the centuries the oral tales underwent many mutations as each historical epoch and each community altered them to reflect the prevailing social conditions and as narrators with the active participation of their audiences added and deleted elements to make them more meaningful to themselves and their listeners (Bettelheim, 1976; Zipes, 1979). Perhaps the most salient transformation was the literary appropriation of the folk tale by the aristocratic and bourgeois writers of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries to create the fairy tale as we know it. In the process the fairy tale came to reflect ‘a change in values and ideological conflicts in the transitional period from feudalism to early capitalism’ (Zipes, 1979: 7). With this transformation the narrative was no longer responsive to the intended audience but served an instrumental purpose by seeking to manipulate its audience in accordance with the vested interests of the state. In the process of transformation the original ideology and political content of the tales was obscured (Zipes, 1979).

2.8.3 Psychoanalytic Interpretations of Fairy Tales

Bettelheim (1976) explores the meaning of fairy tales from a psychoanalytic perspective but acknowledges that other interpretations are equally valid. For Bettelheim fairy tales are fictions that provide young children aged four to six years with a moral education that helps them come to terms with the emotional turmoil and insecurities they are experiencing. In addressing universal human dilemmas, particularly those problems which preoccupy a child’s mind, fairy tales communicate with the child’s budding ego and foster its development in a way that the child unconsciously comprehends. The imagery of fairy tales helps children to achieve ‘a more mature consciousness to civilize the chaotic pressures of their unconscious’ (Bettelheim, 1976: 23).

Young children have to overcome such psychological problems as narcissistic disappointments, sibling rivalries, and oedipal dilemmas. They must let go of their dependencies, develop a sense of self-worth, and a sense of morality. The young child achieves this by fantasising in daydreams not through rational understanding. Fairy tales have unparalleled potential as they ‘offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own’ (Bettelheim, 1976: 7). A story’s enchanted quality depends to a large extent on the child not knowing why it delights him so much. Adult explanations can deprive the child of the story’s potential to empower the child to overcome his/her anxieties. Such stories enable children to ‘work through unconscious pressures in fantasy’ as inner processes are depicted in visual imagery (Bettelheim, 1976: 63). For example, through the story Hansel and Gretel the child learns to overcome separation anxiety, not by holding on to his/her primary carer forever, but by going out into the world.

‘The fairy tale is future-oriented and guides the child – in terms he can understand in both his conscious and his unconscious mind – to relinquish his infantile dependency wishes and achieve a more satisfying independent existence’ (Bettelheim, 1976: 11). So from a Vygotskian perspective it could be said that the fairy tale is within the child’s emotional and psychological zone of proximal development. Through fairy tales the child can compensate in fantasy for his/her own real or imagined shortcomings and satisfy his/her most grandiose wishes. After the age of about five years, the age when fairy tales become truly meaningful, no normal child will view such stories as representative of external reality (Bettelheim, 1976).

The true meaning of a fairy tale is best appreciated and its enchantment is best experienced in the story’s original form (Bettelheim, 1976; DES, 1999). While “true” stories about the “real” world inform but fail to enrich the child’s life, they are still

important for the child's development. But 'when realistic stories are combined with ample and psychologically correct exposure to fairy tales, then the child receives information which speaks to both parts of his budding personality – the rational and the emotional' (Bettelheim, 1976: 54).

2.8.4 Telling Fairy Tales to Children

The telling of a fairy tale is most effective when it becomes an interpersonal event shaped by the participants as equal partners in the event. The act of reading or listening to a fairy tale separates the child from the external world as he/she enters the world of fantasy and repressed primal experiences. Fairy tales embody wish fulfilments. If the child becomes immersed in the story by being encouraged to talk about it, to act it out, and to bring his/her own personal associations to it, then the story becomes emotionally and intellectually rewarding for the child (Bettelheim, 1976).

2.8.5 Hansel and Gretel

In the story Hansel and Gretel it is the female characters who are the dominant forces. The stepmother who persuades her husband to abandon his children and the wicked witch who nurtures them with the intention of cannibalising them are the inimical forces. In contrast Gretel does not become evil but learns self-reliance and uses her chthonic powers to ensure their safe passage across the river showing that women can be rescuers as well as destroyers (Bettelheim, 1976) and essentialising the female gender role as nurturer and carer.

Viewed from a psychoanalytical perspective the story expresses a child's fear of abandonment. Through the story children learn to confront separation anxiety, anxieties about being devoured, and fear of starvation. Consequently this fairy tale is likely to have

its most beneficial impact for a young child about to take his/her first steps out into the world, perhaps aged four or five years. But these anxieties are not restricted to a particular developmental stage as such fears are encountered unconsciously at all ages. Therefore, the story has meaning and gives solace to older children as well.

Hansel and Gretel return home safely more mature, independent, and self-reliant. They are now ready to rely on their own intelligence and initiative to solve their problems. This is one of many fairy tales where two siblings cooperate and through their combined efforts rescue each other. 'These stories direct the child toward transcending his immature dependence on his parents and reaching the next higher stage of development: cherishing also the support of age mates' (Bettelheim, 1976: 166).

2.9 Chapter Summary

A review of the literature revealed that reading is both a cognitive and a social process. Children acquire culturally appropriate ways of taking from texts moving from 'legitimate peripheral participation' to 'full participation' under the guidance of literate adults in communities of practice. In classrooms teachers and pupils co-construct their own models, understandings, and definitions of literacy through repeated participation in literacy events, including storybook reading events. The literacy practices constructed in schools may support or constrain how children approach literacy in other contexts. The present study aims to examine literacy practices in all-Irish schools, to learn about the definitions of literacy being constructed by teachers and pupils, and to find out how such literacy practices align with children's experiences with books in other contexts.

The literacy models teachers and pupils in all-Irish schools construct are shaped by the local norms of the school secondary Discourse of immersion education which is a non-dominant Discourse in the wider society. Questions arise therefore regarding the nature of

the literacy practices children in all-Irish schools experience in L1 and L2 and how they are shaped by local norms and by the participants themselves. If different literacy practices promote different cognitive skills, then we need to learn about the possible effects of different literacy practices privileged by all-Irish schools. In particular it would be important to examine how closely aligned literacy practices in L1 and L2 might be in all-Irish schools and to determine what ways of taking from texts children experience in each language.

Where a child's primary Discourse is not aligned with the school-based Discourse teachers will need to build bridges between a child's home culture and the school culture if school literacy practices and Discourses are to resonate with the child's primary sense of self. Students whose primary Discourses are affirmed through classroom interactions that reflect collaborative power relations will have the confidence and motivation to succeed academically. Therefore, we need to know how all-Irish schools acknowledge and affirm children's primary Discourses as the children acquire the school immersion Discourse.

A child's identity as a reader is a performative accomplishment achieved through the stylized repetition of literacy events over time. Learning to do storybook reading is an intersubjective process wherein participants both act and are acted upon. Children internalise discourse processing strategies, ways of constructing meaning from texts, and literary responses that are repeatedly modelled by teachers. Children's agency in the process is constrained by the historical conventions of storybook reading within the group.

What propels bilingual children's linguistic, cognitive, and academic development is the extent to which the children are 'enabled to invest their identities fully in the learning process' (Cummins, 1996/2001: 90-91). The negotiation of identity is fundamental to literacy and biliteracy development (Cummins, 1996/2001; McCarthy, 2001). It would be important therefore, to investigate how children's identities as bilinguals and as bilingual

readers in all-Irish schools are assumed, imposed, or negotiated and what agency children are afforded in the process. We need also to learn about children's perceptions of themselves as bilinguals and bilingual readers and what the implications might be for their literacy development.

The specific research questions developed from the foregoing review of the literature are presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

‘Research in education is a disciplined attempt to address questions or solve problems through the collection and analysis of primary data for the purpose of description, explanation, generalization and prediction.’
(Anderson, 1990: 4)

The present chapter outlines the research methods used to seek answers to the research questions presented below. The research questions were developed inductively from the literature review as well as from my own professional experiences as an educator and my interest in the phenomenon. I was aware, as a former teacher in an all-Irish school, that when presented with a choice between selecting an Irish book or an English book for leisure reading children would invariably opt for the latter. While we understood this was probably related to the children’s competence in the language as well as the much greater and more attractive range of books available in English, I also wondered if the approaches to reading in all-Irish schools were inadvertently contributing to children’s behaviours. Consequently I became interested in learning about literacy practices in all-Irish schools. During the course of the study I have refined my research questions to focus primarily on teachers’ and pupils’ inter-actions during storybook reading events in the hope of shedding light on the broader issue of how literacy events and literacy practices are shaped by local norms and by the participants in all-Irish schools.

Research Questions

Young children and their teachers participating in literacy events in Irish and English in all-Irish immersion schools:

- 1. In what ways are storybook reading events in Irish and English shaped by local norms?*
- 2. In what ways are storybook reading events similar and different in the two languages?*

3. *What factors impact on children's attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in Irish?*
4. *In what ways do teachers' convictions about language and literacy development mediate their approaches to storybook reading events?*
5. *What might the implications of the findings be for pedagogy and research?*

One of the methodological implications of operating within a constructivist research paradigm is that I was not able to define my research questions definitively at the outset of the study. The questions changed and evolved during the course of the study (Mertens, 2010) as the process of recontextualizing, reinterpreting, and redefining the research questions continued until I had reached a satisfactory interpretation of the data (Krippendorff, 2004).

Initially when I entered the field, because of my own background and my limited knowledge of the subject area, I was operating within a cognitive-psychological paradigm of reading. This model of reading framed my observations which were revealing that teachers' approaches to reading instruction in L2 were consistent with L1 theoretical models of reading. Teachers devoted much time to skills-based instruction and rather less time to literature-based instruction. The knowledge I was constructing from my reading of the literature brought about a change in the focus of my observations in an attempt to learn more about the culturally specific ways of interpreting texts the children were experiencing in the all-Irish school context. In Chapter 2 the local learning context as a social space emerged as an important determinant of children's literacy development. This eventually led to my framing of Research Question 1 *In what ways are storybook reading events in Irish and English shaped by local norms?*

The bulk of the research into literacy practices in elementary education has tended to look at literacy practices in one language only. The sociolinguistic context of all-Irish schools presented a novel context in which to research literacy practices in a bilingual

context. Much research in immersion contexts, including Cummins's Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1980, in Baker & Hornberger, 2001) indicates that children can transfer literacy skills from L2 to L1 and from L1 to L2. Consequently, I became interested in finding out if children in all-Irish schools were learning different ways of taking from texts in L1 and L2, or if literacy practices established in one language were being transferred to the other language, or if there would be a melding of literacy practices. I formulated Research Question 2 *In what ways are storybook reading events similar and different in the two languages?* because documenting similarities and differences between literacy practices in L1 and L2 would shed light on these issues and enrich our understanding of the complexity of literacy events in immersion contexts.

In a storybook reading event the teachers and children are the main social actors along with the texts being read. When transcribing and analysing the video-recordings of the storybook reading events, my attention was being drawn continually to the participants' use of language and their intended meanings. In adopting a phenomenological approach I was attempting to understand the motives underlying the teachers' and children's language and actions. As I was acting on the data the data were also acting on me as part of the reflexive process of the research. I was drawn to analysing the ways in which the participants were using their L1 and L2 linguistic resources to inter-act with each other and with the text. All this time it was becoming more and more evident to me that I should try to learn more about the participants and the experiences and resources they were bringing to the literacy events. Therefore, I set in motion a process that led to the teacher and pupil interviews.

When I interviewed the children I was struck by the sharp contrasts in attitudes to Irish and to reading in Irish among them. This led to the formulation of Research Question 3 above *What factors impact on children's attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in*

Irish? I then analysed the interview transcripts in an attempt to answer this question. When I interviewed the teachers their own convictions about language and literacy development within an immersion context emerged as a salient topic. Equipped with this knowledge I formulated Research Question 4 *In what ways do teachers' convictions about language and literacy development mediate their approaches to storybook reading events?* and revisited the data from the literacy events in an attempt to understand better the intended meanings inherent in their actions and their use of language. So Research Questions 3 and 4 emerged from the data through a process of reflexivity and were framed in an attempt to illuminate further data analysis and deepen my understanding of the participants' intentionalities and my understanding of the literacy events.

Educational research should not just be research *about* education. It should also be research *for* education. Bronfenbrenner (1979: 54) has noted the importance for science and public policy of documenting the types of 'molar activities' occurring in classrooms, a literacy event being one example of such activities. And education is 'an art that can be *informed* by ... the outcomes of educational inquiry' (Biesta and Burbules, 2003: 78) (*italics in the original*). It was deemed important therefore, to include Research Question 5, *What might the implications of the findings be for pedagogy and research?* An examination of literacy events and literacy practices in all-Irish schools has the potential to inform practice and prompt further research not just in all-Irish schools but also in other education immersion contexts. While it is unlikely that such small-scale research as presented in this dissertation will impact on Irish-medium education policy, the findings do have the potential to inform teacher education which receives substantial public funding in the Republic of Ireland.

Chapter 3 aims to build on the theory of knowledge discussed in Chapter 2. It also aims to provide assurances that appropriate procedures were followed. The personal and

professional roles I brought to my role as researcher had implications for a number of aspects of the research process; the research questions in the first instance and subsequently the boundaries I imposed on the research. My own underlying assumptions about the focus of the research and the knowledge I gleaned from the review of the literature had implications for the research methods employed and the analysis of the data. These issues are elaborated on throughout the chapter.

Following this introductory section the conceptual framework underpinning the research methodology is outlined. The methodologies used including, micro-ethnography and case study are discussed. The research settings, the manner in which access was negotiated, and the criteria used to select the focal children are described. Data collection instruments including observation, video-recordings, and interviews are described in some detail as are approaches to data management, transcriptions, and data analysis. Other issues addressed include validity and reliability, research ethics, and reflexivity.

3.2 Theoretical Framework for the Study

3.2.1 Qualitative Inquiry

A flexible, dynamic and fluid methodology was required and so I considered that a qualitative, interpretive approach, and more specifically a phenomenological approach, best suited the study. A phenomenological approach was considered particularly suitable in that it is an approach seeking to get below how people describe their experience to the structures that underlie these experiences.

In the last few decades qualitative approaches to social science research, including language and literacy studies, have gained scientific credibility (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). The key principles of qualitative research methods are that they are holistic, inductive, and naturalistic (Rudestam and Newton, 2001). The whole is greater

than the sum of the parts, general patterns can be inferred from specific observations, and phenomena can be understood in their natural state.

In designing a qualitative study I am locating myself within the constructivist research paradigm. I take the view that there are multiple realities that are time and context dependent and that are socially constructed by participants as they inter-act with each other. This means that perceptions of reality may change during the course of the research (Mertens, 2010; Schwandt, 2000). As a qualitative researcher I am taking ‘an emic, idiographic, case-based position’ by examining the specifics of certain cases (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 10) in an attempt to understand the world from the perspectives of the participants (Hatch, 2002; Mertens, 2010; Schwandt, 2000) and to understand the many social constructions of knowledge and meaning (Mertens, 2010) during literacy events within all-Irish school settings. I am emphasising how knowledge is socially constructed and how the context shapes the inquiry, as well as my relationship as researcher to the other participants and to the phenomenon of literacy events being studied (Gibbs, 2002; Mertens, 2010). The methodological approach, therefore, is consistent with the view of knowledge as being socially constructed and the view of reading as a social process outlined in Chapter 2. The aim is to produce a rich description of the events being studied (Mertens, 2010).

Qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interpretive practices to understand phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The approach used in the present study combined case study with micro-ethnography and strategies used to gather data included observation, in-depth interviewing, and video recording. The report aims to produce a detailed description of how the participants make sense of each other and their environment through symbols (spoken and written language), rituals (storybook reading events), social structures (all-Irish schools) and social roles (as teachers and pupils) (Berg,

2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Contrary to quantitative researchers who seek to establish a universal theory of human and social behaviour, for me theories are ‘sets of meanings which yield insight and understanding of people’s behaviour’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 37). I interpret people’s actions and inter-actions in the context of participants’ shared experiences. My findings and my interpretations are grounded in the empirical evidence of the data.

3.2.2 Four Dimensions of Research Inquiry: Epistemologies, Theories, Approaches and Strategies

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) outline four inter-related dimensions of research inquiry: (a) epistemologies, (b) theories, (c) approaches, and (d) strategies. I aim to establish the meaning and relevance of these four dimensions for my research because in designing and carrying out research ‘one should work hard to develop principled alignments between and among epistemological positions, relevant theoretical frameworks, approaches to research, and strategies for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 13).

Epistemologies are the philosophical theories of knowledge and how people come to know. Objectivism and constructionism are two examples of contrasting epistemologies. Constructionists hold that meaning is not discovered but is constructed through interaction with an objective reality (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). We do not have access to an independent reality (Hammersley, 1990/1994). Rather we construct the material, social, and psychic worlds we inhabit (Gibbs, 2002). Meaning will be constructed differently depending on the perspective taken by a culture, a social group or an individual. Thus multiple realities exist and a variety of reasonable meanings could be ascribed to any process (Hatch, 2002; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). And reality is temporal, it is

‘dynamic and self-evolving’ (Dewey, 1903, cited in Biesta and Burbules, 2003). Therefore, each literacy event is unique and is accomplished in the moment. However, when literacy events are being constructed on a regular basis by the same participants, habits and rituals become embedded in the events and the participants come to expect certain behaviours from their co-participants. But the participants are also free to deviate from the norms and establish new rituals. Therefore, in presenting and interpreting data, anything I claim to know ‘is part of reality-in-change’ (Biesta and Burbules, 2003: 52).

In social research knowledge is taken to be actively constructed and culturally and historically grounded (Howe, 2001; Schwandt, 2000). Knowledge is also seen ‘as laden with moral and political values, and as serving certain interests and purposes’ (Howe, 2001: 202). Such a view of knowledge and meaning as ‘partial and perspectival’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 14) is consistent with the sociocultural perspective on knowledge discussed in Chapter 2 and with the pragmatist view of knowledge as emergent, situated, and provisional espoused by Biesta and Burbules (2003). As the focus in the present study is on the sociocultural dimensions of early literacy development, I am embracing a constructionist epistemology in designing a qualitative study. Gibbs (2002) suggests that the task of a qualitative researcher is to reflect as accurately as possible the observed constructed world. However, a constructivist approach is not an attempt to capture ‘a single reality’ but acknowledges ‘multiple realities and the multiple viewpoints within them’ (Charmaz, 2000: 523).

In outlining their pragmatist stance on knowledge, inquiry, and research Biesta and Burbules (2003) draw substantially on the writings of Dewey. Knowledge is the product of experience and action. ‘We only know the world as a result of our actions’ (Biesta and Burbules, 2003: 55). And as Vygotsky (1978) pointed out, we do not act directly on the world but our actions are mediated by the cultural tools available to us, the most important

of which is language. Therefore, we can only know the world through language (and other non-linguistic means of communication) because ‘reflection ... takes place by means of language’ (Biesta and Burbules, 2003: 55). For this reason I am privileging language over other means of communication when presenting and analysing data and focusing mainly but not exclusively on the participants’ social rather than material worlds (Gibbs, 2002).

Positivism and interpretivism are two contrasting, abstract social theories (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). Interpretivism, which is embedded in a constructionist epistemology, is a radical response to the inherent inconsistencies of positivism. Researchers espousing an interpretivist position attempt ‘to understand, interpret, and explain complex and highly contextualized social phenomena such as classroom cultures, avid readers, or peer group development and maintenance’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 17). Anti-positivists do not accept that human behaviour is governed by general laws or characterised by underlying regularities. As the social world can only be understood from the point of view of those individuals who are part of the action being investigated, my aim is to understand the research participants’ interpretations of their social worlds from their perspectives (Schwandt, 2000). ‘Social science is thus seen as a subjective rather than an objective undertaking, as a means of dealing with the direct experience of people in specific contexts’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 26).

A nomothetic approach aims to discover an external reality and is ‘characterized by procedures and methods designed to discover general laws’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 8). In adopting an idiographic approach I was seeking to understand how individuals create, modify, and interpret the world (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Micro-ethnography and case study were the approaches used for the research. Using an ethnographic approach is particularly suitable for ‘mapping the systems of meaning and practice that constitute a particular formation such as a classroom’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 18).

A pragmatic stance means that data collection methods are selected based on fitness for purpose (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). The research strategies used included video-recordings of literacy events, and gathering observational and interview data, strategies associated with qualitative research (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). These data collection instruments were considered to be the most adequate for the purposes of the research. The data were then transformed into linguistic form including both field notes and transcriptions. And qualitative analysis was used because it is particularly appropriate for analysing language and texts (Gibbs, 2002).

Many research studies combine inductive analysis with discourse analysis (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). Through inductive analysis themes emerging from interview and observational data were identified. Storybook reading events were analysed using discourse analysis which ‘is used to examine the “micro” patterns embodied in specific verbal-visual interactions (usually represented in transcripts) to understand both the forms and functions of these interactions and the ways they both index and sustain recurrent “macro” patterns’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 19) (emphases in the original). And in using discourse analysis to seek to understand how literacy events are co-constructed by participants, I was drawing on philosophical hermeneutics which holds that language has the potential to unlock meaning and truth (Schwandt, 2000).

A pragmatic stance holds that the knowledge resulting from the research is provisional because the conceptual outcome of inquiry is always context-dependent (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). It is based on my situated actions in the research sites described later in the chapter. Through my actions I have generated “working hypotheses” (Cronbach, 1975, cited in Merriam, 1998), or what Dewey called “warranted assertion” (Burbules and Biesta, 2003). Such “warranted assertions” are not a description of how the world is but a description of the relationship between my actions, the actions of the other research

participants, and their consequences (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). And hopefully, my provisional findings might help other educators to know more intelligently in their situations as they judge for themselves the extent to which the phenomenon under investigation and the conclusions drawn fit with their own situations, a process which Merriam (1998) calls ‘reader or user generalizability’. That is all I can claim.

3.2.3 Chronotopes of Qualitative Inquiry

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) have identified four *chronotopes* of inquiry that inform most qualitative research. The current study reflects *Chronotope 11, Reading and Interpretation*, which is grounded in a social constructionist epistemology, and aims to understand people and their language and literacy practices ‘within relevant contexts of interaction and communication’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 33), namely within literacy events in all-Irish immersion schools. Operating within a chronotope of *Reading and Interpretation* I espouse a linguistically mediated view of knowledge and meaning wherein both are constituted in and through language practices (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). I am studying literacy events, including storybook reading events, ‘in order to reveal and understand the contexts and ontologies that they index’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 34).

Within the chronotope of *Reading and Interpretation* language is seen as the most powerful means for constructing what is real and meaningful about the world. Individuals are constructed within the language and literacy practices of the speech communities to which they belong. Knowledge and understanding are the result of ongoing dialogue between the researcher and the research participants (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 36). Shirley Brice Heath’s (1983) study *Ways with Words* is grounded in this tradition. It is important to note that language always includes other means of communicating including

gestures, facial expressions, and prosody. While these other verbal and non-verbal features of communication are important they are not central to my analysis.

In focusing on the language used by teachers and pupils in the inter-actions during shared book experiences, I am drawing on symbolic interactionism which may be regarded as both a theoretical perspective and an approach to research (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). Meaning derives from social interaction, negotiation of definitions and role-taking (Berg, 2004). This helps me to see how individuals create the context, the Discourses, and the social orders, as well as how individuals are mediated in and through social interaction (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005). Thus I view individuals as dynamic and active as opposed to passive and determined (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

3.3 Ethnography and Micro-ethnography

Rooted in anthropology, ethnographic procedures have become commonplace in educational research in recent years (May, 1997). Although authors including Atkinson, *et al.*, (1999), Berg (2004), and Hammersley (1990/1994) have noted the fragmented and diverse nature of ethnography it would not be accurate to claim that the present study was a full-blown classroom ethnography. Rather, I was using an ethnographic approach by utilising research strategies most closely associated with ethnography, classroom ethnography (Watson-Gegeo, 1997) and micro-ethnography. Indeed, much ethnographic research does not conform to the standards of true ethnography but this is not necessarily a weakness.

As an ethnographer my aims are interpretive as I attempt to ascribe meaning to behaviour, try to share in the meanings of participants and then explain these meanings for readers by producing a rich, detailed description to recount the story of the research settings. A key feature of my interpretive and naturalistic ethnographic approach has been

to allow meaning to emerge from the data (May, 1997). As is consistent with an ethnographic approach the data came from natural as opposed to experimental classroom settings. Data collection was unstructured in the sense that a detailed, fixed plan was not being followed. The focus was on a very small number of groups and the analysis involves interpreting people's actions and inter-actions to represent their perspectives. The aim was to learn the culture of the participants, to experience their way of life and to explain their behaviour (Hamilton, 1999; Hammersley, 1990/1994).

Ethnography is very appropriate for studying small groups and for studying the nature of human behaviour, 'in particular its processual and meaning-laden character' (Hammersley, 1990/1994: 4). Ethnography can be a particularly useful method for studying children's worlds by affording them a more direct voice than through quantitative methods (Bragg, 2007). By working with small groups the aim was for depth rather than breadth and to draw theoretical inferences rather than making empirical generalisations (Hammersley, 1990/1994). I have also included full transcripts of literacy events, pupil interviews, and teacher interviews in the appendices for readers to interpret differently and draw their own conclusions.

The current study is micro-ethnographic in the sense that it focuses on the face-to-face interactions of participants during literacy lessons at specific points in time. A notable feature of a micro-ethnographic approach is the use of videotape. It is common practice among researchers interested in verbal and non-verbal communication to combine participant observation with video recording as the main data collection procedures so as to discover 'the linguistic rules that participants in certain settings use to construct meaning together' (Hatch, 2002: 21). I video recorded examples of group collaborative storybook reading. The inter-actions and discourse of the participants were then analysed in detail to identify underlying principles and concepts, with a view to understanding how these inter-

actions are jointly constructed by the participants as inter-actional accomplishments. In adopting a micro-ethnographic approach I was also examining the role context plays in the interpretation of speech and other communicative behaviour as well as how situated social identities are constructed during literacy events (Garcez, 1997).

Although ethnographic micro-analysis of interaction is labour intensive it is particularly suitable for investigating social interaction in face-to-face events because it generates detailed information on the speech and non-verbal behaviour of participants. It also entails continued revisitation of data

‘in a long process of reviewing the whole event numerous times, identifying its major constituent parts and the aspects of organization within them, then focusing on the actions of individuals and finally comparing instances of the phenomenon of interest across the research corpus’ (Garcez, 1997: 193).

This limits the amount of data that can be processed. Consequently, micro-ethnographies, including the present study, tend to be of a case-study nature (Garcez, 1997).

A micro-ethnographic approach to reading as a social process focuses on face-to-face local reading events and locates broader historical, social and institutional factors in local events and in the cultural and historical relationships of events to each other (Bloome, 1993: 103). Drawing on Erickson and Schultz (1977) Bloome (1993: 103) notes that a ‘fundamental construct underlying a microethnographic approach to reading as a social process is that *people act and react to each other*’ (italics in the original). Because it is people who are acting and reacting to each other and creating the context for each other, the basic unit of analysis is a group of people and not the individual. In acting people are strategic in what they do. And people react not just to previous events but they also react in anticipation of future actions. Actions and reactions are not necessarily linear but may occur simultaneously. Actions are not just individual because people can act and react to each other through sequences of actions. And people’s actions and reactions are both

linguistic and semiotic in nature (Bloome, 1993). The methodological implications for the micro-ethnographic study of reading as a social process are

‘(a) a detailed, thick description of how people act and react to each other, and the ways they use language (including written language) to act and react, and (b) an emic interpretation of what is happening in the event, moment by moment as the event evolves, and as what is happening in the event changes and is contested’ (Bloome, 1993: 103) (emphasis in the original).

3.4 Case Study

A micro-ethnographic case study approach was adopted for the research. While a case might be a person, a group, a programme, a policy, or an incident, fundamentally a case is a bounded, integrated system (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). Based on this characterisation of a case I am presenting the six storybook reading events as six cases. Therefore I am not using case study as a research strategy, as suggested by Yin (2003). Neither am I using it as a methodological approach, as suggested by Berg (2004). In line with Stake (2000), for me the case was about choosing what to study, not a methodological choice. For my micro-ethnographic case study I was observing the characteristics of storybook reading events, the purpose being ‘to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit’ (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 106).

Case study is particularly suitable when the focus of interest is a particular process (Merriam, 1998) such as storybook reading events. Choosing to study literacy events as cases was also guided by my own understanding of reading as a social process that is shaped by the context in which it occurs because, as Yin (2003) points out, case study can be particularly suitable in situations where it is not possible to separate a phenomenon and its variables from the context. Merriam (1998: 29) characterises qualitative case studies as being ‘particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic’. The current study is particularistic in the sense that each case is important because of what it reveals about the phenomenon of

storybook reading. It is descriptive because it enabled me to produce a ‘rich, thick description’ of the events. And it is heuristic in that it generates insights of the events for the reader. Focusing on qualitative case study reflected my interest in insight and interpretation as opposed to hypothesis testing (Merriam, 1998) and it helped me to reflect and revise my understandings of what was happening in the events (Stake, 2000).

Stake (2000) distinguishes between intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. The current study reflects instrumental case study but it was also collective in that it extended to several cases thus enabling cross-unit comparisons (Berg, 2004). It was instrumental in the sense that the primary focus was on the phenomenon of literacy events and the cases were of secondary interest. In examining how storybook reading events are constructed by the participants, the children were not of intrinsic interest. In other words I was interested in how the studied phenomenon was enacted in the cases (Dyson and Genishi, 2005). The cases were chosen and studied in depth to help me develop my understanding of my external interest (Stake, 2000). My overall intent is both descriptive and interpretive but not evaluative (Merriam, 1998).

One disadvantage associated with case studies is generalizability (Faltis, 1997). Both Stake (2000) and Faltis (1997) argue that generalization should not be a goal of all interpretive research. Readers can make their own generalizations based on the evidence presented in the report and the particulars of the cases. Each case is unique but within each case there may be features and events that readers can find in other similar settings (Faltis, 1997). Stake (2000) calls such processes *naturalistic generalizations*. I am aiming for ‘analytic generalisation’, which is generalisation about the phenomenon being studied, as opposed to statistical generalisation (Yin, 2003). ‘Case studies are of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability’ (Stake, 2000: 448). Because I studied six cases any analytic

conclusions I draw will be more powerful than those drawn from a single-case study. And because the contexts of the cases differ to some extent, this can increase the external generalizability of any common conclusions arrived at (Yin, 2003).

3.5 The Research Settings

During the course of the study I gathered data in three classrooms in two all-Irish schools located in urban areas in Munster. No other information regarding geographical location is included to ensure non-traceability. Most all-Irish schools tend to be located in urban areas because such areas have the critical mass of parents necessary to create a demand for such schools. Therefore, the two participating schools would be typical of most all-Irish schools in many respects. Both schools are co-educational and were originally founded by groups of parents who sought Irish-medium education for their children. The schools espouse a catholic ethos and are both under the patronage of *An Foras Pátrúnachta*. Both schools follow an early total immersion model as defined by Baker (1996). Formal English language arts are introduced for 2.5 hours per week at the beginning of the second term in Senior Infants (Year 2 of schooling). Following the children's first two years in school, English is taught as a subject for approximately 3.5 hours, or 12.5% of the school week.

Both schools are located in English speaking urban districts. Like all primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, Boards of Management are in place to discharge most responsibilities in relation to the day-to-day running of the schools, including recruitment of staff and upkeep of the premises. There are eight single-grade classes in both schools covering the full range of Irish primary education from Junior Infants (5-year-olds) to Sixth Class (12-year-olds). As well as eight class teachers and an administrative principal, the schools also employ learning support teachers, classroom assistants, and secretaries.

The schools are funded primarily by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) but are also heavily dependent on fundraising by parents to cover extra costs incurred. The vast majority of pupils in both schools speak English as a first language. Irish is a very low status language in the local communities. Consequently, most pupils attending the schools would have little or no contact with Irish before commencing school, apart from attending a *naíonra* perhaps.

When the study commenced both schools were following an early total immersion model as defined by Baker (1996). All subjects, except English, were taught through the medium of Irish for the duration of the children's primary schooling. Initially formal literacy instruction was exclusively in Irish. Some English language arts such as songs, rhymes and story reading were introduced informally during the third term of Junior Infants (Year 1 of schooling). Formal literacy instruction in English commenced during the second term in Senior Infants (Year 2 of schooling). During the fourth year of the study the schools amended their policies to allow for formal English language arts, including formal literacy instruction in English, to be introduced during the second term of Junior Infants. The policy change was implemented to comply with a directive from the DES (Circular 0044/2007) instructing all-Irish schools and Gaeltacht schools to introduce formal English language arts by the beginning of the third term of Junior Infants. The directive was subsequently withdrawn in 2010 and both schools reverted to the early total immersion model.

There was a strong sense of community in both schools where all children were the collective responsibility of the teaching and ancillary staff. Relationships between pupils and staff were based on mutual respect. The dynamic, progressive management style in both schools was supported by teachers. Teachers were clearly focused on children's academic achievement and cognitive development. Academic achievement was measured

by standardised tests in Irish, English, and mathematics which were administered at the recommended intervals. Pupil report cards were filled out annually and were available to parents and other teachers. Teachers and parents also provided a range of extra-curricular activities for the children, some on a voluntary basis. There was a strong emphasis in the schools on all aspects of Irish culture including Irish dancing, Irish music, and Irish national sports including hurling, camogie, and gaelic football. However, other sports such as rugby, basketball, and athletics were not neglected. Every year pupils in senior classes visited a Gaeltacht area as well as travelling abroad to visit other immersion schools.

There was a strong emphasis on the use of ICT by both pupils and teachers in the schools. Pupils in all classes participated in many local and national competitions for sport and the visual and performing arts, including Irish language competitions. Behaviour and use of Irish in the playground were carefully monitored and offending pupils were referred to the principals for sanctions to be enacted. Pupils were expected to wear the school uniform or school tracksuit at all times. The schools forged strong partnerships with parents through fundraising activities, shared reading with younger pupils, and the publication of monthly newsletters. Pupils took home Irish and English books for leisure reading every week. Parents read the books with the youngest pupils. Gradually the pupils progressed towards reading for their parents and finally to independent reading.

3.5.1 School A

School A has been in existence since 1990 but the teachers and pupils are still housed in temporary, rented accommodation, having failed to gain approval from the DES to build a permanent school. One class in the school (Class A) participated in the study for the duration of the children's first four years in school.

For the duration of the study the classes in School A were housed in two separate buildings in close proximity to each other and located in an urban centre surrounded by concrete and the noise of traffic. Most classes were located in an old listed building that was once used as a courthouse. Having been vacant for a number of years the building was refurbished extensively to accommodate the all-Irish school. However, the rooms were very small and poorly ventilated. The school yard was also very small. Every effort was made to brighten and decorate the internal spaces with children's artwork and project work. Parents and teachers have been campaigning continually but unsuccessfully to secure approval from the DES to build a new school.

The infant classes, including Class A, were housed in a nearby hall that was used throughout the week by local community groups. The classes were separated by temporary partitions. I have included some photographs of the classroom accommodation in Appendix 22. All classes in the school used the hall on a weekly basis for Irish dancing and music lessons. Consequently the infant classes had to contend frequently with interruptions and noise levels that were above normal. During observations I noticed that sometimes when children in Class A were working on written activities they sang along quietly with the other infant class who could be overheard singing songs. The infants and their teachers had to walk to the other school premises to use the school yard during break time whenever the weather permitted.

Despite all the difficulties in relation to accommodation, during my visits to School A, I observed that the pupils and teachers were very happy in the school. In particular, there was a very strong commitment to the school ethos and to the Irish language by the teachers, pupils, parents, and Board of Management.

3.5.2 School B

School B has been in existence for over twenty years and they moved to their brand new purpose built accommodation more than ten years ago. Two classes in the school, Junior Infants (Class B1) and Senior Infants (Class B2) participated in the study for four years.

While School B shared many similarities with School A in terms of size, ethos, and commitment to early total immersion the accommodation and facilities were very different in both schools. School B is located on the outskirts of an urban centre with very little traffic passing by, and is surrounded by a mixture of housing developments consisting mostly of privately owned semi-detached houses and greenery. There is a large public park directly opposite the school and the school has the use of this facility for sports. Classrooms are big, bright, and spacious. The school also has a large hall, a library, and an ICT room. Recently an extension was added to cater for pupils attending learning support. I have included some photographs taken in the classrooms I visited in Appendices 23 and 24.

During my visits it was noticeable that pupils and teachers were very happy in school and they shared a very strong commitment to the school ethos with parents and the Board of Management.

3.5.3 Negotiating Access and Gaining Entry

Access to School A was negotiated based on my friendship and professional relationship with the principal. I was aware that the principal and teachers were deeply committed professionals. There was an 'open door' policy in the school in the sense that visitors and researchers were always welcome. Teachers and pupils were accustomed to the presence of others in the school. Thus the criterion for site selection was the potential

for learning within the site rather than its representativeness. Because I was interested in studying early biliteracy development I requested access to the Junior Infants class. Both the principal and the class teacher were very willing to accommodate my request. I asked the principal of School A to identify another school that might be interested in participating in the study. The principal of School A referred me to School B. Having negotiated access to the Junior Infants class in School B, the teacher of Senior Infants in the school expressed interest in being part of the research project. Thus the process of negotiating access was one of snowballing (Berg, 2004). Initial contact with the school principals was made by telephone and all other negotiating was done in person.

Having negotiated access I visited all three classes twice as an observer. The purpose of these wide lens, impressionistic observations was threefold. First, I wished to orient myself to teachers' approaches to teaching literacy in each class by observing teachers' and pupils' behaviours. During observations I took note of and drew diagrams of the classroom layouts and I took detailed field notes as suggested by Berg (2004), including descriptions of the settings, those present, resources used, and activities the teachers and pupils engaged in. 'Knowledge about the people being studied and familiarity with their routines and rituals facilitate entry as well as rapport' (Berg, 2004: 159). These written records were 'free descriptions' of the literacy events as they were constructed by the participants and are a very common means of recording observations (Hobart and Frankel, 1999). Second, it enabled me to become accustomed to the process of observing and note taking and to learn from the process (Hatch, 2002). Third, it allowed the teachers and the children to become accustomed to having a stranger in the classroom observing their activities and taking notes. Subsequently all participating teachers were given the opportunity to withdraw from the project if they felt they or the children were

uncomfortable with my presence in the classroom. All three teachers agreed to be part of the study following my initial orientation visits.

The next step in the process was to identify a small group of children in each class who would be the focal children for the duration of the project. The selection of the target children is addressed in the next section. I then began the process of contacting gatekeepers in order to gain entry to the schools to conduct the study. Firstly, consent in writing from both Boards of Management to carry out the study in their schools was received. Then, through the schools, I contacted the parents and carers of all children whom I wished to involve in the study to seek their active, informed consent (Berg, 2004; Cohen and Manion, 1994). All gatekeepers were provided with descriptions of the project and I informed them of my purposes for embarking on the study. I also indicated to the parents and carers in a letter that was sent home with the children that I would be in the school on a particular date to meet with them to discuss the project with them and answer any questions they might have. Copies of relevant letters are included in Appendices 20 and 21.

In School A I met with a group of parents one afternoon after school when they came to collect their children. At this very informal meeting I explained the project to the parents who were very supportive. All parents were very encouraging and very relaxed about the prospect of me observing and interacting with their children, and they wished me well with the project. In School B I met with one parent who was interested in learning more about the project. She was also very supportive of my endeavours. Parents and carers of all sixteen children, whom I had identified to involve in the study, gave their informed consent in writing to the children's participation in the project. I continued to negotiate and renegotiate overt access during the course of the project. At each stage of the project, for example at the beginning of each school year, and prior to all video-recordings and

interviews with the pupils active, informed consent from parents and carers to involve the children was sought.

James *et al.* (1998) have noted that researchers working with children very often seek informed consent for children's participation from adult gatekeepers only. However, for the current study children's informed consent was sought separate to seeking parental consent, as advised by Hill (2005). I spoke with the children prior to the commencement of the project and invited them to participate. I explained the nature of my work to them in the presence of the class teachers and assured them that their parents had already been apprised of the situation and had given their consent. I met with each group of children in the presence of the class teacher and I asked each child individually if they would like to be part of the project. All children agreed verbally to participate. I sought the children's assent to participation at numerous stages during the duration of the project, especially prior to all video-recording sessions and prior to the group interviews. This always took place in the presence of the class teacher with the children as a group because the power relationship that exists between the adult researcher and child participant in a one-to-one setting is diffused in group settings (James *et al.*, 1998). On each occasion all children gave their individual consent verbally to the video-recordings and interviews. I reassured all children on numerous occasions that they could withdraw from the project at any stage, as counselled by Hill (2005). On each of these occasions when I met with the group I asked each child individually if they wished to withdraw from the project. Therefore, as suggested by Flear *et al.* (2009), I have made visible how I entered the field, my interactions with the children, how I positioned myself and how the children were positioned. Only one child dropped out of the study because she did not progress to Senior Infants with her classmates.

3.6 Research Participants

I use the word participants to refer to the teachers, children, and myself as researcher to take cognisance of the active role that humans play as contributors in the research process (Mertens, 2010). Such a view of children as social actors who can express opinions, be part of the decision-making process, and influence outcomes reflects the new social studies of childhood and the view of the child expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted by the United Nations in 1989 (Bragg, 2007), and also expressed in The National Children's Strategy (2000) in Ireland.

Detailed profiles of the teachers are presented in Chapter 4 drawing on interview data. All teachers' names used in the report are pseudonyms. Detailed profiles of the children are also presented in Chapter 4 drawing on observation and interview data. The following section outlines the criteria used to select the focal children. All children's names used in the report are pseudonyms.

3.6.1 Internal Sampling

Aware that the frequency and durations of my classroom observations would not be substantial due to work commitments 'internal sampling' (Dyson and Geneshi, 2005) was used to select a small number of pupils (five or six) in each class whom I could observe during each visit. By focusing on a small group of pupils it was hoped to gather valuable data about each child's literacy development as opposed to using a wide lens to observe the whole class. In selecting the children who would be the focus of my observations I wanted to apply selection criteria that indexed childhood resources (Dyson and Geneshi, 2005). For that reason the following criteria were used to select the focal children in the all-Irish schools in consultation with the teachers and principals.

- **Gender:** I was anxious that there would be a gender balance among the target pupils because gender figures in childhood resources (Dyson and Geneshi, 2005). While I was not focusing on gender *per se* as a variable, I was keen that the gender balance among the focal pupils would be representative of the overall gender balance in the participating classes. In total nine boys and seven girls were selected for the study. One of the girls did not participate after Year 1 of the project.
- **Academic Progress (as reported by the class teachers):** It was important to ensure that both children who were progressing well and children who were falling behind their peers would be included in the study to reflect more accurately the possible range of abilities in the participating classes and, hopefully, ensure a more balanced perspective when analysing data. In selecting the focal pupils I had to rely on the teachers' and principals' professional judgments as these very young children had never been formally assessed in school. We therefore selected children who were performing well or very well in school, as well as pupils who seemed to be lagging behind their peers academically.
- **Parental Support for Irish:** I was interested in the children's backgrounds and, in particular, their contact with Irish outside of school to see how this might impact on their attitudes to Irish and to learning through the medium of Irish. Children's experience with Irish in the home could be a very useful resource for teachers and children to draw on when constructing literacy events in Irish as it is part of the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 2000) children bring to school. Such interrelations between home and school form part of the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that influences children's development. We therefore selected pupils whose parents spoke some Irish with them at home as well as pupils whose parents did not.

- **Attendance at a *Naíonra* (Irish language preschool):** Another possible point of contact for young children with Irish outside school, and part of the mesosystem impacting on children's behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), is a *naíonra*. Again when selecting the focal children we selected a mix of children some of whom had attended a *naíonra*. Prior knowledge of the language could be a very useful resource for these children when learning to read and write in Irish.
- **Siblings who Attended all-Irish Schools:** We also selected pupils whose siblings had or were attending all-Irish schools as well as pupils whose siblings had not attended all-Irish schools, and pupils with no siblings. A school attended by a sibling is an example of an exosystem in the child's ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). I was interested to find out if such family circumstances might impact on the children's attitudes to Irish and to learning through the medium of Irish.

The socioeconomic status of children in all-Irish schools tends to be significantly higher than that of children in Gaeltacht schools and in ordinary schools as evidenced by previous research, including Department of Education (1991), Harris and Murtagh (1988), Harris *et al.* (2006) and Shiel *et al.* (2011). Socio-economic status (SES) was not considered to be an appropriate criterion to use for selecting the focal children as the vast majority of children in the participating classes were from middle income families. In total sixteen pupils in the three classes in the two all-Irish schools were selected, one of whom was from a lower SES group. This pupil was selected based on her poor academic progress in school as well as not having any support for speaking Irish at home and not having attended a *naíonra*. Fifteen of the selected pupils were part of the study for the full duration of the project.

3.7 Data Collection

Data collection sources included video-recordings of storybook reading events, observations, and interviews. The data collection instruments are discussed in the chronological order in which they were deployed so as to convey the evolving nature of the study.

3.7.1 Classroom Observations

Observations generate data through direct engagement with the phenomenon of interest as opposed to an account obtained at second hand in an interview (Merriam, 1998) and there is a strong tradition of observation as a research strategy in early childhood education as it can inform other participatory methods (Bragg, 2007). By combining observations with interviews and video-recordings I was aiming for a holistic interpretation (Merriam, 1998) of literacy events. Not only did the observations make it possible to record behaviour as it was happening (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Merriam, 1998), but they also provided knowledge of the contexts, specific incidents, and behaviours that were useful reference points when subsequently interviewing the participants (Merriam, 1998). The observations took place over a period of four years allowing me to develop gradually more informal and intimate relationships with the participants (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Observation has been criticised as a data collection instrument because it is very subjective, idiosyncratic, and impressionistic and therefore, unreliable (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Merriam, 1998) and 'lacking in the precise quantifiable measures that are the hallmark of survey research and experimentation' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 110). This leads to concerns about external validity while close involvement with participants will

affect an observer's judgement leading to concerns about internal validity. The issue of validity is addressed later in the chapter.

I do accept that my mere presence in the classroom as well as my interactions with the participants did disturb the ecology of the settings to some degree. As Merriam (1998) notes, 'an observer cannot help but affect and be affected by the setting, and this interaction may lead to a distortion of the situation as it exists under nonresearch conditions' (Merriam, 1998: 111). However, my aim was always to remain sufficiently detached so as to observe and analyse (Merriam, 1998) and to try not to contaminate the ecology of the settings and literacy events too much by keeping my 'research footprint' to a minimum. It is accepted that 'in qualitative research where the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, subjectivity and interaction are assumed' (Merriam, 1998: 103). Good qualitative research is about building trusting relationships between the researcher and the participants. I am satisfied that my impact on the research settings and events attenuated as the teachers and children became accustomed to my presence in their classrooms.

Non-participant observation was favoured as a strategy for collecting data because the goal was to understand early literacy development from the children's perspectives (Hatch, 2002). I was also attempting to understand better the contexts in which early literacy development occurs. Non-participant observation allowed me to discover inductively how the participants were understanding the settings during literacy events. I was attempting to expose things that might have been taken for granted and that would have remained under the surface had I used other data collection techniques. It also allowed me to bring my own experience in the setting to the analysis of the literacy events (Hatch, 2002).

I knew from experience of visiting early years classrooms that it would be virtually impossible not to engage with the children at some level. My aim was to be as unobtrusive as possible although my presence in the classroom made the context somewhat unnatural (Hatch, 2002). I conducted formal observations as a spectator and did not become involved in any of the literacy events being observed. I only interacted with the children and teachers before and after formal observations. The mix of participation and observation changed during the course of the four years as I got to know the children. Some children interacted with me freely, showing me their written work, discussing it with me, and asking me to spell words for them. Initially such interactions were initiated by the class teachers and by the children themselves when they felt comfortable to do so. Subsequently I initiated conversations with the children when I felt I was accepted as a familiar face and friend. These interactions mainly amounted to praising and encouraging the children for their work. All of the participating children were extremely welcoming and my relationship with them developed gradually during the course of the study. Getting to know the children and observing them from year to year was a very enriching and rewarding experience for me.

I wrote raw field notes on the spot while in the research settings using small spiral notebooks which were less obtrusive and less cumbersome than other materials such as a clipboard or a laptop (Hatch, 2002). The raw field notes could best be described as 'accurate, but incomplete, written descriptions of what was observed in the field' (Hatch, 2002: 82). These notes included contextual details including descriptions of the classroom layout, seating arrangements, notes on what aspects of literacy development the teacher was focusing on as well as what time observations commenced and concluded. Details were recorded of what each participant child was doing while being observed. I had to accept that I could not observe and capture everything that was happening. It was more

important to make a careful record of what I was attending to. I used this format of note taking rather than being confined by an observation schedule so as to capture as much detail as possible. Such written records using ‘free description’ of an event as it unfolds are the most common type of observation technique (Hobart and Frankel, 1999) and they were particularly useful for the ethnographic approach used as they enabled me to produce ‘thick descriptions’ of the events observed.

The raw field notes were then converted into research protocols through a process of “filling in” the original notes in preparation for analysis. Research protocols were produced to keep track of impressions and preliminary interpretations that went beyond the descriptions in the field-note record. This was accomplished by highlighting certain sections within the field notes and adding subsequent comments, including subjective reflections (Berg, 2004; Hatch, 2002). The research protocols were completed as soon as possible after visits but not always on the same day due to other work commitments. The research protocols were used as secondary source data for the study.

I conducted observations at irregular intervals over a four-year period between 2004 and 2008. In general my observation visits lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. During the visits each target pupil was observed for a minimum of one five-minute period. Depending on the duration of the lesson some or all of the children were observed for two or more five-minute periods. Visits were arranged in advance with the class teachers. Some visits had to be cancelled for various reasons such as teacher absences. Not all of the target children were always present during each visit.

Class A was visited twice each year for observations during the first three years of the project. They were taught by three different teachers during this period. Two thirty-five minute periods were spent observing the children during the first and third years. During the second year the target children were observed for two one-hour periods amounting to a

total of four hours and twenty minutes of observation. No observations were carried out during the fourth and final year of the project because a number of substitute teachers were employed during the year to cover for the class teacher who was on extended maternity leave. Observing the literacy events under such conditions would not have been natural.

Class B1 was visited once during the first year of the project, seven times during the second year, once again during the third year and four times during the fourth year of the project. The children were taught by six different teachers during this period as some teachers were job sharing. A total of six hours and fifty minutes were spent observing the target children over a four-year period.

Class B2 was visited once during the first year of the project, three times during year three and four times during the fourth and final year. A total of four hours and thirty minutes were spent observing the target children over a four-year period. No observations were conducted in Class B2 during Year 2 at the request of the school. A number of temporary teachers were employed for short periods during the year and the school felt my presence as an observer would be unfairly inhibiting for them as they were not part of the school staff and they were not very familiar with the children. Observing the children under such conditions would not yield insights into regular classroom practices and events.

In total fifteen hours and forty minutes were spent observing children during both Irish and English literacy lessons. A summary of the total number of visits and the durations of visits is provided in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Amount of time per class spent observing the target children for the duration of the project

	Class A	Class B1	Class B2	Total
Year 1	70 minutes 2 visits	30 minutes 1 visit	50 minutes 1 visit	150 minutes 4 visits
Year 2	120 minutes 2 visits	250 minutes 7 visits	0 minutes 0 visits	370 minutes 9 visits
Year 3	70 minutes 2 visits	35 minutes 1 visit	105 minutes 3 visits	210 minutes 6 visits
Year 4	0 minutes	95 minutes 4 visits	115 minutes 4 visits	210 minutes 8 visits
Total	4hrs. 20mins. 6 visits	6hrs. 50mins. 13 visits	4hrs. 30mins. 8 visits	15hrs. 40mins. 27 visits

A number of difficulties emerged in relation to the classroom observations during the course of the study. Due to work commitments I was only observing the children at very irregular intervals. Such snapshot observations limited the quality and quantity of the data that could be collected. On more than one occasion when I arrived at a school the observation had to be cancelled for various reasons.

Another difficulty that emerged related to my decision to focus my observations on the pupils only. Observing the pupils without noting the teachers' actions was not proving very fruitful because the dominant classroom discourse pattern observed during the literacy events was one of Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Feedback (IRE/IRF) (Cazden, 2001). The children were invariably responding to the teachers' initiations. As noted earlier, because people are acting and reacting to each other and create the context for each other, the basic unit of analysis should be a group of people and not the individual (Bloome, 1993). Because the children's actions and utterances do not exist in isolation (Bakhtin, 1986), a fuller account of the inter-acting during the literacy events was required, including teachers' actions. Very often when observing the target children, although they were engaged in the lessons, there was not a lot to observe and note because the teacher was trying to engage the whole class and the target children appeared to be quite passive. This

is not to suggest that they were not engaged in many ways, cognitively, emotionally, and affectively but it was difficult to ascertain how engaged they were unless it was overtly manifest. However, because I was learning much about the manner in which the teachers and pupils were constructing literacy events, I continued with the observations for a period of four years.

Towards the end of the first year of the study it was decided to collect more stable data that would allow for more overt, observable involvement of the focal children during literacy events. I therefore requested permission to video record the teachers reading storybooks in Irish and English to the target children only. By this stage the children were being introduced to English language arts, albeit on an informal basis only through rhymes, songs, and stories. During informal conversations with the teachers it emerged that they did read storybooks to the children but not as frequently perhaps, as they would like. By capturing a small number of reading events on video I would generate a representative sample of literacy events that were part of normal classroom routines (Hatch, 2002). The teachers were favourably disposed to the suggestion and so the process of getting permission from the children and relevant gatekeepers to video record the storybook reading events began. These video-recordings provided much richer data and subsequently became the main source of data collection. Thus the project evolved into a micro-ethnographic study. Details of the video-recordings as a data collection tool are presented in the next section.

It is important to note here that while video recording the teachers reading stories only to the target children necessitated a change from normal classroom routines, it was not an experimental setting. As outlined earlier in the chapter, I was adopting an ethnographic approach and using research methods most closely associated micro-ethnography as opposed to conducting a full-blown classroom ethnography. The

environment for the literacy events differed slightly from the classroom environment but the ecological validity of the study was not compromised. Besides as Bronfenbrenner (1979: 33) notes, ‘ecological validity is a goal to be pursued, approached, but never achieved’.

What matters most for behaviour is the environment as it is perceived by the participants, including researcher, teachers and pupils, and not the environment as some objective reality (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the adapted settings the participants’ perceptions and experiences of the ‘three microsystem elements of activity, role, and relation’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 33) were the same as their perceptions and experiences of these elements in the everyday classroom settings. The relations which the participants enacted with each other did not change significantly and the roles of the participants were the same as their roles in everyday classroom settings, based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979: 25) definition of role as ‘a set of behaviors and expectations associated with a position in society, such as that of mother, baby, teacher, friend, and so on’.

Drawing on Hedegaard’s (2008a: 16) definitions of activity and practice, the activities which the participants engaged in in the adapted settings were broadly the same as those engaged in by the teacher and children in the whole class setting in the sense that the participants’ motives and intentions were the same. The classroom practice of storybook reading provided the same conditions for learning and development and for establishing literacy practices in both settings. The ‘web of meanings’ (Heath and Street, 2008: 10) being built by the participants in each literacy event was particular to each group of participants, as one would expect, as the participants used language and literacy to build meaning but the ‘cultural patterns of interaction’ (Heath and Street, 2008: 6) were the same for both the group and class settings. And it is ‘the cultural patterning of interactions’ which shapes roles and identities thus providing access and opportunities for pupils (Heath

and Street, 2008: 6). Even within the whole-class setting each storybook reading event is a unique event because for each event the story, the number of participants as well as their contributions *inter alia* will vary. Consequently, I am confident that the findings presented in Chapter 4 are both reliable and valid.

The main advantage of the adapted settings was that they allowed me as researcher to gather much more detailed data on the focus children, thus providing a much richer database for my findings. However, caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions from the findings. As noted earlier in adopting an ethnographic approach one aims to draw theoretical inferences as opposed to making empirical generalisations (Hammersley, 1990/1994). Reader or user generalizability (Merriam, 1998) means that readers can decide for themselves the degree to which the phenomenon under scrutiny and the conclusions drawn match their own contexts. As Woods (1986) notes, the ‘ethnographic spirit’ should take precedence over the techniques and methods employed.

3.7.2 Video-Recordings of Storybook Reading Events

Hatch (2002) notes that video-recording is a powerful means of capturing data and it can improve the quality of a study when used to supplement other data collection methods, including observations and interviews. In micro-ethnographic studies video-recording is the primary source of data collection. At one level it is regarded as a special form of unobtrusive data when it serves a documentary function similar to a historical record. However, video-recording in educational settings can be quite obtrusive. At another level it allows the researcher to capture ‘contextualized face-to-face social behaviour in greater detail than can be accomplished using other means’ (Hatch, 2002: 126).

Video-recordings were made of teachers reading both English and Irish stories to the target children in the all-Irish schools towards the end of the school year during the first

year of the project. In Class A the class teacher read the stories. The videos were recorded in the classroom located in a local community hall while the non-participating pupils were accommodated in another class. All recordings in School B took place in the learning support room. In Class B1 the class teacher read the stories while the learning support teacher taught the non-participating children in the classroom. In Class B2 the learning support teacher read the stories to the children allowing the class teacher to continue with normal class routines with the non-participating children.

The teachers were asked to select and read suitable stories that they had not read previously to the children using whatever approach they would normally use with the class. I suggested this might include discussing the stories with the children and setting a task for the children after the story had been read. On each occasion only the target children were present for the recordings. I recorded all the story reading sessions with a hand-held camera with zoom lens and built-in microphone and the teachers wore wireless microphones with battery packs. The equipment was adequate for recording all voices in these small settings. One of the disadvantages of making the recordings on my own was that I was not able to supplement the recordings with field notes. However, this was a necessary compromise that had to be made.

After each recording a colleague in the audio-visual department made two copies of each tape. The video-recordings were also transferred to DVDs thus providing a choice of media to work from when transcribing. The video-recordings enabled the production of very detailed transcripts of the literacy events as the recordings could be replayed frequently to identify subtle details and document aspects of the context that came within the visual frame of the lens. It was then possible to engage in fine-grained analysis that could not have been accomplished with observation field notes of the literacy events (Hatch, 2002). For example, by video recording the story reading sessions it was possible

to capture most of the dialogue for analysis at a later stage. An audio-recording would not have enabled identification of individual children. Although the main emphasis was on recording the dialogue by making a video-recording it was also possible to capture other details, including gestures, body movements, non-verbal communications, and facial expressions on camera which could enrich the data analysis.

The initial recordings in each setting were marked by great excitement on the part of the children. On each occasion before recording the storybook events I recorded the children as they settled into position and played back these brief recordings for them to ensure that the novelty of being video recorded did not become too intrusive. Besides, many of the children indicated that their parents frequently recorded them in various contexts so they were used to seeing themselves on videotape.

3.7.3 Interviews

During the course of the study I had many informal conversations with participating teachers before and after observations providing much information about the children and about the teachers' approaches to teaching language and literacy. These unstructured conversations also generated additional information about what had been observed. All three participating teachers and all but one of the children were interviewed for the study. Interviews enabled a more thorough exploration of participants' perspectives and interpretations on actions observed and video recorded (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Hatch, 2002). Interviews can be very useful 'to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds' (Hatch, 2002: 91). In keeping with a constructivist approach to the research, I was aiming for flexible, interactive interviews that would include more involvement and more active sharing of experiences by the participants to co-construct data with them (Hatch, 2002),

while at the same time striving to obtain ‘uncontaminated’, unbiased data (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Oppenheim, 1992). It is this distinctively human element in interviewing which is essential to its validity (Kitwood, 1977, cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994).

I was conscious of the social and hierarchical relationship between me and the respondents, particularly the children. Having worked for many years as a primary teacher I was satisfied that the social distance (Cohen and Manion, 1994) between me and the teachers was minimal. Berg (2004: 114) notes that interviews are ‘essentially symbolic interactions’ that are performances and familiarity with the social context in which the interview is being conducted is intrinsic to understanding the data collected. I would characterise each interview I conducted as a social episode where the participants engaged in ‘a culturally determined dialogue’ (Oppenheim, 1992: 86). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full in order to provide the best database for analysis (Merriam, 1998).

3.7.3.1 Pupil Interviews

Open, semi-structured interviews (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2010) with fourteen pupils were conducted during June 2008 to learn more about the whole immersion experience, including learning to read and write in two languages, from the children’s perspectives. The interviews also afforded me an opportunity to confirm information about the children received from the teachers at the beginning of the study such as use of Irish in the home and attendance at a *naíonra*. The resultant data would, hopefully, enrich the study by providing another layer to add to the data gathered during observations and storybook reading events. Pupils’ voices are important as they can further our understanding of teaching and learning (McCallum *et al.*, 2000). However, the rationale for involving children in the research went beyond merely seeing them as

instrumental in furthering our knowledge. In line with the new social studies of childhood, in education it is argued that discussing their learning with young people can improve their ability to become self-reflective learners (Bragg, 2007). It was hoped therefore, that the interviews would be intrinsically rewarding for the children (Oppenheim, 1992).

As this was a study about literacy practices being established in schools with children as participants in the research process it was important to give voice to children's own opinions. An important theme discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2 and one which is central to the present study is Gee's (2005) notion of primary and secondary Discourses. Therefore, it was important to discuss with the children their own reading habits, their opinions of the reading material prescribed by the school, as well as parental support for reading, to explore consonances and dissonances between children's primary Discourse and the school secondary Discourse in relation to literacy practices.

In Chapter 2 it was noted that language, literacy and identity are inextricably linked and children need to be able to invest their identities fully in learning experiences in order to derive maximum benefit from their experiences in school (Cummins, 1996/2001). This is particularly so in L2 immersion contexts. Consequently it was important to hear about children's attitudes to Irish, to speaking Irish and to attending an all-Irish school, as well as parental support for speaking Irish. Previous studies have established the crucial role parental support plays in developing positive attitudes to Irish among primary school children (e.g. Harris and Murtagh, 1999; Harris *et al.*, 2006).

While I approached the interviews with each group of children with the intention of exploring these particular aspects of the children's lives, the analysis of the pupil interviews as presented in Chapter 4 is organised on the basis of the content of the children's responses in an attempt to foreground their opinions.

Physical arrangements are important to help make children comfortable during interviews (Lewis, 1992). In School B the interviews were conducted in the ICT room. The children were very familiar with the setting and generally looked forward to going there, albeit for different purposes. Due to lack of facilities the interviews took place in the staffroom in School A. All children were assured they did not have to participate in the process and they were made aware that they could withdraw from the interview at any stage. No child withdrew from the interviews. On the contrary they were excited about having themselves audio-recorded. Before beginning the interviews with each group I allowed the children an opportunity to speak into the microphone and replayed it for them. They seemed both excited and amused by the experience helping to ease them into the process in a non-threatening manner and to gain their confidence and trust before commencing the interviews. In each case we sat in a circle so that the children would have eye contact with each other, as suggested by Lewis (1992). I dressed more casually for the pupil interviews than when interviewing the teachers as suggested by Berg (2004), in an attempt to lessen the unequal power relationship between myself and the children and create a comfortable and informal atmosphere (Punch, 2002) but not trying to eliminate it which might have been ethically inadvisable (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

As an ethnographic researcher in all-Irish schools I was mindful of the need to privilege Irish when speaking with the children. But I also wanted the children to be able to express themselves freely. Lewis (1992) has noted that children's receptive and expressive ability may be limited. This would be further compounded if the interviews were all in Irish. Therefore, I sought and was granted permission from the school principals and the teachers to interview the children using both Irish and English. All pupils were given permission by their parents to be interviewed. Similar to McCallum *et al.* (2000), during the interviews I was drawing on my experience as a primary teacher of eighteen years,

including three years teaching in an all-Irish school, to put the pupils at their ease and make them feel comfortable about offering their opinions using both Irish and English. The children were assured that their privacy would be respected and that only I would ever get to listen to the audio-recordings.

Being mindful of child protection laws I was reluctant to interview the children individually. Therefore, I interviewed the pupils in small groups of two and three. Having consulted with the teachers I interviewed the children in single sex groups. We felt the children would be most comfortable in friendship groups (Lewis, 1992). However in one case this was not possible as there was only one girl in the group. Conducting group interviews had a number of advantages over individual interviews. Group talk can be less stilted than individual interviews and I wanted the interviews to be more like conversations. Group interviews can help to uncover consensus views and can raise unanticipated issues. They can also lead to responses that have greater range and depth. It was hoped that by interviewing the children with their peers they would be less intimidated and more relaxed. Smaller groups encourage greater participation as they afford all participants more opportunities to express themselves. And while one child was speaking other children had time to think thus encouraging more reflectivity in responses (Bragg, 2007; Lewis, 1992).

It must be acknowledged that the approach was not unproblematic. Interviews are more obtrusive than observations and some young people may be nervous and anxious when speaking with adults (Bragg, 2007). Children can be easily led by the interviewer (Oppenheim, 1992). It is possible that the children may have influenced each other in their responses because of desires to conform to the group norm. Also it is not possible to ensure confidentiality in group interviews. Some members may be inhibited from speaking and sometimes group interviews can be dominated by an individual. It can be difficult to

identify speakers afterwards when transcribing. Therefore, it was necessary to interject and talk over the children sometimes to refer to the children's names when they were responding. This may have interrupted the flow of children's conversations but necessarily so (Bragg, 2007; Lewis, 1992). I also made very brief notes as discreetly as possible during the interviews. The notes consisted of keywords mentioned by the children as well as their names in order to be able to identify the speakers when transcribing the interviews.

Punch (2002) notes the importance of considering children's different social skills and preferred means of communicating with unfamiliar adults. A number of researchers including Bragg (2007) and Punch (2002) recommend using props or stimulus material when interviewing children as props can help them expand their answers. As part of the interview process the children were encouraged to bring along one or two books they had read and that they might like to tell me about. Using props had the advantage of allowing the children to talk about something they were familiar with and which they were able to think about in advance. By this stage also I had built up a relationship with the children through my observations and video-recordings and I was confident the children would be relaxed in my company and willing to express themselves freely. All of the children knew me by my first name. In total six interviews were conducted over a two-day period. Fourteen of the fifteen pupils were interviewed as one pupil (Ethan) was absent the day I visited School A. The children were rewarded for their participation with 'goody-bags' but such unannounced rewards were not used as inducements to participate, as advised by Bragg (2007) and Hill (2005).

3.7.3.2 Teacher Interviews

In November 2010 formal, semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Hatch, 2002) were conducted with the three teachers who read the storybooks during Year 1 of the study.

Initially each teacher was contacted by telephone and I suggested I would like to interview them as part of the study, indicating to them that I would like them to review the video-recordings of the storybook reading events which might form a basis for part of our conversations. The DVDs were a very effective stimulus to get the teachers to discuss their own perspectives and interpretations of the behaviours I had recorded for my ‘multivocal’ micro-ethnography (Hatch, 2002). All three teachers were keenly interested in viewing the video-recordings which they felt would be valuable aids for reflective practice. The interviews, therefore, would be intrinsically rewarding for them (Oppenheim, 1992).

To prepare for the interviews I visited the schools in advance to discuss with the teachers the purpose, content, and dates for the interviews. Sharing responsibility for discussion topics with participants was part of my constructivist approach (Hatch, 2002). During the visits teachers were given copies of the DVD recordings and full transcripts of the storybook reading events divided into topic units. They were asked if they would be willing to review the DVD recordings of the lessons and check the transcripts for accuracy. We also discussed some questions they might think about in advance of the interviews, some of which related to the literacy events I had recorded. I was interested in getting their considered thoughts and beliefs about their approaches to teaching literacy and, in particular, their approaches to storybook reading. The issue of confidentiality was discussed and the teachers were assured that no information would be disclosed to others without their consent. All three teachers agreed to participate in the process and to be interviewed in English as they were aware of the extra workload for me in having to translate the transcripts if the interviews were conducted in Irish. The interviews took place in the staff room and the principal’s office.

When interviewing I was attempting to ask open-ended questions using familiar language that was clear, neutral and non-directive (Berg, 2004; Hatch, 2002; Merriam,

1998; Oppenheim, 1992). Open-ended questions allow respondents to express their opinions with 'greater richness and spontaneity' (Oppenheim, 1992: 81). A mixture of more- and less-structured questions was included (Merriam, 1998). The interviews included both biographical questions and descriptive questions (Hatch, 2002) about the school's approach to immersion education. Structural questions (Hatch, 2002) were included to explore teachers' opinions on language and literacy teaching and learning and to review the video-recordings of the storybook reading events. Contrast questions (Hatch, 2002) prompted teachers to compare their approaches to storybook reading in Irish and English. For each interview I had an interview schedule which had been negotiated with the teachers beforehand and which was flexible in the sense that the exact wording and sequencing of questions were not determined in advance (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2010). The flexible approach allowed me to probe beyond the answers to the prepared questions (Berg, 2004). I did not take any notes during the interviews as doing so would take from the conversational nature of the interviews.

3.8 Data Management and Transcriptions

3.8.1 Pupil and Teacher Interviews

Pupil interviews were audio-recorded using a mini-disc recorder. A colleague in the audio-visual department transferred the data to CDs. I then transferred the data from the CDs to my PC as audio files giving me the option of using my PC or a CD player when transcribing. Teacher interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. On returning to the office after the interviews I transferred the data to my PC as audio files and made back-up files of all audio files. As it transpired it was possible to transcribe all interviews from the audio files. As far as possible, interviews were transcribed verbatim. Very few of the speakers' rejoinders were undecipherable.

3.8.2 Video-Recordings

All video-recordings were transferred from the master tapes to VCR tapes shortly after the recordings by a colleague in the audio-visual department. He also made copies of the tapes and transferred the master tapes to DVD giving me the option of transcribing from either the tapes or the DVDs. As Hatch (2002) notes, playback equipment for microanalysis needs to be very sophisticated or else the process becomes very protracted. Unfortunately I did not have access to such equipment. All six videos recorded during Year 1 of the project were transcribed in full using a VCR. I have attempted to transcribe the rejoinders of the speakers verbatim, but there are gaps because some rejoinders were inaudible or undecipherable due to people speaking over each other or for various other reasons such as background noises. The process proved to be quite slow and arduous. It necessitated rewinding the tapes several times to check the identity of speakers, to check the accuracy of rejoinders, to look for gestures, body movements, non-verbal communications and any other information that would enrich the data because meaning between interactants is often conveyed by non-verbal means (Brown and Rodgers, 2002).

Although the main focus was on the language-in-use of the participants, I also wished to record as much information as possible that came into the visual frame of the camera lens. To transcribe one minute of video footage in the detail required for microanalysis took between thirty minutes and one hour. While I have presented snapshots from the six recordings in the next chapter, the full transcripts are included in the appendices allowing readers to view the snapshots in context so that they can confirm or challenge my findings and conclusions.

When typing up the transcriptions a transcription key to indicate pauses, overlapping rejoinders, interruptions by speakers, prosody, gestures, other paralinguistic

clues, or any other information that came into the frame, was not used. I used words to fill in as much information as possible to supplement the participants' rejoinders. In attempting to capture as much detail as possible, managing the transcripts, each of which ran to several thousand words, was proving difficult. Transcriptions of the Irish lessons had to be translated into English. Through trial and error I settled on a system that was fit for my purpose and that allowed me to present the discourse and inter-actions of the participants in fine detail so as to be able to conduct a micro-ethnographic discourse analysis of the storybook reading events.

As Gee (2005: 106) notes, 'speech always has far more detail in it than any recording or transcription system could ever capture'. In the transcriptions I have focused on the details of speech most relevant to the situation and to the arguments being developed. The main focus is on the language being used by the participants, and how this language-in-context is used to enact specific socially situated activities (literacy events) and socially situated identities (being a bilingual and being a bilingual reader) (Gee, 2005). While other contextual information regarding gestures and overlapping utterances in the transcripts is included, I have not included much information about other features such as prosody. While such features are important they are not central to the analysis being conducted.

The next step in the process was to identify the focus of teachers' and pupils' rejoinders and inter-actions. This stage in the process was informed by the approach to transcribing videotapes of storybook reading events reported in Martinez and Teale (1993) and Teale *et al.* (1989). Transcripts were divided into Topic Units using bold broken lines based on my best guess of what the participants were focusing on during inter-actions. A Topic Unit may contain one or more instructional moves such as monitoring alphabetic knowledge, developing bibliographic knowledge, reading the text, or monitoring

comprehension. A topic shift occurs when one of the participants, usually, but not exclusively, the teacher, proposes a new topic and the proposal is acknowledged and taken up by one or more of the other participants. These subdivisions represent the macrostructure of the transcript and are based on my interpretations of the teachers' and children's intended meanings. The subdivisions are purely arbitrary and represent my attempt to reflect as accurately as possible the natural ebb and flow of the literacy events. Some Topic Units are short and are made up of one topic only, while others are longer and are made up of more than one topic or one topic may be embedded within another. The following example taken from the end of the transcript of the reading of the story 'Goodnight Goodnight' might help to illustrate. The full transcript of this literacy event is included in Appendix 9.

Excerpt from Topic Units 19 – 22 of Transcript B2.B 'Goodnight Goodnight'

374. Teacher: He was green to match the beanstalk, isn't it?
 375. Choral Response: Yeah.
 376. Teacher: Green to match the beanstalk. *[The teacher turns the page.]*
 377. Daniel: And his shoes.

.....
TU 20: Revising Story Language

378. Teacher: And what was the bit that she said every time somebody arrived?
 379. Regina: Jump on my bed and join in the fun. *[Regina points at the words on the page. Some of the other children join in. The teacher interrupts them.]*
 380. Sheila: And join the fun.
 381. Teacher: That's right. You're putting in a little word there. It is part of the word join and join...
 382. Daniel: And join in... *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
 383. Teacher: No. Join. Just say join. And join the fun. *[Some children speak also but their rejoinders are undecipherable.]*
 384. Regina, Sheila, Daniel, Clement: There's lots of room for everyone.
[Regina points to the words in the book.]

.....
TU 21: Monitoring Phonological Awareness & Displaying Metalinguistic Awareness

385. Teacher: Does anyone hear any words that rhyme there?
 386. Regina, Clement: Everyone and fun.
 387. Kevin: One. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
 388. Teacher: Excellent. And, and what...
[Kevin and Regina say something here but it's undecipherable.]

- one rhymes with...
389. Clement: Everyone, everyone. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
Everyone, everyone.
[Clement makes the gestures for a compound word.]
390. Teacher: That's a compound word. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
And which does it rhyme with?
[Regina raises her hand to volunteer an answer.]
391. Regina: For, every for.
392. Teacher: For. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
No, I don't think so. Listen again.
393. Regina: For everyone.
394. Clement: Join.
395. Teacher: Jump on the bed, on my bed and join the fun,
There's lots of room for everyone.
396. Clement: Jump on. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
Everyone and fun.
397. Regina: Lots. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
398. Teacher: Yes.
399. Daniel: Fun and one.
400. Teacher: Fun and one. Everyone and fun or fun and one. Great.
[The teacher turns the page.]

.....

TU 22: Monitoring Children's Lexical Knowledge, Discussing Pictures, & Language Input

- Do you see the way that comes every so often? It's a bit like in a song. You know when you sing a verse and then you sing a piece after every verse. What do you call that piece that you sing after every verse?
401. Clement: You do it over again.
402. Teacher: You do it over again. Yeah, you sing the same piece and then you sing a new verse and then you sing the same piece.
[Undecipherable] [Regina stands up as the teacher says this.]
403. Regina: I, I can see the lit, the little bear with that Goldilocks and he's a scared.
[This rejoinder interrupts the previous speaker.]
404. Teacher: He's scared is he? Okay. The word I was thinking of was the chorus.
[The teacher turns the page.] Did you ever hear a chorus in a song?
405. Regina: No.
406. Teacher: No. Okay. I was...
-

In Topic Unit 19 the teacher and children are discussing the font colours used in the text. Topic Unit 20 begins when the teacher proposes a different topic at turn 378, focusing on the language in the story and her proposal is taken up by Regina, one of the children, at turn 379. This represents the beginning of a new Topic Unit where the teacher is eliciting some of the story language from the children. Topic Unit 20 concludes at turn 384 and the teacher proposes another topic (monitoring phonological awareness) at turn 385, a proposal

that is acknowledged and taken up by two of the children, Regina and Clement, at turn 386.

In turns 385 – 400 the teacher is monitoring the children’s phonological awareness. However, at turn 389 Clement focuses on another aspect of the word ‘everyone’ apart from the fact that it rhymes with the word ‘fun’, namely that it is a compound word. He does so by saying the word twice and making the hand signals the children use for compound words. Here Clement is demonstrating his metalinguistic awareness and his proposal is acknowledged by the teacher in turn 390 and she immediately proposes a return to the previous topic which is acknowledged by Regina. This is an example of one topic being embedded in another. The embedded topic of displaying metalinguistic awareness at turns 389 – 390 does not deflect the teacher from her focus on phonological awareness, and is simply too short to warrant being depicted as a separate Topic Unit.

Turn 400 signals the end of Topic Unit 21 and the beginning of Topic Unit 22. The teacher has the final say on rhyming words when she says: *‘Fun and one. Everyone and fun or fun and one. Great.’* She then proposes a new topic with an interrogative: *‘Do you see the way that comes every so often? It’s a bit like in a song. You know when you sing a verse and then you sing a piece after every verse. What do you call that piece that you sing after every verse?’* Her proposal is taken up by Clement at turn 401: *‘You do it over again’*. Here the teacher is monitoring the children’s lexical knowledge and attempting to elicit the word ‘chorus’ from them. In fact they are not familiar with the word and the teacher provides the language input at turn 404: *‘The word I was thinking of was the chorus’*.

Having divided the transcripts into Topic Units the six transcripts were presented to two colleagues, one of whom is a native Irish speaker and the other a very competent secondary bilingual, to check for accuracy and to ensure that the translations would represent accurately the intended meanings of the speakers. This proved a valuable and

worthwhile stage in the process. Minor changes to the translations to reflect more accurately the nuances of some of the Irish language rejoinders were made. Colleagues also made suggestions in relation to the Topic Units identified resulting in some minor but important changes to the transcripts. As discussed earlier in the chapter I also gave the transcripts and DVDs to the participating teachers prior to interviewing them. Two of the three teachers did not suggest any changes to the transcripts. The third teacher suggested a few minor changes to the Topic Units. She was also very helpful in deciphering rejoinders I was unable to decipher and in identifying speakers whom I had been unable to identify. Her contribution greatly improved the accuracy of my representations of the storybook reading events she participated in.

So, while others were involved in the authoring process, the transcripts are by and large my own constructions. As such they represent my personal, subjective, interpretive reconstructions of the storybook reading events. Such subjectivity is assumed in qualitative ethnographic research. In such circumstances what matters is how the researcher can identify the effects on the data and account for them in interpreting the data (Merriam, 1998) an issue which is addressed more fully later in the chapter. Having used member checks and peer examination of transcripts, I am confident that the transcripts I have included in the appendices are a reasonably accurate record of the storybook reading events and that the topic units identified represent accurately the focus of teachers' and children's talk during the events.

3.9 Data Analysis

3.9.1 Pupil and Teacher Interviews

A phenomenological design focusing on the experiential underpinnings of participants' knowledge was adopted (Gubrium and Holstein, 2000). Adopting a phenomenological approach opened up the possibility of developing a greater understanding of the classroom literacy events in all their complexity. In phenomenology theory is grounded in lived experiences. I am attempting to reveal the ways in which the literacy events are produced 'through the constituting acts of subjective experience' (Butler, 1988: 522). The semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated the exploration of teachers' intended meanings (LeCompte and Preissle, 1992) leading to a better understanding of how the literacy events were accomplished. It is important, however, to recognise that interviews reflect participants' perceptions of events rather than the reality of such events.

3.9.2 Video-Recordings

The transcriptions of the video-recordings were analysed based on the approach to discourse analysis developed by Gee (2005).

3.9.2.1 Discourse Analysis

The approach to discourse analysis used in the present study is the analysis of 'language-in-use' that emphasises group social, linguistic and literacy practices as well as highlighting 'creativity and particularity' in how literacy events are both replicated and transformed (Bloome *et al.*, 2008). The reflexive property of language means that 'language-in-use both creates and reflects the contexts in which it is used' (Gee, 2005: 94). I draw mainly on the work of Gee (2001, 2005); Bloome *et al.* (2005); Bloome *et al.*

(2008); Hicks (1995, 1996); Luke (1995); and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) because their work is particularly suited to the study of literacy events in early years classrooms. Indeed Gee, Bloome *et al.*, Hicks, and Luke all draw considerably on Bakhtin's literary discussions of language in their work. Gee's (2005) approach allows us to examine the institutional aspects of discourse as they connect to social relations and identities.

I have labelled my approach to discourse analysis 'interpretive micro-ethnographic discourse analysis'. The approach focuses on how language and other means of communicating are used by people inter-acting with each other as they construct literacy events. At the same time it emphasises cultural and social processes (Bloome *et al.*, 2008). By focusing on the socially situated meanings of utterances I am taking an interpretative stance and this is necessary as I am exploring relations between discourse and the processes of teaching and learning literacy (Hicks, 1995).

3.9.2.2 Discourse

Discourse is language used socially (Hicks, 1996). I take the view that children's literacy development is mediated by discourse and in literacy events discourse 'implies communication that is socially situated and that sustains social "positionings": relations between participants in face-to-face interaction or between author and reader in written texts' (Hicks, 1995: 49) (emphasis in the original). I also take the view that discourse is never neutral or value free because discourses always reflect ideologies (Hicks, 1995, 1996; Gee, 2005). By conceiving of discourse as social practices for 'doing school' or 'doing story reading' I am emphasising reading as a social practice that takes its meaning both from the school context in which it is embedded, i.e., all-Irish schools, and from the specific literacy event of storybook reading in which it occurs as opposed to foregrounding a definition of reading as a set of autonomous cognitive skills (Bloome *et al.*, 2008).

Gee (2005) distinguishes between ‘discourse’ with a lower-case ‘d’ and ‘Discourse’ with a capital ‘D’. The former refers to ‘language-in-use’ while the latter refers to ‘ways of being in the world’ (Gee, 2005: 7). We are all members of many Discourses. For the teachers and children in the current study this includes the Discourse of doing storybook reading. As people enact specific socially situated identities and socially situated activities they merge various Discourses to form new hybrids. So part of my analytic task is to ascertain what Discourse(s) and what hybrids are operative in the inter-actions between the teachers and the children during the literacy events (Gee, 2005). This will be accomplished by examining the language-in-use of classroom literacy events in Irish and English because ‘*language has meaning only in and through social practices*’ (Gee, 2005: 8) (emphasis in the original). In doing so I will be focusing on the utterances of the participants based on Bakhtin’s (1986) definition of utterance.

3.9.2.3 Utterances, Rejoinders, Speech Genres

Bakhtin (1986) maintains that we do not speak in words or sentences but in utterances. An utterance is a real ‘unit of speech communication’ (Bakhtin, 1986: 73) and every utterance ‘is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances’ (Bakhtin, 1986: 69). Learning to speak entails learning to construct utterances. A single word, phrase or sentence only becomes an utterance when it is imbued with the speaker’s expressive intonation. Therefore, there is no such thing as a neutral utterance (Bakhtin, 1986). Hicks (1996) notes that Vygotsky (1986) made a similar point when suggesting that words have dictionary meaning but only speech has sense. Meaning is socially constituted because language, both oral and written, only acquires meaning through social use (Hicks, 1995).

Every utterance is a 'link in the chain of speech communion' (Bakhtin, 1986: 84), and the boundaries of each utterance are marked by a change of speakers. Any utterance is an attitudinal response to preceding utterances in the sphere of speech communication, but it also encompasses "addressivity" as it anticipates a responsive attitude towards it on the part of the addressee (Bakhtin, 1986). The assumed response, as well as the 'degree of *personal* proximity of the addressee to the speaker', actively influence and determine the style of the utterance including choice of genres, choice of compositional devices and choice of language vehicles (Bakhtin, 1986: 96). The utterance is shaped by the speaker's consideration of the addressee's apperceptive background. In other words, the addressee's specialised knowledge actively influences the utterance (Bakhtin, 1986).

Because we usually construct our utterances from the utterances of others, our utterances are, to some degree, imbued with the attitudes and emotions of others (Bakhtin, 1986; Bloome *et al.*, 2008). Every utterance is filled with 'dialogic overtones' (Bakhtin, 1986: 92). Each individual's unique speech experience is realised 'in continuous and constant interaction' with the utterances of others (Bakhtin, 1986: 89). Utterances 'mutually reflect one another' and this is what determines their character (Bakhtin, 1986: 91). In each utterance we sense the speaker's intentions or 'speech plan' and it is this 'speech will' which determines the duration and boundaries of the utterance (Bakhtin, 1986: 77). And from the initial words we sense the developing totality of the utterance (Bakhtin, 1986).

In the present study the sphere of speech communication is the literacy event of storybook reading. And in analysing the data I am examining the mutually reflective utterances of the speakers to uncover their intended meanings and to determine how language is being used by the teachers, the children, and the texts to position the children

as certain kinds of readers. Because, as Bakhtin (1986) notes, dialogic utterances are the “real” units of language and meaning.

Following Bakhtin (1986), I refer to the alternating speech turns of the interlocutors in the transcripts as rejoinders. ‘Each rejoinder, regardless of how brief and abrupt, has a specific quality of completion that expresses a particular position of the speaker, to which one may respond or may assume, with respect to it, a responsive position’ (Bakhtin, 1986: 72). And all rejoinders are linked to each other. Many of the sentences in the transcripts are interrogatory and imperative types and act as completed utterances in this particular classroom speech genre (Bakhtin, 1986).

Speech genres are the ‘relatively stable types’ of utterances that each sphere of language use develops (Bakhtin, 1986: 60). A word acquires a particular typical expression or situated meaning in a genre (Bakhtin, 1986). The particular function and the particular conditions of spoken interaction specific to each language sphere create particular speech genres, i.e. ‘certain relatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic types of utterances’ (Bakhtin, 1986: 64). Each genre in each area of oral communication has its own specific conception of the addressee and this is part of what defines it as a genre (Bakhtin, 1986).

Hicks (1995) notes that all classrooms have stable discourse genres such as Circle Time, ‘Show and Tell’ and, as is the case in the current study, ‘Storybook Reading’. I view these discourse genres as specific examples of Bakhtin’s (1986) speech genres. Children do not need to learn anew the discourse associated with such particular activity structures every time they engage in such activities. And, ‘classroom discourses are not “givens” but, rather, social constructions’ (Hicks, 1995: 52) (emphasis in the original).

3.9.2.4 Analysing Discourse

Language is used to enact social identities, social relations, and social activities, and ‘to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions’ (Gee, 2005: 1). These two functions of language are reciprocally related. Language is used to build identities and institutions. One could say that identities, events and institutions are ‘discoursed into being’ (Bloome *et al.*, 2008). In turn the identities and institutions we inhabit influence the language we use. And in the process the identities and institutions are transformed. So language-in-use is a tool used along with other tools to design, to build and to transform (Gee, 2005).

Gee (2005) has identified seven “building tasks” of language accompanied by seven concomitant discourse analysis questions. He contends that when we write or speak we always construct these seven areas of “reality”. Similarly, Bloome *et al.* (2008) highlight how the linguistic turn in the social sciences foregrounds the manner in which language is used for certain purposes.

- **Significance:** Language is used to make certain things significant, meaningful, valuable or not, to privilege certain definitions and ways of knowing (Bloome *et al.*, 2008; Gee, 2005). Discourse analysis question: ‘How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?’ (Gee, 2005: 11).
- **Activities:** Language is used to enact certain activities. Discourse analysis question: ‘What activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact?’ (Gee, 2005: 11).
- **Identities:** People use language to enact particular identities or roles, to construct social realities of people’s daily lives, including identities as particular kinds of readers (Bloome *et al.*, 2008; Gee, 2005). The identities we assume ‘are flexibly

negotiated in actual contexts of practice' (Gee, 2005: 23). Discourse analysis question: 'What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact?' (Gee, 2005: 12).

- **Relationships:** We use language to build social relationships (Bloome *et al.*, 2008; Gee, 2005). Discourse analysis question: 'What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)?' (Gee, 2005: 12) (emphasis in the original).
- **Politics:** Language is used to voice a perspective on the distribution of social, economic, political, and cultural capital (Bloome *et al.*, 2008; Gee, 2005). Discourse analysis question: 'What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating?' (Gee, 2005: 12).
- **Connections:** Language can be used to form connections, to render certain things relevant or irrelevant. Discourse analysis question: 'How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?' (Gee, 2005: 13).
- **Sign systems and knowledge:** Language can be used to privilege or disprivilege certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief (Bloome *et al.*, 2008; Gee, 2005). Discourse analysis question: 'How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief?' (Gee, 2005: 13).

These seven building tasks together constitute an interrelated network or system within which all of the components impute and receive meaning to and from each other (Gee, 2005). Discourse situations, such as the literacy events I video recorded, are never entirely novel. Through repetition over time they have become ritualized. In each research

site the teachers and children have developed ‘flexible’ rituals for how to read stories, what Bloome *et al.* (2005) and Bloome *et al.* (2008) call a ‘working consensus’. Yet each literacy event is novel to some extent. Children learn how to ‘do’ story reading even if the enactment of the literacy event varies from day to day in the stories read, the questions asked and the participants present. Whereas the text and the participants might be different the literacy practices will be very similar (Bloome *et al.*, 2005; Bloome *et al.*, 2008).

I drew on the seven discourse analysis questions on a “fitness-for-purpose” basis to analyse the transcripts of the video-recordings. This bottom-up approach to discourse analysis takes as its starting point the teachers and children engaged in communication and ‘constructing intersubjective reality together in interaction’ (Riley, 2007: 7). By examining the dialogic utterances of the participants in the storybook reading events I have aimed to uncover their intended meanings in an attempt to answer the first two research questions:

1. *In what ways are storybook reading events in Irish and English shaped by local norms?*
2. *In what ways are storybook reading events similar and different in the two languages?*

3.9.2.5 Conceptual Tools

As stated in Chapter 2 I am using Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity and subjectification as conceptual tools for analysing the storybook reading events. Another key conceptual tool I draw on is Halliday’s (1973) *Explorations in the Functions of Language*. Halliday outlines seven functions of language including instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and representational. The concept of language functions is important ‘for the understanding of language in its educational, developmental, social and aesthetic aspects’ (Halliday, 1973: 8). I will be drawing on these conceptual tools on a fitness-for-purpose basis.

3.10 Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability in qualitative studies the research must be conducted in an ethical manner. Accounting for validity and reliability are important in order to establish the trustworthiness of research results. Because qualitative research is based on different assumptions about reality to those held by quantitative researchers, validity and reliability should be considered from a perspective that is consistent with the philosophical assumptions underlying the research paradigm (Merriam, 1998). One of the assumptions underpinning the constructivist paradigm is that ‘reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing’ (Merriam, 1998: 202). As discussed earlier, the data presented are my reconstructions and interpretations of the literacy events observed and video recorded. Because the data were gathered using direct methods including observations and video-recordings, I would claim that my interpretations of reality are more valid than if a data gathering instrument had been interjected between me and the participants. This form of internal validity can be seen as a strength of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998).

In qualitative research establishing validity is a form of quality assurance. I attempted to enhance the internal validity of my study by drawing on strategies proposed by Faltis (1997) and Merriam (1998). Firstly, I outlined my theoretical assumptions in Chapter 2 and also at the beginning of the current chapter thus exposing any biases I have. Secondly, I engaged in long-term observation at the research settings over a period of four years. Thirdly, I used member checks with participating teachers to check some of my assertions during the course of the study. Fourthly, peer examination of transcripts for accuracy also served as a form of quality control. With regard to external validity I was aiming for analytic generalisation through developing an in-depth understanding of how literacy events are co-constructed by participants in very specific all-Irish immersion

contexts and not statistical generalisation which is not the goal of such small-scale research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) have proposed transferability as the qualitative parallel to external validity. By providing a ‘rich, thick description’ of the context, readers can judge for themselves the extent to which the phenomenon under investigation and the conclusions drawn fit with their own situations, a process which Merriam (1998) calls ‘reader or user generalizability’.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that in qualitative research reliability should be replaced by a focus on the ‘dependability’ and ‘consistency’ of the results derived from the data. What matters is not whether others get the same results but how consistent the results are with the data gathered. To ensure my results are dependable a number of techniques suggested by Merriam (1998) have been deployed. I have explained my theoretical position from the outset as well as explaining my own reasons for the investigation, my position in relation to the participants, the basis for selecting participants, descriptions of participants and the social context from which data were gathered. And in providing detailed descriptions of the participants, the settings, details of how data were gathered, categorised, analysed, how decisions were arrived at during the course of the study, as well as full transcriptions of interviews and video-recordings, I have attempted to leave an ‘audit trail’ (Merriam, 1998) or ‘chain of evidence’ (Yin, 2003) for readers to scrutinise the methodology and interpretations and draw their own conclusions. Providing for a ‘confirmability audit’ is recommended by Guba and Lincoln (1989) who proposed confirmability as the qualitative equivalent of objectivity in the postpositivist paradigm. The conclusions arrived at amount to no more than ‘working hypotheses’ (Cronbach, 1975, cited in Merriam, 1998), or what Dewey, cited in Biesta and Burbules (2003) called, ‘warranted assertion’.

While my observations did undoubtedly disturb the ecological validity of the literacy events, every attempt was made to ensure observations were as unobtrusive as possible. With time my impact on each setting attenuated as the children and teachers became accustomed to my presence in their classrooms. Similarly, for the video-recordings, because the focal children were withdrawn from the class the settings were not natural. However, this was offset by the advantages which may have accrued to the children from participating in storybook reading events in small groups, based on evidence from Morrow and Smith (1990) cited in Chapter 2.

3.11. Ethical Issues

3.11.1 Children and Childhood

I was guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which views children as individuals in their own right who, as social actors, can express opinions, be part of the decision-making process, and influence outcomes. In accordance with the new social studies of childhood, I view children as fully-formed beings who are participants in and producers of social and cultural change. Children engage in cultural activities, create identities and meanings and their world views may not coincide with those of adults and institutions such as schools (Bragg, 2007). Much language in the literature such as ‘emergent bilinguals’, and ‘emergent readers’ can imply a deficit on the part of children by viewing them as people growing towards adulthood. I reject such a view in favour of a view of children as mature individuals in their own right.

3.11.2 Ethics in Research

Stake (2000: 447) reminds us that ‘qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world’. Ethics, therefore, are a matter of balancing one’s social

responsibilities (Berg, 2004) or what Cohen and Manion (1994) refer to as the 'costs/benefits ratio'. Such responsibilities include responsibility to oneself, one's discipline or profession, to the pursuit of knowledge, the society, and the research participants (Berg, 2004). Ultimately ethical practice is realised through the individual's own values and ethics (Merriam, 1998). And the ethical justification for the research should be considered 'situationally, case by case' (Berg, 2004: 70), because behaviour is determined by situation (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

Ethical issues such as negotiating access, gaining entry, seeking active, informed consent from participants (Berg, 2004; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Mertens, 2010), and informing participants of the nature and purposes of the study, have already been discussed in detail. Only towards the end of Year 1 of the project did I consider the possibility of video recording storybook reading events with only the target children present. By then I was familiar with the settings and, based on observations and informal conversations with the teachers, video-recording emerged as a potentially powerful means of gathering very rich, detailed data on inter-actions during literacy events. By Year 4 of the project I had built up a good rapport with the teachers and children. It was only at that stage, therefore, that I formally requested permission to interview the children. Similarly it was only at a later stage, when the video transcripts had been prepared, that I formally sought teachers' consent to be interviewed. Therefore, it was not possible to inform gatekeepers and participants about every stage in the process before the study commenced. In that respect I was seeking 'reasonably informed consent' (Cohen and Manion, 1994) at each stage of the project. I viewed my relationship with the participants as a 'social contract' (Berg, 2004), a contract that was under ongoing negotiation as the project evolved, and as we developed trust and confidence in each other.

The privacy of the participants was respected at all times. At each stage of the project the teachers and children were assured they could withdraw from the project at any stage. Measures were put in place to ensure anonymity and to avoid unwanted disclosure of confidential information (Bragg, 2007; Cohen and Manion, 1994). Such measures included using pseudonyms for all participants, as well as not divulging enough information about the participating schools that would allow readers to identify them (Hill, 2005). The aim was to ensure non-traceability by removing all identifiers. Schools and participants were assured from the outset that such measures were being put in place. In line with the assurances I gave the schools, parents, and children, only the teachers and I have ever seen the video-recordings of the storybook reading events, and only I have listened to the audio-recordings of the interviews.

Ethical problems also emerge when presenting and analysing data because the data have been filtered through my theoretical position (Merriam, 1998). I accept responsibility for all decisions made about what data to collect, data collection methods, what data I presented, as well as approaches to data analysis. I may have unwittingly excluded data that contradicted my findings. To reduce the potential bias of the study I have put measures in place including member checks and peer examination, as well as leaving an 'audit trail' (Merriam, 1998) for the reader in order to establish the validity and reliability of the study. In particular, full transcripts of all interviews conducted during the study, and full transcripts of all video-recordings presented in the study have been included in the appendices for readers to draw their own conclusions which may or may not be congruent with mine. Finally, I was neither an advocate of, nor a critic of the literacy events I observed (Berg, 2004).

3.12 Reflexivity: The Researcher's Voice

Reflexivity is a process of reflecting critically on oneself and on one's actions as a researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Being reflexive entails acknowledging the historical, social, cultural, and personal situatedness of one's work (Etherington, 2004; Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Reinharz, 1997, cited in Lincoln and Guba, 2000) as well as being conscious of the ideology, culture, and politics of the participants (Etherington, 2004). Therefore, it has been important for me to expose my subjective, motivational reasons for conducting the research and to make transparent my values, beliefs, theoretical orientations, and biases, all of which influence the research process and outcomes (Berg, 2004; Etherington, 2004). I am aware that there may be other hidden and unacknowledged elements in my background that haven't been brought to consciousness during the study (Olesen, 2005) but that will always be the case with research.

Reflexivity 'creates a dynamic process of interaction within *and* between our selves and our participants, *and* the data that inform decisions, actions and interpretations at all stages of research' (Etherington, 2004: 36) (emphases in the original). My decisions about what topic to research, what literature to review, what data collection methods to employ, how to analyse the data and report findings all reflect my own history and perspective and are constrained by my own 'discursive repertoire' and my capacity to represent the participants' worlds. I am, therefore, enmeshed in the data I generate and the representations I construct (Youdell, 2006). This was an evolving perspective because, as I gathered and reflected on the data, I was also creating and re-creating my selves in the field (Reinharz, 1997, cited in Lincoln and Guba, 2000) because I was both a part of, and a product of, the social world I was studying (Berg, 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). I have also used my own personal knowledge and experience to guide me at different stages of the project (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). For example, as noted earlier in the

chapter, I was drawing on my many years of experience as a primary teacher when interviewing the children.

I have attempted throughout the report to reveal to the reader what my perspectives are and how they have influenced my approach in an attempt to lend rhetorical force to the research report. This is not to suggest that my personal experience is privileged over the shared experiences with the research participants. As an educational researcher my primary job is to tell the stories of the people and the literacy events I have studied but the account has been constructed through dialogues with the participants (Gergen and Gergen, 2000). As a reflexive ethnographer I do not merely report findings as facts. As Charmaz (2000: 253) reminds us, 'a constructivist grounded theory distinguishes between the real and the true'. I actively construct interpretations of my experiences in the field and then question how these interpretations came about (Berg, 2004). I do not claim that the products of the research 'constitute the reality of the respondents' reality' (Charmaz, 2000: 523). What I present is 'a rendering, one interpretation among multiple interpretations, of a shared ... reality' (Charmaz, 2000: 523). The result of the process is 'reflexive knowledge' (Berg, 2004: 154) which includes an account of what I know as well as how it came to be known (Berg, 2004; Etherington, 2004).

I do not attempt to privilege my subjectivity. I have involved the pupils and teachers in meaningful ways (Biesta and Burbules, 2003). By viewing my relationship with the research participants as one of 'consultancy and collaboration' I have attempted to promote 'a sense of power, involvement and agency' (Etherington, 2004: 32) among the participants. 'Good ethnography requires that the researcher avoids simply accepting everything at face value but, instead, considers the material as raw data that may require corroboration or verification' (Berg, 2004: 154). Through collaborating and consulting with the participants I was able to revisit the data with new perspectives and insights that

enabled me to reflect more thoughtfully on my initial conclusions, a form of ‘internal dialogue’ (Berg, 2004). The teachers were afforded opportunities to be reflexive through viewing the video-recordings of the storybook reading events and sharing their reflections and insights with me, a form of ‘performative reflexivity’ (Turner, 1988, cited in Alexander, 2005).

To be reflexive studies must be contextually situated (Charmaz, 2000). Consequently I have presented the reader with details of the research settings and the participants. I have also addressed ethical issues and power relations between myself and the participants because this is what reflexivity entails. Such reflexivity adds validity and rigour to the research (Etherington, 2004). I am both the researcher and the author and authoring has been a process of ‘discovery of the self’ (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 184).

3.13 Summary

The chapter began by outlining the theoretical framework which guided the methodology for the study. The methodologies and data collection methods used were discussed in detail. Detailed descriptions of the research sites were presented. The validity and reliability of the study have been established and reflexivity and ethical issues were addressed. Approaches to data management, transcriptions, data analysis and in particular, discourse analysis have been detailed. The aim has been to provide a full account of the contexts and processes that led to the research findings which are presented and analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 is divided into three main sections. In the first section I present my interpretive analysis of the storybook reading events from the three classes. In conducting a social constructivist analysis I am focusing on discourse during storybook reading events to understand how reality comes to be constituted in participants' inter-actions and in the language they use (Krippendorff, 2004). In Chapter 2 I noted the inter-dependency of the context, the text, and the participants in accomplishing the literacy event. Therefore, I preface my analysis of each storybook reading event with detailed profiles of the teachers and pupils. I also present my interpretations of the books read by the teachers. Detailed information on the school contexts was presented in Chapter 3. When presenting data from the literacy events I will be considering ways in which the teachers' convictions about language and literacy development, as revealed during interviews, correspond with their approaches to storybook reading and how the local norms mediate and shape the literacy events.

Data from the pupil interviews are presented and analysed in the second section. The third section explores ways in which the children draw on their linguistic resources in both L1 and L2 to enact their identities as bilinguals and bilingual readers during literacy events, a theme which emerged from the data. The chapter concludes with a summary of the most salient issues emerging from the study.

Bloome *et al.* (2005) note that no research methodology is autonomous. I am present in the literacy events as cameraman, and sometimes as participant observer. A micro-ethnographic interpretive discourse analysis does not lie outside the literacy events. For me it exists in reflexive relationship with the events. But this does not necessarily invalidate the study or its usefulness. It does help to delineate the limits of the study and

the claims I make. As I analysed I learnt and made decisions about what else and how to analyse, what to focus on, what to highlight, and what to report on. So the literacy events shaped the analysis and in analysing the events I am re-shaping and re-constructing the events. This can be seen in my interpretations and critiques of the stories read by the teachers, in how I divided the transcripts into Topic Units, and in the vignettes I have selected from the transcripts to answer the research questions and build a case. The process of reflexivity permeates all aspects of data presentation and analysis.

4.2 Storybook Reading in Class B1 (Junior Infants)

4.2.1 The Participants

Five pupils, three boys and two girls, in Class B1 participated in the study. All five children were present for the video-recordings in June 2005 and four of the children were interviewed in June 2008. As mentioned previously one of the girls did not advance to Senior Infants. The class teacher Claire was interviewed in December 2010.

Claire qualified with a Bachelor of Education Degree in 1987 and had spent sixteen years teaching in School B prior to the commencement of the project. Part of that time had been spent teaching infants. She is not a native Irish speaker. I had not met Claire prior to meeting with her in the school to request access to her class for the study. Claire has experience of implementing both a partial immersion model and a total immersion model in School B. Therefore, she is well placed to compare the two models. She is deeply committed to the total immersion model espoused by the school as she feels it is by far the most effective means of promoting language and literacy development in Irish.

Full immersion approach ... from the beginning, because I have taught not using the full immersion approach and it's very difficult. We just didn't see the same success rate ... they didn't have the fluency and the literacy that they have now at the end of Junior Infants. The other approach just did not work. (Claire)

Claire also places great emphasis on the availability of suitable resources and considers the *Séideán Sí* programme to be very effective because it is designed as an integrated approach to teaching the four macro-skills of language. The programme also enables the implementation of a whole-school approach to teaching Irish. Claire values a consistent approach to language and literacy development throughout the school.

The huge thing there with Séideán Sí is consistency. I really firmly believe in it ... If the whole scheme contains everything you actually need from Junior Infants right through the school and if it's followed, you will have a fantastic development of literacy and fluency. (Claire)

Claire places much emphasis on the affective dimension of literacy development. It is important to her that the children actively participate in the storybook reading events and enjoy the stories. She strives to achieve participation by using a lot of paralinguistic clues and by frequently eliciting vocabulary from the children when reading.

I find that role, mime and drama is fantastic am because you are keeping the enjoyment alive. You can elicit fantastic vocabulary, you can get them very involved. (Claire)

It is clearly evident that Claire is deeply committed to the school early total immersion policy and to using the Irish language materials developed to promote an integrated approach to the teaching of the four macro-skills of language appropriate for the circumstances that obtain in all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools.

Table 4.1 Summary profile of Claire

Class Teacher: Claire
16 years teaching experience in School B prior to commencement of study
Non-native speaker of Irish
Stories read: <i>Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamaí</i> and <i>The Smartest Giant in Town</i>
Favours total immersion approach
Satisfied with <i>Séideán Sí</i> materials
Values consistent approach to language and literacy development throughout the school
Emphasises affective dimension of literacy development

4.2.1.1 The Pupils

Christopher was reported as being a very quiet, clever, and somewhat philosophical child. He was slow and meticulous in his approach to all school work. I noticed he sometimes erased and re-wrote during activities. He did not attend a *naíonra*. He often sat on his hunkers on the chair. Christopher frequently raised his hand to answer questions and followed teacher instructions diligently. During Year 2 I noticed that his word recognition skills and phonemic awareness were very good. He could use his knowledge of language, words, and orthography to identify the final phoneme in a word. Other pupils looked to him for help with spelling words during written activities.

During interview Christopher revealed that he frequently spoke Irish with his father, his uncle, his brother, and grandparents. He had a very positive attitude to speaking Irish as it was part of his primary Discourse: *“Is fearr liom ah labhairt Gaeilge sa bhaile níos mó.”* (I prefer ah speaking Irish at home.) He enjoyed reading information texts about animals and the Titanic and was happy that his parents had selected an all-Irish school for him. He also indicated that sometimes he found it easier to read and write in Irish: *“Uaireanta tá Gaeilge níos éasca.”* (Sometimes Irish is easier.)

Colm was an only child when the project commenced. He was reported to be progressing at an average rate. He had attended a *naíonra*. During interview the teacher, Claire, remarked that he sought a lot of attention from teachers and classmates. Observations revealed that Colm engaged enthusiastically in Irish language and literacy activities, including songs, rhymes, sound games, and drama activities. He raised his hand to volunteer answers frequently. He could easily be distracted from his work. During Year 2 I noticed he was well able to identify and blend phonemes. He could use his knowledge of language, words, and orthography to anticipate the next sound or phoneme in a word.

He also liked to compose complex sentences during oral activities. At the time the teacher indicated that this oral competence had not yet transferred to writing.

During interview it emerged that Colm had a very positive attitude towards speaking Irish that was related to a strong family commitment to learning the language. He frequently spoke Irish at home and visited the Gaeltacht on a regular basis. His social proximity to the Gaeltacht community impacted very positively on Colm's attitude to speaking Irish: *"Well it's our language and I like speaking it and stuff and that's why I go to Inis Oírr a lot because I like speaking Irish to people and they speak Irish back."* *"I know English, I know German, but I am wanted to know Irish 'coz that's my native language and it's dying and I want to keep it up."* Colm indicated that he sometimes preferred to read in Irish but he found writing in Irish a little more challenging than English because of his greater fluency in English. He liked to read in bed, a habit he had acquired at a young age from his parents. In particular he liked to read adventure stories and fantasy stories about characters with superhuman powers. Colm derived a lot of satisfaction from writing stories and he responded positively to praise from teachers about his oral competence in Irish.

Colin was reported as experiencing learning difficulties in school and both the class teacher and the school principal were concerned that Colin was presenting with behaviours that are characteristic of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. He had attended a *naíonra*. Observations revealed that Colin could be quite inattentive. Even when he appeared to be paying attention he frequently gave "incorrect" answers to questions. Sometimes I wondered if he just interpreted the questions differently to the teacher's intended meanings. He raised his hand frequently to volunteer to participate in drama activities but not so often to volunteer answers to questions. During Year 2 I noticed that his word recognition skills were quite weak. He also had difficulty blending phonemes to

identify words. He frequently made errors in literacy assignments. His concentration was poor and he appeared to daydream a lot. Colin appeared to listen to other pupils when they were speaking off-task but not to instructions from the teacher about what tasks to complete. He enjoyed activities that involved physical movement. By Year 3 his oral fluency in Irish was quite impressive as is evidenced by the following grammatically correct sentence I recorded from him during an observation in October 2007: *Bhí fiacla móra aige chun daoine a mharú agus fuil a ól.* (He had large teeth to kill people and drink blood.)

At interview Colin revealed that he enjoyed reading adventure stories and information texts related to animals and insects. He was read to frequently by his parents but his own preference was for playing electronic games such as Nintendo. He spoke some Irish at home, was favourably disposed towards speaking the language, and was happy that his parents had selected an all-Irish school for him: *“Am I think it’s good and I like the decision that they choosed and I hope that because my Mom and Dad speak it as well with me sometimes when they’re having dinner or something”*.

Simone was reported to be progressing at a normal rate with her classmates. The class teacher described her as being very quiet and shy. She was an only child when the project commenced. No Irish was spoken at home. Simone had attended a *naíonra*. When observing Simone I noticed she paid great attention to the teacher at all times. She was very focused on her work and not distracted easily. When assigned written work she always completed it immediately and usually correctly. She always carried out the teacher’s classroom management instructions. She was extremely quiet at all times and was frequently asked to repeat her answers more loudly. Initially Simone was not inclined to raise her hand to volunteer answers but by Year 3 she was more willing to do so.

In contrast to the three boys in Class B1 who had very positive attitudes to speaking Irish and who also had a lot of home support for learning Irish, Simone did not have such home support for speaking Irish and had quite a negative attitude towards the language: “*Ní maith liom é*” (I don’t like it), saying that having to speak Irish all the time in school made her “*cross*”. She found reading and writing in Irish quite challenging because of the highly inflected nature of the language compared with English which has relatively few inflections. Simone did not seem particularly happy that her parents had selected an all-Irish school for her. When she was younger both her parents had read to her frequently. She enjoyed reading adventure stories. She also enjoyed writing stories at home as a leisure pursuit: “*Yeah I write lots of stories at home in my storybook*”. Sometimes she was a reluctant reader when required to practise reading for homework: “*Because I have to, because I already read them before I don’t really want to, because I know the story*”.

Sienna was the youngest pupil in the class and some of her older siblings were attending the same school. She was reported as being bright but immature. There was a strong family involvement in Irish music. Her mother spoke some Irish with her. I did not get to observe Sienna for my two classroom visits during the third term of Year 1 as she was absent on both occasions. She was present on the days we recorded the storybook reading events. I did not interview Sienna as she did not progress to Senior Infants with her classmates.

Table 4.2 Summary profiles of pupils in Class B1

Pupils	Progress in school	Attendance at naíonra	Home support for Irish	Attitudes to Irish	Reading preferences
Christopher	Very good	No	Very strong	Very positive	Enjoyed reading in both languages
Colm	Average	Yes	Very strong	Very positive	Enjoyed reading in both languages
Colin	Experiencing learning difficulties	Yes	A little	Positive	Enjoyed reading in English
Simone	Average	Yes	No	Quite negative	Enjoyed reading in English but not material prescribed by school
Sienna	Very good	^{5*} Not interviewed	A little	*Not interviewed	*Not interviewed

4.2.2 The Irish Story: *Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamáí (Shopping with Mammy)*

It is important to bear in mind that the storybook reading event is shaped and constructed not just by the teacher and children but also by those not directly present including the author and illustrator. An analysis of a reading event must include consideration of the potentialities and restrictions the text might impose on the event. As noted in Chapter 2, the “potential text” becomes the “realised text” as the teacher and pupils bring their own personal experiences and interpretations to bear on the event resulting in ‘verbal art performance’ (Golden and Gerber, 1990). My own interpretation of the story will also shape my analysis of the reading event. Therefore, I am presenting a brief synopsis of the Irish story imbued with my own interpretations as well as Claire’s assessment of the suitability of the text having reviewed the video-recording.

This big book is not a ‘real’ book as it was specially produced by the *Dearthóirí Áiseanna Teagaisc na Roinne Oideachais agus Eolaíochta* scheme charged with developing materials to support the teaching of Irish in all-Irish schools and Gaeltacht schools. The scheme is entitled *Séideán Sí* and is funded by the Department of Education

⁵ *Sienna withdrew from the study because she did not progress to Senior Infants with her classmates. Consequently she was not interviewed with the other pupils.

and Skills. The materials have been specially developed to support teachers to implement the official Irish language curriculum for all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. The use of such materials is indicative of the presence of remote actors in the form of ‘literacy sponsors’ (Brandt and Clinton, 2002) in local literacy events who play a role in making possible the acquisition of literacy. Such distant forces can be seen as ideological players who are subjective participants integral to the local literacy event (Reder and Davila, 2005).

An integrated approach to teaching the four macro-skills of language, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, is strongly recommended in the curriculum and in the *Séideán Sí* scheme. The curriculum and the scheme are based on ten thematic units. The book *Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamaí* is part of the theme *Siopadóireacht* (Shopping).

The story is about the main character Róisín who goes to the supermarket with her mother. While there they get separated and the shopkeeper helps to reunite the two of them. There is no character development in the story unlike the English story *The Smartest Giant in Town* which Claire also read to the children. Similar to the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel the story *Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamaí* deals with the theme of separation anxiety and many young children could possibly identify with the content, emotions, and sentiments expressed in the text. However, it does so very explicitly. Bettelheim (1976) suggests that such realistic storylines can be frightening for a child and they run counter to children’s inner experiences. In contrast fairy tales speak to children through symbols and not through everyday physical reality. In fairy tales events become important to children through the symbolic meaning they attach to them.

Another salient contrast between the two stories is the agency afforded the children in both stories. In Hansel and Gretel the children use their intelligence and ingenuity to rescue themselves and find their way home safely. Their behaviour is goal-directed based on rational assessment of their plight. Such themes are very appropriate for children who in

their first year of schooling are learning to confront fears of separation. The fairy tale Hansel and Gretel encourages growth towards a higher plane of psychological and intellectual existence whereby children transcend their immature dependence on their parents and learn to rely on their own ingenuity and support of age mates (Bettelheim, 1976). In contrast the child in the story *Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamaí* does not have agency and is dependent on the adult shopkeeper to resolve the problem.

The text is very short and simple and combines narrative with direct speech. Some sentence structures are repeated to help Irish language learners. Like all children's books it is beautifully illustrated to appeal to young children. The pictures can be used to read beyond the text and to elicit, practise and teach vocabulary and sentence structures. The emotions of sadness and happiness are emphasised in the story providing children with vocabulary they could use to express their own feelings.

I would have a number of misgivings about the suitability of many of the stories in the *Séideán Sí* programme, including the story which Claire selected to read. I find the texts of many of these stories quite contrived. They appear to have been written with didactic intentions, namely to teach children language. They position the children as passive recipients of language and knowledge rather than as active meaning makers. As such the 'textual agency' (Reder and Davila, 2005) of the *Séideán Sí* books differs considerably from the textual agency of other children's literary fiction such as the story *Goodnight Goodnight* read by Deborah. Many of the *Séideán Sí* texts are meant to reflect 'reality' and are conduits for teachers to give children language they could use to speak about their own experiences. In particular, I doubted the potential of these books to enchant and stimulate children's imaginations. However, when asked to compare the children's levels of engagement for both stories it emerged that Claire took a different viewpoint.

I think that the story that we chose ... Mamaí ag Siopadóireacht they really liked that particular story ... and I think they responded very well to it ... it was something that could

happen in their own lives quite easily, there was a connection ... to their own experiences, so I think their reaction to it was fantastic ... I think that the content of the story really ... enthralled them. (Claire)

Claire is of the opinion that the story content was ‘enthralled’ for the children and that the children responded well to the story because it was grounded in their experiences. The following excerpt from the reading event indicates that at least one of the children could identify with the experience. But his recollection of the experience (Turn 359) indicates his own agency in finding his mother as opposed to the passive role assigned to the child in the story. The full transcript of the literacy event is included in Appendix 4.

357. Colm: Am, I was playing hide-and-go-seek in Dunne’s with my mum and then I went too far and then I looked around the other side and then my mum was gone.
358. Teacher: Agus cad a rinne tú? An raibh tusa ag gol?
And what did you do? Were you crying?
359. Colm: No. I ran, I ran back over to the, am, shoes she was looking at and then I found her.

Claire values the affective dimension of storybook reading. It is important to her that the children actively participate in the events and enjoy the stories.

When I’m reading an Irish story I would focus more on the language, definitely the story I would really want ... to keep the story very much alive and the enjoyment ... but definitely am in my own subtle way I am you know focusing very much on the language and repetition ... which enhances the vocabulary, it enhances them to develop language. (Claire)

So from Claire’s perspective she focuses a good deal on the language and vocabulary in the Irish story, not just to practise and teach language but also to ensure that the children understand the story and enjoy the read-aloud as an aesthetic event.

4.2.2.1 The Irish Storybook Reading Event in Class B1: *Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamaí*

Here Claire is reading the story *Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamaí* to four of the children. One pupil, Colin, was absent. As would be expected in a storybook reading event with young children many of the teacher's utterances were aimed at promoting various aspects of early literacy development including monitoring and developing the children's bibliographic knowledge, concepts of print, phonological awareness, and whole word recognition. Such predictors of early success in literacy are as relevant for Irish as they are for English. In analysing all of the lessons I am focusing on excerpts from the transcript that help shed light on the research questions presented in Chapter 3.

Excerpt 1 below occurs during the pre-reading phase of the lesson when Claire and the children are discussing pictures in the book. I have selected Excerpt 1 for two reasons. Firstly, it is representative of the dominant discourse interactional patterns in all of the literacy events recorded, and described as Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Feedback (IRE/IRF) by Cazden (2001). Secondly, we see that Claire is making **significant** (Gee, 2005) children's knowledge of lexical items and language as display as a **way of knowing** (Gee, 2005), a common feature of her instructional strategies. The full transcript of this literacy event is included in Appendix 4.

Excerpt 1

- Céard é an rud sin atá ag Mamaí os a comhair amach?
What is that thing that Mummy has in front of her?
14. Choral Response: Tralaí.
A trolley.
15. Teacher: Is tralaí é, nach ea? Abair é. Is...
It's a trolley, isn't it? Say it. It's...
16. Choral Response: Is tralaí é.
It's a trolley.
17. Teacher: Cén dath atá ar an tralaí? Lámha suas. Cén dath atá ar an tralaí? Bhfuil fhios ag aon duine? Colm.
[Colm and Christopher have their hands raised to volunteer an answer.]
What colour is the trolley? Hands up. What colour is the trolley? Does anyone know? Colm.
18. Colm: Liath.
Grey.
19. Teacher: Tá sé liath. Céard atá istigh sa tralaí ag Mam?

20. Sienna: **It's grey. What has Mum got in the trolley?**
Píseanna.
21. Teacher: **Peas.**
Tá píseanna ann. Céard eile?
22. Colm: **There are peas in it. What else?**
Calóga arbhair.
23. Teacher: **Cornflakes.**
Calóga arbhair. Aon rud eile?
Cornflakes. Anything else?

At turns 19 to 23 above the teacher is using the picture in the book to elicit the names of food items from the children. Eliciting single lexical item responses from the children was a regular occurrence during the Irish literacy event. Claire accomplished this by asking closed, display questions. In such instances knowledge resides with the teacher and in the text. Claire is privileging a **view of knowledge** (Gee, 2005) as transmissionary and ‘dialogic interaction’ (Wells, 2000) is not promoted. The children are expected to display their knowledge of vocabulary items with single word responses to the teacher’s stimulus. Similar interactional patterns occurred throughout the lesson where children were expected to display their knowledge of lexical items related to food, colours, clothes, numbers, and emotions. The net effect was that the children responded mostly in Irish during the lesson. Similarly, Mhic Mhathúna (2008, 2010) found that when the *stiúrthóirí* read stories to the children in the *naíonra* they encouraged the children to participate by completing sentences with lexical items frequently focusing on vocabulary for naming objects, colours, and numbers, as well as vocabulary related to size and emotions.

Sometimes when discussing the pictures with the children Claire was practising language to prepare the children for the text she was about to read. However, very often she was practising language that was not part of the actual text or language that did not advance the story in any way. For example, in turns 15 to 16 above Claire avails of the opportunity to practise the copula *Is* which is a core feature of Irish syntax for which no English equivalent exists. This Irish structure is difficult for Irish language learners to

master and Claire is, no doubt, aware of that. It is clear that Claire approaches the literacy event with didactic intentions related to language learning as well as literacy development and the children are aware of her intentions as is evident in Excerpt 2 below when Christopher makes **significant** (Gee, 2005) his lexical knowledge.

Excerpt 2

- So osclóimid an leabhar agus tosóimid agus arís feicimid an...
[The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the sentence.]
Okay. So we'll open the book and we'll begin and again we see the...
28. Colm: Teideal.
Title.
29. Teacher: An teideal, nach ea, thuas ar...
[The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the phrase.]
barr.
The title, isn't it, up at the...top.
30. Christopher: Agus an tralaí.
And the trolley.
31. Teacher: Agus an tralaí. Go raibh maith agat, Christopher. Okay.
And the trolley. Thank you, Christopher. Okay.

In Excerpt 2 above Claire is monitoring the children's bibliographic knowledge and Christopher refers to the picture of the trolley on the page. He is displaying his lexical knowledge and his utterance is a response to previous utterances in the lesson. Christopher is positioning himself within the classroom immersion Discourse for storybook reading in Irish which privileges demonstrating knowledge of lexical items and using language for display. His contribution is acknowledged by the teacher thereby confirming to him the appropriateness of his behaviour. In positioning himself as a good, knowledgeable pupil Christopher is both acting and being acted upon. Through his unsolicited contribution Christopher is acting on the literacy event and the teacher in a way that gives meaning to the classroom immersion Discourse thereby confirming to the teacher the effectiveness of her earlier instructional strategies. He is also being acted upon in that he is being positioned by the classroom Discourse. The teacher, Claire is also both acting on and being acted upon by the event and by the pupils. Because of her commitment to the school immersion Discourse she focuses primarily on the language in the story to improve

children's oral skills as opposed to prioritising children's responses to the story. The literacy event is being performatively accomplished through the inter-actions of the participants, the event itself, the text, and the context.

The classroom Discourse is imposed rather than negotiated and Christopher is aware of how to behave in order to be recognised as a knowledgeable pupil. He is enacting his socially situated **identity** (Gee, 2005) as an Irish speaker and his academic identity as a learner by performing in the appropriate manner. His identity is a performative accomplishment as he positions himself in relation to the teacher's expectations and available Discourses (Lewis, 2001). Christopher is learning that to position himself as a knowledgeable pupil he has to acquire the classroom Discourse that privileges certain **forms of knowledge** and **ways of knowing** (Gee, 2005).

Focusing on language as display meant that more communicative exchanges occurred infrequently during the Irish storybook reading event. A more communicative interchange can be seen in Excerpt 3 below where Claire privileges a different **form of knowledge** (Gee, 2005) related to comprehension development, namely predicting the storyline.

Excerpt 3

45. Teacher: Sháigh Mamaí a ceann isteach an doras agus meas tú céard a dúirt Mamaí le Róisín?
Mammy put her head in the door and what do you think Mammy said to Róisín?
46. Colm: I know.
[Colm has his hand raised to volunteer an answer.]
47. Teacher: Christopher.
48. Colm and Christopher: I know.
49. Teacher: Cad a dúirt sí?
What did she say?
50. Christopher: I don't know. *[He shrugs his shoulders as he says this.]*
51. Colm: I know.
52. Teacher: Bhfuil aon tuairim agat?
Do you have any idea?
53. Colm: I know.
54. Teacher: Éra, tá.
Ah, you do.
55. Colm: I know.

56. Teacher: Simone.
 57. Simone: Am, am...
 58. Colm: I know. I know.
 59. Teacher: Nach bhfuil a fhios agat ach an oiread? Sienna? Níl? Colm?
Do you not know either? Sienna? No? Colm?
 60. Colm: Cuir as an teilifís, Róisín. Tá mé ag dul ag siopadóireacht.
Turn off the television, Róisín. I'm going shopping.
 61. Teacher: Bhuel, sin iontach, Colm. Tá sibh iontach ar fad.
Well, that's excellent, Colm. You're absolutely excellent.
-

At turn 45 above Claire asks the children to predict what one of the characters might say. She fails to get responses from three children and is reluctant to accept this as is evidenced by her rejoinder at turn 54. At turn 60 Colm offers a response displaying a sophisticated command of Irish and is rewarded with much praise. In displaying his knowledge of Irish Colm has also communicated his ideas by making a valid prediction related to the story. The teacher has facilitated his response by asking an open question and in doing so she has also provided the opportunity for a more complex response. Similar exchanges can be seen at turns 150 to 153 and at turns 380-382 in the transcript in Appendix 4 indicating that the children were capable of producing more complex sentence structures to make predictions when requested to do so. However, such open questions were not a common feature of Claire's style.

Two points are worthy of note here, one of which relates to language learning and the other to comprehension development. Firstly, in predicting what a character might say the focus is on direct speech and language the children could adapt and use in a variety of real communicative situations. Secondly, predicting the storyline induces story schemata leading to advanced comprehension (Morrow, 1984; Morrow *et al.*, 1990).

In approaching the literacy event with didactic intentions the dominant language models used by Claire were the regulatory and representational models of language (Halliday, 1973). Claire frequently used language to regulate the children's language behaviour in the form of stimulus and response. However, Excerpt 4 below demonstrates

how the children used Irish to fulfil other language functions such as the personal and interactional functions. One pupil, Sienna, uses her L2 to enact her **identity** (Gee, 2005) as a funny person and to mediate a personal **relationship** (Gee, 2005) with the teacher. This excerpt is taken from the reading phase of the lesson. Claire frequently interrupted her reading of the story to practise vocabulary and syntax. In Topic Unit 10 she is practising the future tense interrogative, positive, and negative forms of the regular Irish verb ‘to drive’.

Excerpt 4

91. Teacher: Agus an dtiomáinfidh Róisín an carr?
And will Róisín drive the car?
92. Sienna: Níl. [*The children laugh at the suggestion.*]
No.
93. Teacher: Ní thiomáinfidh. An dtiomáinfidh Christopher an carr?
(She) won't drive. Will Christopher drive the car?
94. Choral Response: Níl. [*The children laugh at the suggestion.*]
No.
95. Teacher: Ní. An dtiomáinfidh múinteoir Claire an carr?
No. Will the teacher Claire drive the car?
96. Sienna: Sea. [*The children laugh at the suggestion.*]
Yes.
97. Teacher: An dtiomáinfidh mise an carr go dtí an siopa? [*The children are still laughing.*] Ní thiomáinfidh. Cé a thiomáinfidh an carr go dtí an siopa?
Will I drive the car to the shop? (I) will not drive. Who will drive the car to the shop?
98. Sienna: Mamaí.
Mammy.

.....

Claire is using language here to regulate the children’s language behaviour and attempting to elicit the correct negative form of the verb from them. At turn 96 Sienna subverts the teacher’s intentions by responding to the question in the affirmative. Sienna is using language interactionally and personally. She uses humour to mediate a personal **relationship** (Gee, 2005) with the teacher and her peers and to get recognition as a funny, likeable person. Sienna’s behaviour is based on her understanding of how language works and on her understanding of the meaningfulness of language. As Halliday (1973: 12) notes, children ‘have a very broad concept of the meaningfulness of language’ that encompasses

all seven functions of language. So while Claire is making language form **significant** (Gee, 2005), Sienna is focusing on the function of language to convey meaning.

The final excerpt, Excerpt 5 below, is taken from the reading phase of the lesson. Claire also paused frequently when reading the story to invite the children to complete a sentence with the appropriate word. In doing so she was facilitating the children to use their L2 to enact their **identities** (Gee, 2005) as readers.

Excerpt 5

- [The teacher begins reading the story with intonation.]*
'Táim ag dul go dtí an siopa anois, a Róisín,' arsa Mamáí.
'Cuir... *[Text]*
[The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the sentence.]
'I'm going to the shop now, Róisín,' said Mammy. Turn...
70. Colm and Sienna: As an teilifís.
Off the television.
71. Teacher: Agus cad a dúirt Róisín sa bholgán cainte? Ceart go...
[The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the phrase.]
And what did Róisín say in the speech bubble? All...
72. Choral Response: Leor.
Right.
73. Teacher: Cas an...
[The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the sentence.]
Turn the...
74. Choral Response: Leathanach.
Page.
-

In Excerpt 5 above Claire pauses twice to invite the children to complete the sentences in the text. She is positioning the children as readers and inviting them to join the 'literacy club' (Smith, 1992). Even though she is eliciting language from the children it serves a more communicative purpose here as the children are invited to use their knowledge of language to author the story. Claire used such invites frequently when reading both in Irish and in English. Martinez and Teale (1993) noted that one of the teachers in their study used a similar strategy when the children were reading in L1.

Summary

Data from the Irish storybook reading event revealed that classroom practices were being imposed on the children as the teacher controlled the event tightly and used language to regulate the children's language behaviour. The children in turn positioned themselves as knowledgeable pupils within the imposed classroom Discourse. By and large Claire used the Irish literacy event as a conduit for language learning privileging language as display. Discussion of the story was confined mainly to story content. The teacher did not discuss story themes or characters, activities associated with story comprehension development (Morrow, 1984; Morrow *et al.*, 1990). However, it must be acknowledged that Claire was also restricted by the text which is sparse and superficial, and was written with didactic intentions. An interview with Claire revealed that she was deeply committed to the school policy of early total immersion and to using the *Séideán Sí* programme. Her convictions were instrumental in shaping the Irish storybook reading event which she subverted and transformed into a language learning event.

Data revealed that the children could use their L2 to fulfil language functions other than the language functions privileged by the teacher. Data also revealed that the children were capable of making predictions and authoring the story with quite complex responses in Irish but they were not frequently encouraged to do so, suggesting the teacher was not always operating within the children's ZPD. Two issues emerge from the discussion. First, what views of knowledge does the teacher espouse during Irish storybook reading events and what are the implications for children's language and literacy development? Second, what language model(s) are the children being immersed in during the events and what are the implications for immersion pedagogy and for children's language development? These questions will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

4.2.3 The English Story: *The Smartest Giant in Town*

This story is by the popular children's author Julia Donaldson who also wrote *The Gruffalo* and is beautifully illustrated by Axel Scheffler. Like many children's stories the characters include talking animals and a giant. The language is rich with lots of adjectives and the story also includes a refrain with emphasis on rhyming words. As with most of the other stories read by the participating teachers, the text macrostructure follows a conventional structure for children's stories with a number of propositional parts from setting to problem to attempts at resolving the problem (Luke, 1995).

The main character in the story, George the giant, is an allegory for kindness and generosity and at the end of the story he is rewarded by the animals for his kindness. At the outset George is unhappy with his appearance and purchases new clothes to improve his appearance. However, during the course of the story he gives away all his new clothes to the animals he meets and ends up wearing his old clothes again. For me the story is about more than generosity. Themes of sameness and of people wanting to be 'normal', to be like others, are explored in the story. But the story also celebrates difference as the giant ends up at the end of the story wearing his old clothes again. The juxtaposition of sameness and difference is also visible in the characters George meets. Because they are all animals they share many common features yet they are all individuals with very different problems to be solved. The story also explores the theme of personality being more important than physical appearance. So there are competing voices within the text (Bakhtin, 1981). The story could be viewed as a modern day fairy tale and contrasts sharply with the more realistic Irish story about the "real" world that Claire selected to read, a contrast she was well aware of.

I also think that whole world of fantasy is hugely appealing to children at that age ... the fact that it was quite ridiculous as a story, but for them it opened up that whole world of fantasy, and that genre has a huge appeal ... as opposed to the Irish story, that's a life experience. (Claire)

4.2.3.1 The English Storybook Reading Event in Class B1: *The Smartest Giant in Town*

In the following section I present an analysis of the literacy event where Claire reads *The Smartest Giant in Town* to all five pupils. As noted earlier, similar to the Irish storybook reading event many of the teacher's utterances were aimed at developing the children's early literacy skills. I am presenting excerpts from the lesson transcript which are most relevant to the arguments I am developing. I begin by examining similarities between the English and Irish literacy events before proceeding to a discussion of the differences between the two events.

Excerpt 1 below occurs early during the reading phase of the lesson. The teacher is discussing the pictures with the children. Their responses in Irish reveal how they are using their L2 to make a **connection** (Gee, 2005) with discourse interactional patterns privileged in L2 literacy events. The full transcript is included in Appendix 5.

Excerpt 1

67. Teacher: What's this, Simone?
68. Simone: Am, a geansaí. [*This is the Irish word for jumper.*]
69. Teacher: A geansaí or a shirt. What's this?
70. Simone: Am, bríste. [*This is the Irish word for trousers.*]
71. Teacher: A trousers.
72. Simone: Am.
73. Colin: A seatbelt. [*Both Colm and Christopher laugh.*]
74. Teacher: Well it's like a seatbelt, but you can also wear a belt into, wear it around your trousers. Okay. What's this, Christopher?
75. Choral Response: A tie.
76. Teacher: A tie. Sienna?
77. Sienna: Stocaí. [*This is the Irish word for socks. Someone else says the word 'socks' here.*]
-

Similar to the Irish literacy event Claire also elicited single lexical items when discussing the pictures and revising story content in the English event. Both Simone and Sienna responded in Irish (turns 68, 70, and 77). Their responses were accepted by the

teacher and recast in English. It appears the children have code switched to L2 because they have made an intercontextual **connection** (Gee, 2005) between the classroom discourse pattern here and one they associate with Irish storybook reading, namely labelling clothes items. Interestingly, when the same discourse pattern was repeated in Topic Units 8 and 9 the children responded exclusively in English, once they knew what behaviour was expected of them.

The children were requested to label items on a number of occasions during the English literacy event and this discourse interactional pattern is possibly an artefact of the Irish literacy event. Claire is using similar strategies in both languages because she is being positioned by the classroom immersion Discourse. Similarly, the children are being positioned by the immersion Discourse because in making **significant** (Gee, 200) not just what they say but also how they say it, they are privileging the L2 **sign system** (Gee, 2005). They are enacting their L2 **identities** (Gee, 2000) by positioning themselves as knowledgeable Irish speakers indicating that the classroom immersion Discourse can mediate English literacy events in subtle and unexpected ways. Much research, including Cummins's Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1980, in Baker & Hornberger, 2001) indicates that in immersion schools children can transfer literacy skills from L2 to L1. The data presented here reveal that participants in literacy events may also transfer literacy practices and ways of taking from texts from L2 to L1.

Another similarity between the English and Irish literacy events relates to how Claire positions the children as readers and members of the 'literacy club' (Smith, 1992). She frequently paused when reading to invite the children to complete sentences, for example in Topic Units 8, 10, and 37. She used the same strategy to invite the children to chime the refrain.

In the English storybook reading event pictures, language, characters, and story content were discussed mostly at an efferent level. There was no discussion of the giant's character and his inner motivation for wanting to change his appearance. Claire did refer to the allegorical nature of the giant's character in the final Topic Unit but there was no discussion of the other themes which I identified above when presenting my own interpretation of the story. In L1 literacy events activities such as labelling objects and actions and chiming of familiar passages make lower cognitive demands on children. Cognitively challenging talk would include analysis of characters and events, predicting story events, talk about vocabulary, and evaluative responses to stories (Dickinson and Smith 1994). A question emerges therefore, regarding the impact literacy practices established during L2 literacy events might have on L1 literacy events.

Research on storybook reading reviewed in Chapter 2 revealed that teachers frequently focus on more literal aspects of stories (e.g. Almasi, 1995). But research also revealed that children are capable of much more sophisticated levels of engagement with stories when teachers facilitate such discussions (e.g. Morrow, 1988). The children and teacher are discussing whether the events in the story are real. Here the children's ideas and their **ways of knowing** (Gee, 2005) are afforded **significance** (Gee, 2005). The discussion was initiated by the researcher at turn 640.

Excerpt 2

673. Colm: Am, I don't believe that story cos giants don't really exist cos they're gone now a long, long time ago.
674. Teacher: Mmm... [*laughing slightly*] So they don't really exist. Do you think there might have been giants in the world one time?
675. Colm: Yeah.
676. Teacher: You do. You really believe that. Do the rest of you believe that there were giants around a long time ago?
677. Christopher: No. [*This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.*] [*Christopher shakes his head to indicate that he doesn't believe that giants existed once upon a time.*]
678. ? No. [*I can't identify who speaks here.*] [*Simone also shakes her head to indicate that she doesn't believe that giants existed once upon a time.*]

679. Teacher: Who does? Colm does. Does anybody else?
 680. Colin: I do.
 681. Christopher: I don't.
 682. Teacher: You don't. Definitely not, Christopher.
 683. Christopher: No because...
 684. Teacher: No. Go on. *[This rejoinder interrupts the previous speaker.]*
 685. Christopher: There were, I know that there were never any giants.
 686. Teacher: Never?
 687. Christopher: Giants aren't real.
 688. Teacher: Giants aren't real. How about you, Simone? What do you think? Are giants real?
 689. Simone: Yeah.
 690. Teacher: You think they are. Are there giants around in today? If you went off around today would you meet a giant uptown?
 691. Choral Response: No. *[Some of the children laugh at the suggestion.]*
-

Passages like Excerpt 2 above can be difficult to interpret. Responses from Colm (turn 673) and Christopher (turn 687) demonstrate their ability to engage in quite a sophisticated story discussion. However, it appears that some of the children are unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality. But it is unlikely that the children believed in the existence of giants as is indicated by their response at turn 691 above. Bettelheim (1976) notes that no normal five-year-old views fairy tales as representative of external reality. Here it is important to remember that the children are experiencing one of their first English storybook reading events in school. It is possible that because the children were mostly in the habit of answering the teacher's closed questions during Irish events, they were trying to provide the 'correct' answer. Christopher has given a plausible answer at turn 687 but the teacher asks Simone the question again. Simone may be interpreting the repeated question as indicating that Claire has not accepted Christopher's response. By and large during Irish literacy events knowledge resided with the teacher and the children were not accustomed to discussing their own opinions and interpretations of stories. They were invariably expected to answer in accordance with the teacher's expectations during the Irish storybook reading event and they appear to be approaching the English event from a

similar disposition. Here again the literacy practices established in L2 are shaping the literacy event in L1.

One notable difference between the Irish and English literacy events was that in the English literacy event Claire focused more on the story than on the language. She asked more open questions and invited the children to predict story events, privileging a constructivist view of **knowledge** (Gee, 2005) as in such exchanges knowledge was co-constructed with the children through dialogic interactions. Excerpt 3 below illustrates the point very well.

Excerpt 3

- Oh, before I turn the page, what do you think George is going to give him to make the path? Now think about what he's left, Colin?
[Colin has his hand raised to volunteer an answer. Colm then raises his hand.]
307. Sienna: His pants.
308. Teacher: Do you think she's right?
309. Choral Response: No. No way.
[Colm has his hand raised to volunteer an answer. Some pupils are laughing.]
310. Colin: No, his belt.
311. Teacher: Maybe his belt. Will we, who thinks it's his belt?
[Christopher raises his hand in agreement.]
312. Sienna: His pants is going to fall down.
313. Christopher: Yeah. *[Laughing]*
314. Teacher: Who thinks...it might happen? Who thinks it's his trousers?
[Christopher has his hand raised but drops it again. Sienna raises her hand in agreement.]
Who thinks it's his belt to make the path?
[All children raise their hands except Colin.]
Almost everyone. What do you think, Colin?
315. Colin: His belt.
316. Teacher: You think his belt as well. Okay. Let's see. Turn the...
-

As noted earlier open discussions that encourage children to predict story events are an effective means of helping children develop advanced comprehension (Morrow, 1984; Morrow *et al.*, 1990) and teaching children to attend to problem resolution improves comprehension and ability to recall (Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006).

Summary

Data revealed that the Irish and English literacy events in Claire's class were similar in that they were tightly controlled by the teacher and the children had very little agency. Many of the discourse interactional patterns were similar in both events and focused on reading efferently, suggesting that literacy practices established in L2 were shaping the English literacy event. The children were not encouraged to interrogate or interpret story themes or to discuss characters and their inner motives. In the English literacy event Claire focused more on the story and asked more open questions to invite the children to predict story events. An important question emerges from the data presented here and will be discussed in the final chapter. It relates to managing the transition from storybook reading in L2 to L1 as the classroom literacy practices established in L2 may not always be the most appropriate for L1 storybook reading.

Overall I would summarise Claire's style as didactic-regulatory. Claire uses language to regulate the children's language behaviour and makes children's knowledge of vocabulary and syntax significant during the Irish storybook event. Through her storybook reading style she enacts a relationship with the children, that privileges her as the source of knowledge and knowledge is transmitted from master to apprentices, suggesting she espouses a transmissionary view of knowledge. The local norms of the school immersion Discourse shaped the literacy events insofar as the local norms were filtered through Claire's motivations. Her convictions about the most effective means of promoting language and literacy development in L2 were instrumental in constructing the classroom Discourse and, in turn, the literacy events. In effect the classroom immersion Discourse was being co-constructed and reconstructed by the teacher and children but they were also being positioned by the Discourse.

4.3 Storybook Reading in Class A (Junior Infants)

4.3.1 The Participants

Three boys and three girls participated in the study. One girl, Marion was absent when we recorded the Irish story in June 2005. Another girl, Nancy was not in attendance the day we recorded the English story, also in June 2005. One of the boys, Ethan, was absent the day I interviewed the pupils in June 2008. I interviewed the class teacher, Anna in December 2010.

Anna was in her first year of teaching when I began observations in her classroom in 2004, having completed her three-year Bachelor of Education Degree earlier that year. She is from the Gaeltacht and a native Irish speaker. I had only met her very briefly on one occasion before approaching her about participating in the project. During interview it emerged that Anna shared many convictions about literacy development within an immersion setting with Claire. For example, Anna valued a consistent approach to literacy development within the school as well as the importance of parental support. She also focused on the affective dimension of storybook reading.

A lot of it am would be focused around the shared reading ... to ensure that ... the little books are read in class with the pupils every day and ... they get to go home and read them at home and definitely would be based around the big books as well, ... very important ... To make the reading process enjoyable for them. (Anna)

Anna shares with Claire a commitment to a whole-school approach to early total immersion as well as a commitment to using the *Séideán Sí* programme.

“I suppose the success with Séideán Sí for ... gaelscoileanna ... it’s excellent ... they would have to be totally immersed in it, in their surroundings ... and I suppose as a school as well ... you’d have to ensure that the whole process is being carried up through the school”. (Anna)

The most salient theme that emerged in the discussion with Anna was the need to help children develop comprehension strategies that would sustain them as independent readers, an issue she raised on a number of occasions.

If I was to go into an infant class tomorrow and read those same two stories ... definitely my strategies ... would be different ... I would definitely do a lot more predicting ... them being the director ... of the story and get them to visualise, and use their senses ... to make connections ... with their own life ... probably more higher-order questions. (Anna)

The strategies mentioned by Anna including prediction, being the director, using one's senses, visualising the story, and making text-to-self and intertextual connections are strategies that readers can learn to use independently to aid comprehension (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Pardo, 2004; Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2006).

Table 4.3 Summary profile of Anna

Class Teacher: Anna
Anna was in her first year of teaching when the study commenced.
Native speaker of Irish
Stories read: <i>Hansel agus Gretel</i> and <i>Lazy Ozzie</i>
Favours total immersion approach
Satisfied with <i>Séideán Sí</i> materials
Values consistent approach to language and literacy development throughout the school as well as parental support
Emphasises the importance of developing children's comprehension strategies

4.3.1.1 The Pupils

Ethan was reported initially as making average progress but at times he displayed a reluctance to write. During Year 2 he was attending learning support. His two older brothers attended the same school. His mother spoke some Irish with him. Ethan had attended a *naíonra*. Observations during the first year revealed that Ethan was easily distracted from his work. He frequently demonstrated a reluctance to engage in activities that did not appeal to him. However, by Year 2 his attention span had increased and he

engaged more with class literacy activities. During Year 3 I observed that Ethan was able to read the class Irish novel fluently.

Liam did not have any siblings attending an all-Irish school. No Irish was spoken in the home. Liam was reported to be progressing at a normal rate. He had not attended a *naíonra*. During the first year of the study I observed that Liam was familiar with nursery rhymes and fairy tales indicating that he was read to at home on a regular basis. He frequently raised his hand to volunteer answers to questions. Observations during Year 3 revealed that Liam was able to read the class Irish novel fluently.

During interview it emerged that Liam enjoyed reading information texts and had a particular interest in books about cars. He also enjoyed reading humorous books and frequently read in bed, a habit he had acquired at an early age from his parents. Liam found reading in English easier because of his limited lexical knowledge in Irish: *“The words are harder in Irish to understand”*. Liam had quite a negative attitude to speaking Irish: *“I’d say I hate it.”* It is possible that lack of self-esteem in relation to competence in Irish was a contributory factor judging by his comment: *“I don’t really speak Irish that good”*.

Philip was reported initially as progressing at an average rate. During Year 2 his teacher reported that he appeared to have difficulties with sound–symbol correspondence in English. His older siblings had completed their schooling. His father is a native Irish speaker from the Gaeltacht and speaks Irish regularly with him. Philip had not attended a *naíonra*. During the first year of the study I noticed Philip was easily distracted from his work and he frequently spoke to other members of the group at the same desk. The teacher had to encourage him often to complete his written activities with the class. I noticed he didn’t raise his hand to volunteer answers frequently. He also tended to remain silent when the class engaged in choral reading. By Year 3 he was able to read the class Irish novel fluently.

Philip indicated during interview that he liked to read books that were funny and his favourite author was Roald Dahl but he tended to read under duress from his parents. When younger his father had read to him frequently at bedtime and he had enjoyed the popular children's book *Winnie the Pooh*. Philip found Irish reading more difficult than English reading: "*The words are hard*". Despite the home support for speaking Irish, Philip had quite a negative attitude to speaking the language: "*Ní maith liom Gaeilge.*" (I don't like Irish.) He explained that it was more difficult for him to speak Irish because of his limited knowledge of Irish vocabulary: "*Well it's difficult like, it's harder agus níl a fhios againn gach rud*" (and we don't know everything).

Marion was reported as being the weakest pupil in the class in both literacy and numeracy. No Irish was spoken at home and she did not attend a *naíonra*. Although initially very shy, Marion's self-confidence improved considerably during her first year of schooling. Her handwriting also improved considerably during her first year in school. Observations during Year 1 revealed that Marion engaged in written activities quietly and diligently. During Year 2 I noticed that her word recognition skills were not as good as most of her peers. By Year 3 she was gaining in confidence and raised her hand frequently to volunteer answers.

During interview it emerged that Marion had quite a negative attitude to speaking the language: "*I just don't like Irish.*" She found speaking Irish to her friends "*weird*". She did however, have a lot of home support for reading. Her father and grandparents read to her frequently and she particularly liked the book *Winnie the Pooh* which had been read to her when she was younger. She also liked to read and write poems as leisure activities. Marion found it easier to read in English mainly due to her much greater fluency in the language: "*English is easier. 'Coz we speak it about our whole lives ... my Granny ... my Grandad and my Dad speak it*".

Nancy was reported as being very bright, mature, and willing to help the teacher. She did not have any siblings attending school when the study commenced. Nancy did not attend a *naíonra*. Observations revealed that Nancy frequently raised her hand to volunteer answers to questions, to participate in activities, and to help the teacher with tasks. She was usually very attentive and although she chatted with other pupils at the same desk, she was not easily distracted from her work.

Nancy had strong home support for reading and for speaking Irish. Her mother read history books to her. She enjoyed reading and writing as leisure pursuits and kept a diary with entries in both Irish and English. She spoke Irish frequently with her mother and with her grandmother in the Gaeltacht. Nancy had a very positive attitude to speaking the language which was related to her social proximity to the Gaeltacht community: “*Ach is maith liom Gaeilge a lán ... mar bhí mo Mhamó ... a céad teanga ah bhí sé Gaeilge*” (“But I like Irish a lot because it was my grandma’s first language”). She was also happy that her parents had opted to send her to an all-Irish school.

Louise was reported as making average progress, and as sometimes being very quiet and reticent and sometimes being quite talkative. She had not attended a *naíonra*. During the first year I noticed the teacher had to call her to attention frequently. Her written work was generally neat and completed on time. She frequently responded to questions that elicited a personal response by shrugging her shoulders and saying “*I don’t know*”. During Year 3 I observed that she was able to read the class Irish novel fluently.

Louise had a little home support for speaking Irish but found it “*annoying*” to have to speak Irish with her friends all the time in school. Despite a slightly negative attitude to speaking Irish she was glad to be attending an all-Irish school: “*I wanted to come here*”. This was partly related to the fact that her older siblings were attending the same school. Louise had strong parental support for reading. When younger she had enjoyed listening to

her mother reading *Horrid Henry* stories to her. She enjoyed reading magazines and books related to children’s popular culture such as the television programme *High School Musical*. All three girls in Class A read material related to this television programme. Louise also enjoyed writing poems. She indicated that she found reading in English easier because of her greater fluency in the language: “*English is easier because I’ve been speaking English most of my life*”.

Table 4.4 Summary profiles of pupils in Class A

Pupils	Progress in school	Attendance at naíonra	Home support for Irish	Attitudes to Irish	Reading preferences
Ethan	Average but attended learning support	Yes	A little	⁶ *Not interviewed	*Not interviewed
Liam	Average	No	No	Quite negative	Enjoyed reading a wide range of genres in English only
Philip	Average but experiencing some reading difficulties	No	Strong	Quite negative	Reluctant reader in English
Marion	Weak	No	No	Quite negative	Enjoyed reading in English only
Nancy	Very good	No	Very strong	Very positive	Enjoyed reading in both languages
Louise	Average	No	A little	Slightly negative	Enjoyed reading in English only

4.3.2 The Irish Story: *Hansel agus Gretel*

This is an Irish language version of the traditional fairy tale that appears in a number of collections including the Grimms Fairy Tales. As I have discussed this story already in Chapter 2 I will just make a few brief comments about the Irish language version read by Anna. It was taken from a collection of fairy tales in Irish entitled *Tomás na hOrdóige agus Scéalta Eile* (Tom Thumb and Other Stories) (Ní Nuadháin, 2004). The very simple text has much repetition, is aimed at Irish language learners, and omits many

⁶ *Ethan was absent the day I interviewed the other children in Class A.

important details from the English version. For example there is no mention of a stepmother. The parents, referred to as *mamáí* and *daidí*, do not abandon the children in the forest. The witch falls into the fire as opposed to portraying Gretel as having agency in killing the witch and rescuing her brother. The story is accompanied by six picture cards to aid comprehension. Small versions of these cards can be copied for children to sequence when retelling the story.

4.3.2.1 The Irish Storybook Reading Event in Class A: *Hansel agus Gretel*

In the Irish literacy event Anna is reading *Hansel agus Gretel* to five children in Class A as Marion was absent. Anna has a copy of the text and six A4 size pictures depicting various scenes in the story. There is no book as such in the event. That explains why there are no episodes in the event focusing on developing bibliographic knowledge, concepts of print, or whole word recognition. In the first Topic Unit from the lesson transcript (Excerpt 1 below) Anna is making a **connection** with, and making **significant** (Gee, 2005) the children's prior knowledge of the story thereby facilitating them to enact their **identities** (Gee, 2005) as readers and connect with their primary Discourse. The full transcript of the lesson is included in Appendix 6.

Excerpt 1

1. Teacher: Hansel agus Gretel. [*This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.*] Okay, Liam, abair liom mar gheall ar an scéal. Bhfuil fhios agat aon píosa?
Hansel and Gretel. Okay, Liam, tell me about the story. Do you know any part?
 2. Liam: Well, there's witches and she tries to give them food and they get fat. And their dad saves them.
 3. Teacher: Ó!
Oh!
 4. Liam: No, they go out and follow, am, these things but I forget what they're, what they are, am...
 5. Philip: Called.
 6. Liam: Called, and, am, well, they go back to their house and only their dad is there. And then there's this wicked stepmother as well.
-

At turn 1 Anna asks an open question to elicit the children's prior knowledge of the story. It is obvious from turns 2, 4, and 6 that Liam is familiar with the story. He mentions the 'wicked stepmother'. Stories familiar to children in their L1 can activate their prior knowledge helping to reduce anxiety and improve self-confidence and motivation, factors associated with learners' affective filters, thus enabling children to process L2 input more effectively (Morrow and Gambrell, 2001). As noted earlier, the Irish language version is very simple, aimed at young language learners and only mentions a mother. The simplified version left gaps in the story that the children found confusing as is evidenced by Ethan's question at turn 348 in Excerpt 3 on page 184.

In Excerpt 2 below Anna invites the children to put themselves in Hansel's place and asks them if they would enter the house. Through her instructional moves and rich language input Anna is not disprivileging either **sign system** (Gee, 2005).

Excerpt 2

111. Teacher: Now, Liam, dá mba rud é gur tusa Hansel, an raghfá isteach sa tigh?
Now, Liam, if you were Hansel, would you go into the house?
112. Liam: Ah, well, I'm not going to do it, am, if she had this kind face
[Liam gestures with his hands] spiky like that and...
113. Teacher: Cén saghas aghaidh? *[This rejoinder interrupts the previous speaker.]*
What kind of face?
114. Liam: She... *[undecipherable]*
115. Teacher: Dein an aghaidh dom. *[Liam pulls a scary face as requested by the teacher.]* Ó, ó, ó, tá sé sin scanrúil.
Do the face for me. Oh, oh, oh, that's scary.
116. Ethan: That's ugly, ah, because witches are all ugly. *[Liam laughs at this.]*
117. Teacher: Níl siad go deas. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
They're not nice.
118. Liam: Then I'd run.
119. Teacher: Rithfeá.
You'd run.
120. Liam: And I'd kick her.
121. Teacher: Ó, ó, ach an thógfá aon milseán leat?
Oh, oh, but would you take any sweets with you?
122. Liam: Ah, well, I could, I, I'd climb up, see the thing next to the curtain down here. *[Liam points to the picture the teacher is holding.]*

123. Teacher: In aice leis na cuirtíní.
Next to the curtains.
124. Liam: I'd get up on that. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
125. Teacher: Oh, yeah.
126. Liam: And I'd climb up on to the roof and start eating through the house.
127. Teacher: *[Undecipherable] [This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]* Agus thosnófa ag ithe.
And you'd start eating.
128. Liam: Yeah.
129. Teacher: Cad a dhéanfadh tusa, Philip?
What would you do, Philip?
130. Philip: I would knock on the door and I'd run.
-

Asking open questions to elicit the children's opinions, ideas, and predictions was a feature of Anna's approach to the Irish storybook event. By asking an open question at turn 111 Anna is inviting the children to enter the world of fantasy and inhabit the story. She uses the conditional mood and is aware the children will have to respond in English indicating that she values both languages equally. The children are able to understand the question and fantasise about how they would react in such a situation. As Bettelheim (1976) notes, making the transition from being totally dependent on one's parents to becoming more self-reliant is an important part of the child's psychological development. Therefore, facilitating the children to fantasise about using their ingenuity to escape is likely to be psychologically beneficial to them.

Dialogic interactions were a feature of Anna's storybook reading style suggesting that she espoused a constructivist view of **knowledge** (Gee, 2005). The children had a lot of agency in the Irish literacy event and knowledge was co-constructed by the teacher and the pupils. Indeed the children sometimes asked questions to fill in gaps in their knowledge as Excerpt 3 below illustrates.

Excerpt 3

348. Ethan: But how did they free, but how did they free the boy? *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
349. Teacher: Ó, lig Gretel Hansel amach as an gciseán nuair a bhí an

chailleach ghránna istigh sa tine. Fuair sí an eochair. [*The teacher mimes turning a key in a lock as she says the word 'eochair' [key].*]

Oh, Gretel let Hansel out of the cage when the ugly witch was inside in the fire. She got the key.

.....

As Pardo (2004) has noted, children need to learn to monitor their comprehension using metacognitive strategies. Similar to Ethan above, during the lesson Nancy asked a number of questions indicating the children were capable of monitoring their own comprehension when listening to a story in L2. Oversimplifying the story can be confusing for children as they attempt to monitor the emerging meaning of the text. A more authentic and linguistically challenging version of the story might be more beneficial to the children for a number of reasons. Firstly, it might not conflict with other versions of the story the children might be familiar with in L1. Secondly, there would be fewer gaps in the story leading to less confusion for the children. And thirdly, children could be encouraged to ask questions when confusion arises as a means of learning to monitor their own comprehension. Self-management strategies including monitoring one's learning promote learner autonomy (Wenden, 1991).

Anna availed of opportunities to practise language during the Irish literacy event but frequently the language practice episodes also served a communicative purpose as Excerpt 4 below illustrates.

Excerpt 4

497. Teacher: Tá an múinteoir chun iad a scaipeadh amach ar an mbord agus tá mé chun ceist a chur ar duine éigin teacht amach anseo agus tosnú anseo le huimhir a haon. Agus ansan, uimhir a... [*The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the phrase.*]

The teacher is going to spread them out on the table and I'm going to ask someone to come out here and begin with number one. And then, number...

498. Choral Response: Dó.

Two.

499. Teacher: Agus ansin uimhir a...

And then number...

500. Choral Response: Trí.

Three.

501. Teacher: Agus ansan uimhir a...
And then number...
502. Choral Response: Ceathair.
Four.
503. Teacher: Agus uimhir a...
And number...
504. Choral Response: Cúig.
Five.
505. Teacher: Agus uimhir a...
And number...
506. Choral Response: Sé.
Six.
507. Teacher: An mbeidh sibh in ann iad a chur san áit cheart?
Will you be able to put them in the correct place?
-

In Excerpt 4 above Anna is organising a picture sequencing activity to help the children retell the story. In explaining the activity she also avails of the opportunity to practise numbers but within a communicative context of conveying information to the children. Getting children to retell stories helps comprehension, concept of story structure, and oral language development (Morrow, 1985; Gambrell *et al.*, 2001). When children reconstruct stories and arrange pictures in sequence they form a mental representation of the story (Morrow, 1985). Anna was well aware of the benefits of such activities for children's literacy development: *"There were opportunities for prediction ... there were little ... cards depicting the sequencing of the story so that was very beneficial. The children could put them in order"*.

Anna's convictions about effective literacy instruction are mediating the storybook reading event in a way that privileges children's literacy development over the school immersion Discourse. Thus the local norms are being filtered through the teacher's motivations.

As Halliday (1973) has noted, at the age of five the child's internal model of language is highly complex. Data revealed that the children in Class B1 used Irish to fulfil a range of language functions. Excerpt 5 below illustrates that the children in Class A could also use Irish to fulfil a variety of functions. Here the teacher and the pupils are using

the picture cards to retell the story events and the children use their L2 to enact an **activity** (Gee, 2005) associated with a particular style of literary discourse.

Excerpt 5

650. Teacher: Okay. An ndúirt sí, an ndúirt sí é seo, “Ó, tá sé fuar anseo istigh.”
Okay. Did she say, did she say this, “Oh, it’s cold in here.”
651. Nancy: No, te.
No, hot.
652. Teacher: No, dúirt sí, “Tá sé... [*The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the sentence.*]
No, she said, “It’s...
653. Nancy: Te.
Hot.
654. Teacher: Te.
Hot.
655. Ethan: Tá sé really, really te.
It’s really, really hot.
656. Nancy: Cos, tá, cos tá oráiste agus buí agus tá sé an-, an-, an-te. [*This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.*] [*As she speaks Nancy holds up one of the pictures for all to see.*]
Cos, there’s, cos there’s orange and yellow and it’s very, very, very hot.
657. Teacher: Tá sé ana- ana-the. Ar fheabhas. Ó ar fheabhas, fheabhas. Agus an pictiúr deireanach.
It’s very, very hot. Excellent. Oh, excellent, excellent. And the last picture.
658. Ethan: Agus oráiste agus buí... [*undecipherable*]
And orange and yellow...
659. Nancy: Mmm, tá siad ag ithe cáca agus... [*This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.*] [*As she speaks Nancy holds up a picture.*]
Mmm, they’re eating cake and...
660. Ethan: Agus dearg, agus dearg [**And red, and red**] so she’ll burn into pieces and then other, and then she’ll just melt.
-

At turn 656 above Nancy refers to the colours in the picture to justify her responses at turns 651 and 653. She is not merely displaying her knowledge of colours in Irish. Nancy is using her lexical knowledge to communicate her ideas and using her L2 heuristically. In using Irish to justify her response she is using an important literary discourse style of justifying one’s interpretations with reference to the text, albeit the pictures in this case. Her approach is then taken up by Ethan in turns 658 and 660 when he adds another colour, *dearg* (red) and completes his response in English showing how the

children, as members of an ‘interpretive community’ (Almasi, 1995), are learning ways of being readers and ways of interpreting texts from each other as well as from the teacher. Similar to the children in the study reported on by Palmer (2008) Nancy and Ethan are learning that engaging in academic discourse about texts requires building on the ideas and words of others.

Excerpt 5 above illustrates that the children did use Irish sometimes to respond to the teacher’s questions. However, because Anna tended to ask mostly open higher-order questions the children responded mostly in English during the Irish storybook event. A question emerges from the data therefore, regarding what exactly is immersion education in all-Irish contexts, a question which will be discussed in the final chapter.

4.3.3 The English Story: *Lazy Ozzie*

Authored by Michael Coleman and illustrated by Gwyneth Williamson the story tells the tale of a lazy owl who is reluctant to learn to fly despite an ultimatum from his mother. He deceives the animals and birds on the farm into helping him so that he can avoid learning this new skill. Through his deception he alienates them. He also tries unsuccessfully to deceive his mother into thinking he can fly. The story introduces readers to various farmyard fowl and animals as well as where they live. The text is short with much repetition, alliteration, and humour. The story explores in allegorical form themes of honesty, growing and learning new skills, and conquering one’s fears to become more independent, themes that would resonate with young children in their first year of schooling and Anna was well aware of the underlying story themes: “*In Lazy Ozzie then, the theme of helping others, learning new things so there was a link there with SPHE*”.

4.3.3.1 The English Storybook Reading Event in Class A: *Lazy Ozzie*

Anna is reading the story to five of the children as Nancy was absent. During the English literacy event Anna tended to ask inferential and evaluative questions and eschewed more literal questioning. She frequently asked open questions to elicit the children's predictions as Excerpt 1 below illustrates, privileging **knowledge** (Gee, 2005) as socially constructed. The full transcript of the lesson is included in Appendix 7.

Excerpt 1

178. Marion: He'll fly down. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
179. Teacher: Do you think he'll be, learn how to fly? *[Marion nods her head to indicate yes.]* Oh, okay. Very good. *[These two phrases are whispered.]* Louise, do you think he'll be able to get down on to the ground? *[Louise nods her head to indicate yes.]* How do you think he'll get down?
180. Louise: Jump.
181. Teacher: Do you think he'll jump, do you? *[This question is whispered.]* Very good. So, Marion thinks he's going to fly. Louise thinks he's going to jump down. What does Philip think?
182. Philip: He's going to fall backwards.
183. Teacher: Oh no! *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]* Oh, I hope that doesn't happen. *[Philip is smiling.]* So Philip thinks he might fall.
184. Philip: Backwards.
185. Teacher: Backwards. Oh goodness! I hope poor Ozzie won't get hurt. *[Ethan raises his hand and stands up.]* What does Liam think?
186. Liam: I would jump on to that piece of hay and then the horse and then slide down the horse's back.
-

Excerpt 1 above demonstrates how the teacher encourages the children to voice their opinions, author the story, and inhabit the story, strategies which are effective for enabling children to monitor their own story comprehension (Wharton-McDonald, 2006). Through such dialogic interactions knowledge was co-constructed within the interpretive community of readers, indicating that Anna espoused a social constructivist epistemology. In Excerpt 2 below we see that the strategies have been appropriated by the children who volunteer predictions unsolicited.

Excerpt 2

350. Teacher: In the duck pond there lived a... *[Text]*
351. Ethan: Oh, oh! *[This rejoinder interrupts the previous speaker.]*
352. Teacher: There lived a diddy duck.
353. Liam: He's going to fall in the water.
354. Teacher: "It's an emergency!" cried Ozzie. *[Text] [This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
355. Liam: He's going to fall into the water.
-

Because Anna values children's ideas and opinions the children are willing to offer predictions even when unsolicited. Anna elicited children's opinions of the characters in the story, the characters' behaviours and motives. She encouraged the children to discuss their interpretations of the story and promoted the affective dimension of reading. Excerpt 2 above demonstrates that the inter-actions of the group are becoming the intra-actions of the children as they appropriate the behaviour modelled by the teacher and learn to read aesthetically. As Almasi (1995) notes, children develop the underlying cognitive processes necessary for interpreting texts on an interpersonal plane first and can subsequently internalise such cognitive functions and learn to monitor their understanding and interpret literature on an intrapersonal plane.

Summary

The interview with Anna revealed that she placed a high value on helping children develop comprehension strategies for reading. Her convictions about effective literacy development were instrumental in shaping the literacy events in both Irish and English. In Class A the Irish and English literacy events were very alike revealing that literacy practices established in L2 were being transferred to L1 literacy events. The local norms of the school immersion Discourse shaped the literacy events to the extent that the local norms were mediated by Anna. The children used their L2 to justify their interpretations of the Irish story. Literacy practices which were co-constructed by the teacher and children

took precedence over the classroom immersion Discourse which was also being co-constructed by the participants.

Overall I would characterise Anna's approach to storybook reading as dialogic-interactive. She engaged the children in dialogic interactions making their opinions significant. The relationship she enacted with the group was one of co-creator of knowledge. Knowledge resided with the group which functioned as an interpretive reading community where everyone had equal status.

4.4 Storybook Reading in Class B2 (Senior Infants)

4.4.1 The Participants

Five children, two girls and three boys, in Class B2 participated in the research project. All five pupils were present for the video-recordings in June 2005 and I interviewed all five children in June 2008. I interviewed the Learning Support Teacher, Deborah, in December 2010 as it was she who read the stories to the children for the video-recordings.

Deborah had almost thirty years teaching experience having qualified with a Bachelor of Education Degree in 1977. She is not a native Irish speaker. Deborah had spent eight years working as a learning support teacher in School B before the commencement of the study. She was the first and only learning support teacher in the school. I was not acquainted with Deborah prior to meeting with her as part of the study. Deborah shared a commitment to the school total immersion policy and to the *Séideán Sí* Programme with both Claire and Anna: "*Well total immersion seems ... to work ... I think Séideán Sí seems to be doing that*".

Deborah also noted the positive impact the *Séideán Sí* Programme was having on children's Irish literacy skills: "*But I do think looking at our present Sixth Class ah they have*

been with Séideán Sí from the beginning, ... and I think it accounts for ... but they are am doing much better in, in reading than other classes”.

Similar to both Claire and Anna, Deborah also remarked on the need to use lots of paralinguistic clues to help the children understand the Irish stories. While she highlights the centrality of the teacher in the storybook reading event, she also values pupil participation as she stated when outlining her reasons for selecting the Irish story *Cearc an Phrompa* (Chicken Licken) to read: *“Well the Irish book as well; there was am repetition in it ... And I like repetition because at least then ... they can join in ... And it’s one way of, of getting them to stay with you”.*

Deborah felt that Irish stories should be used to develop children’s receptive language skills and English stories could be used to develop children’s productive skills: *“I’m using the English story to develop vocabulary and develop oral language ... the story in Irish I’m just letting them hear the, the language and hear the structures and the words; the, the emphasis isn’t as much on developing the vocabulary”.*

Deborah was very aware of how written language in English differed in complexity to oral language and of the importance of operating within the children’s zone of proximal development when reading Irish stories: *“The written language in English is generally more complex than their spoken language ... the Irish language it would have to be at the level that wouldn’t challenge them too much ... I want them a bit challenged but not overly challenged”.*

Similar to both Claire and Anna, Deborah valued the importance of reading stories to children regularly and the need to focus on developing children’s comprehension. She also valued the affective dimension of story reading.

Well the importance of story ... I think they should be hearing stories on a daily basis ... and being read to them and right through the school ... the importance of comprehension from the beginning ... and the idea that the child ... would re-tell what they have read ... because then ... you know whether they’ve understood it or not ... it has to be enjoyable ... motivation is a huge part to play in their success in reading. (Deborah)

Another interesting point raised by Deborah related to the importance of the conative dimension of reading development: *“I want to do more than just teach them to read, I want to create readers and make them want to read. And I don’t think you can do that unless you use a whole variety of really good children’s books”*.

For Deborah the most effective way to encourage children to read was to expose children to lots of books and to promote daily leisure reading: *“I think the Séideán Sí programme has helped that hugely ... they’re reading several Irish books ... They’re reading Irish daily ... Practice is very important”*. Deborah’s emphasis on exposure to books to improve fluency and motivate children to read is consistent with research results reviewed in Chapter 2 (e.g. Elley and Mangubhai, 1983).

As with both Anna and Claire, Deborah was of the opinion that the advantages of learning to read in Irish first far outweighed the disadvantages. In particular she noted that Irish has a more transparent orthography than English making the initial process easier for the children thus supporting the Script Dependent Hypothesis (Geva and Siegel, 2000). And similar to both other teachers she was of the opinion that any difficulties or disadvantages associated with learning to read in Irish first were due to factors outside the child such as the lack of suitable reading material and the inability of many parents to support their children’s literacy development in Irish.

I actually think ... Irish is an easier language to read than English. English is more complex; there are more sounds, ah in Irish, there are is it eighteen definite ones ... and there’s more one to one mapping of sounds ... in Irish than in English. Disadvantages, am the fact that there aren’t as many resources, there aren’t as many books ... and ... the fact that their parents don’t have the language to read to them ... But when you have the transfer from one to another I don’t think ... it’s a problem. (Deborah)

Table 4.5 Summary profile of Deborah

Learning Support Teacher: Deborah
Over 20 years teaching experience prior to commencement of study
Non-native speaker of Irish
Stories read: <i>Cearc an Phrompa</i> and <i>Goodnight Goodnight</i>
Favours total immersion approach
Satisfied with <i>Séideán Sí</i> materials
Values the importance of reading regularly to children and developing their comprehension strategies
Values affective and conative dimensions of literacy development

4.4.1.1 The Pupils

Sheila was an only child when the project commenced. Irish was spoken regularly in the home. Sheila was reported as being very clever. She did not attend a *naíonra*. Observations revealed that Sheila was usually very attentive in class. I also noticed she did not always raise her hand to volunteer answers. She frequently waited for other pupils to answer the teachers' questions. If they failed to answer correctly she then raised her hand and gave the correct answer. She tended to behave in a similar manner during group activities. She would allow other pupils to make suggestions first and only suggested solutions when other pupils failed to solve the problem. Her solutions were invariably correct. She completed written work carefully and meticulously. During Year 2 of the project I noticed she had very good word recognition skills in both Irish and English. By Year 3 of the project she had a very good command of Irish as is evidenced by the following grammatically correct sentences I recorded from her oral output in November 2007: "*Chuir an feirmeoir na beithígh sa chró mar bhí sé ag cur báistí*". (The farmer put the animals in the shed because it was raining.) "*D'úsáid mé raicéad chun an liathróid a bhualadh ar ais nuair a tháinig sé thar an mballa.*" (I used a racket to hit the ball back when it came over the wall.)

During the pupil interviews it emerged that Sheila had her own library at home. Leisure reading was an integral part of her primary Discourse. She enjoyed reading popular children's series such as *Mallory Towers* because "*it's kind of adventurous*". She also

enjoyed the works of Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl. She indicated that sometimes she preferred to read in Irish: *“I do prefer reading the Irish than the English kind of”*. Speaking Irish and visiting the Gaeltacht were also a part of her childhood. Sheila had a very positive attitude towards speaking Irish but she did find it a little frustrating at times because of her limited lexical knowledge and fluency in Irish compared with English: *“Well it’s OK, sometimes you just get fed up with it”*. Part of the frustration related to having to switch from speaking English with friends outside school to speaking Irish with them in school: *“Well I feel different speaking Irish and that like because like we used to sometimes go and visit to each others’ houses and we’re speaking English all the time, and then at school you speak to them in Irish and English and Irish is like ah you know”*. Overall Sheila was pleased that her parents opted to send her to an all-Irish school.

Regina was reported as being a quiet, happy, conscientious child, making average progress and always eager to please the teacher. She had difficulty pronouncing ‘r’ sounds. Her older siblings attended the same all-Irish school. A little Irish was spoken in the home. Regina did not attend a *naíonra*. During class visits I observed that Regina frequently raised her hand to volunteer answers. She was very attentive in class. She completed her written work carefully and on time. This was often done while she sat on her hunkers on the chair. I noticed she tended to subvocalize when writing. She engaged enthusiastically in oral language activities such as singing songs and reciting rhymes. During Year 2 of the project it was noticeable that she was able to read fluently and accurately in both Irish and English and by Year 3 she had developed automatic word recognition of many words she encountered.

During interview Regina revealed that when younger she had particularly liked her book of fairy tales which her parents read to her at night. She enjoyed reading a variety of genres including adventure stories, fantasy tales and horror stories including the books of

Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl. Regina also enjoyed other genres such as puzzle books. She enjoyed reading in both languages: “*I like them both*” and explained why she liked the Irish book *Labhraí Loingseach*: “*Mar tá an ceann seo sort of imaginary*”. (Because this one is sort of imaginary). Regina had a very positive attitude to speaking Irish but found it a little frustrating at times: “*Sometimes it gets very annoying*”. She was happy that her parents had selected an all-Irish school for her.

Daniel was reported as being a very clever and very able pupil. His older siblings had attended the same all-Irish school. The teacher considered him to be the brightest pupil in the class. His mother spoke some Irish with him. Daniel had not attended a *naíonra*. Observations revealed that he engaged very well with literacy activities in both Irish and English. He appeared to enjoy the different sounds of languages and making puns. Daniel was meticulous in his approach to written work. During Year 2 of the study I observed that he had very good word recognition skills in both Irish and English. He liked to read books when he had completed written work and would read the same book two or three times subvocalizing as he read. He tended to take charge during group activities and other group members looked to him for guidance.

Daniel enjoyed reading different genres such as the *Harry Potter* series and the *Horrible Science* and *Horrible History* books, a habit that had been fostered by his parents from a young age. He enjoyed reading at bedtime. He also had fond memories of having played the title role of *An Garbhán (The Gruffalo)* for a dramatic interpretation of the Irish language version of the story the class performed at a national drama competition when they were in Senior Infants. He liked the Irish story *Labhraí Loingseach* for its humorous content. He found reading and writing in English easier because of his superior lexical knowledge in the language: “*Ah I would like English better because am some of the words in Irish in some books I don't really understand, I know most of the words in English*”.

Daniel had a positive attitude to speaking Irish which was influenced partly by his older siblings and the value his parents placed on knowing the language.

Clement was travelling quite a distance every day to attend School B, indicating a high level of commitment to Irish-medium education on the part of his parents. Clement was reported as progressing at an average rate, quiet, but easily distracted. None of his older siblings attended all-Irish schools. His father spoke some Irish with him. He had not attended a *naíonra*. During observations I noticed Clement had a tendency to talk regularly with other group members during written activities but he usually completed the written work accurately and on time. He engaged well with literacy activities and frequently raised his hand to volunteer answers. During Year 2 of the study I observed that his word recognition skills in Irish and English were quite good. By Year 3 I noticed he read accurately and fluently and recognised most words in the text automatically.

During interview Clement indicated that his parents had read to him when he was younger. He liked to read books with humorous content, such as *Horrid Henry*, books populated with characters with superhuman powers, and books with attractive illustrations. He was confident about his ability to read in Irish suggesting that English was slightly easier: *“It’s not that hard like so I guess they’re the same ... Well English is a bit easier to, like understand, the words and some words in books that I don’t know”*. Clement was favourably disposed to speaking Irish and this related to his confidence in his own ability to speak the language: *“I don’t really mind speaking Irish ’coz I know it so well it’s just like speaking English”*.

Kevin was reported as experiencing learning difficulties in school and as being quiet and easily distracted. The teacher considered him to be the weakest pupil in the class. His older brother was attending a local English-medium school. No Irish was spoken in the home. Kevin had not attended a *naíonra*. During observations I noticed he could easily be

distracted from his work. He tended to daydream quite a bit and was slow to complete written activities. He didn't raise his hand as frequently as other pupils to volunteer answers and he didn't always respond to class questions. On one occasion when engaged in a paired activity with Daniel he sat back and let Daniel complete the activity which involved writing Irish words that begin with the digraph 'ch' on a card and colouring a picture. His levels of engagement and confidence during literacy lessons increased considerably during Year 2 of the project. In particular he enjoyed activities that had a competitive element.

Kevin enjoyed the *Horrid Henry* books and books about sport including his favourite football team, Manchester United. This was a habit he acquired at an early age from his parents and uncle. He had enjoyed the Irish language version of *The Gruffalo* and being part of the class dramatic production of the book. Kevin preferred to read in English: "Because it's easier". Although he enjoyed reading, Kevin was resistant to reading the material imposed on him by the school: "I never ever read the books we've to bring home, never". He also had a negative attitude to speaking Irish: "Oh I don't like it" and revealed that he spoke mostly English in the playground which was in breach of school rules.

Table 4.6 Summary profiles of pupils in Class B2

Pupils	Progress in school	Attendance at naíonra	Home support for Irish	Attitudes to Irish	Reading preferences
Sheila	Very good	No	Very strong	Very positive	Enjoyed reading fiction in both languages
Regina	Average	No	A little	Very positive	Enjoyed reading in both languages
Daniel	Very good	No	A little	Positive	Enjoyed reading in both languages
Clement	Average	No	Strong	Positive	Enjoyed reading in both languages
Kevin	Experiencing learning difficulties	No	No	Quite negative	Preferred reading in English but not material prescribed by school

4.4.2 The Irish Story: *Cearc an Phrompa* (Chicken Licken)

The Irish language version of the well-known traditional children’s story ‘Chicken Licken’, like many children’s stories, features talking animals and includes a short refrain. The layout is with text on every second page and illustrations on every other page. The main themes of the story are not to exaggerate and to be sure of the facts before telling stories so as to avoid embarrassment, and not to believe everything one hears from others without checking the veracity of such stories for oneself. The story *Cearc an Phrompa* would be described as a ‘*scéal slabhra*’ (chain story), a genre that is common in many languages, including Irish. The genre is marked by much language repetition and is considered to be very appropriate for young Irish language learners (DES, 1999). As noted earlier, Deborah favoured Irish books with much language repetition because they promoted pupil participation.

4.4.2.1 The Irish Storybook Reading Event: *Cearc an Phrompa*

In Excerpt 1 below the teacher, Deborah is reading the story and Daniel has a tendency to repeat some of the phrases he hears. The **activity** (Gee, 2005) Daniel is enacting is one of imitation, an important and effective language learning strategy. The full transcript of the literacy event is included in Appendix 8.

Excerpt 1

50. Teacher: “Tá an spéir ag titim!” [Text]
 “The sky is falling!”
51. Daniel: Tá an spéir ag titim. [Daniel, Sheila and Clement laugh here.]
 The sky is falling.
52. Teacher: Bhí eagla an domhain uirthi. [Text]
 She was very frightened.
53. Daniel: Bhí eagla an domhain uirthi.
 She was very frightened.
-

Later at turn 91 Daniel reproduces the phrase ‘*Tá an spéir ag titim*’ in response to the teacher’s question indicating he has already appropriated the phrase. Daniel successfully used imitation in the Vygotskian sense as an intentional, goal-directed cognitive activity (Lantolf and Thorne, 2007). Regina also employed the same language learning strategy successfully as is evidenced by her rejoinders at turns 98 and 110. I noted above that Deborah indicated during interview that she used Irish stories to develop the children’s receptive skills, focusing on listening comprehension and she didn’t expect the children to say much during Irish literacy events. However, the evidence presented here indicates that the ‘leading motive’ (Hedegaard, 2008a) for the children during a literacy event may differ from the teacher’s goals highlighting the ecological complexity of the literacy event in L2 which is also a language learning event for the children.

Excerpt 1 above is evidence also that children may prefer to deploy language learning strategies that are at variance with a teacher’s instructional strategies highlighting the need for teachers to be acquainted with young language learners’ preferred learning styles. Equipped with such knowledge teachers can then adapt their instructional approaches to actively promote effective language learning strategies.

In Excerpt 2 below we see the same pupil, Daniel using his L2 imaginatively to enact his **identity** (Gee, 2005) as a competent, sophisticated L2 user.

Excerpt 2

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 154. Daniel: | Bhí an leon ag iarraidh an lóin. [<i>Daniel is playing with word sounds here. The Irish words ‘leon’ (lion) and ‘lón’ (lunch) sound very similar.</i>]
The lion wanted his lunch. |
| 155. Teacher: | Cén rud?
What? |
| 156. Daniel: | Tá an leon ag iarraidh an lóin.
The lion wants his lunch.
<i>[Some of the other children laugh.]</i> |
| 157. Teacher: | An bhfuil? Ag iarraidh rud le n-ithe. Go maith.
Does he? Looking for something to eat. Good. |
-

Daniel has made a clever pun with the Irish words ‘*leon*’ (lion) and ‘*lón*’ (lunch) based on the similarities of their sounds. Deborah remarked on how impressed she was with Daniel’s witticism in reflections she recorded when reviewing the DVDs and which I have included in Appendix 19. Daniel repeats the phrase at turn 162 when he predicts the lion will devour *Chicken Licken*, indicating that he is using language both imaginatively and to monitor the emerging meaning of the text, providing further evidence of the functional diversity which L2 plays in children’s worlds.

Deborah’s instructional style shared some features with Claire’s. For example, she tended to privilege the regulatory and representational models of language. Deborah also asked closed display questions during the story event to promote language acquisition. (See for example, Topic Unit 4 in the transcript in Appendix 8.)

Deborah monitored children’s comprehension of story language using a variety of strategies including recasting language in the story (e.g. at turns 151 and 194), and probing the children’s understanding with questions (at Topic Units 10 and 18). In Excerpt 3 below Deborah asks a number of closed questions that focus the children’s attention on salient information in the picture to aid their story comprehension.

Excerpt 3

- | | | |
|-----|----------|--|
| 7. | Teacher: | Cearc atá ann. Cá bhfuil sé? Cá bhfuil sé?
It’s a hen. Where is he? Where is he? |
| 8. | Daniel: | Tá sí ag rith.
<i>[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]</i>
She’s running. |
| 9. | Regina: | Ag rith.
Running. |
| 10. | Teacher: | Agus cá bhfuil sé?
And where is he? |
| 11. | Daniel: | Sa ‘forest’.
In the forest. |
| 12. | Teacher: | Sa choill. Go maith. Agus céard a fheiceann tú timpeall air?
In the forest. Good. And what do you see around it? |
| 13. | Sheila: | Crann.
A tree. |
| 14. | Daniel: | Crann.
A tree. |
| 15. | Teacher: | An-chuid crainn, nach ea? |

- Lots of trees, isn't it?**
16. Daniel, Clement, Regina: A lán, lán, lán crann.
Lots and lots and lots of trees.
17. Teacher: Go maith. Agus céard atá ag fás ar na, ar na crainn?
Good. And what's growing on the, on the trees?
18. Regina, Sheila: Duilleoga.
Leaves.
19. Teacher: Go maith agus...
Good, and...
20. Sheila: Agus ouch. [*This rejoinder interrupts the previous speaker.*]
And ouch.
21. Teacher: Cén fáth go ndúirt sé 'ouch'?
Why did he say 'ouch'?
22. Sheila: Mar thit an [*pause*] cnó air.
Because the nut fell on him.
23. Teacher: Thit cnó air agus cén fáth go ndúirt sé 'ouch'?
A nut fell on him and why did he say 'ouch'?
24. Sheila: Mar tá 'spikes' air.
Because there are spikes on it.
25. Teacher: Agus ghortaigh sé é. Right, now.
And it hurt him. Right, now.
-

Focusing children's attention on salient information in the pictures was a feature of Deborah's instructional style. She sometimes asked questions that required the children to use verbs and produce full sentences. The children in Class B2 were a year older than the children in the other two classes. Deborah facilitated them to use their knowledge of L2 to monitor their comprehension. However, she did not ask questions that elicited responses in L1. Neither did she elicit children's predictions although the children were able to use their L2 to make predictions as is evidenced by Daniel's rejoinder at turn 162, discussed above. Deborah did not discuss story themes or characters' inner motives. Her style of questioning seemed to be designed to facilitate language output on the part of the children.

4.4.3 The English Story: *Goodnight Goodnight*

This is a real big book. The text is simple and in rhyming couplets. There is also a short refrain in the story, a typical feature of children's stories. The book is full of intertextual connections as characters from traditional children's rhymes and stories fill the

pages, including Old Mother Hubbard, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, The Gingerbread Man, and Jack and the Beanstalk. The girl in the story is reading in bed and the different characters appear to her in a form of magic realism. The book assumes and promulgates a certain type of childhood. Readers are expected to be familiar with the different characters from listening to stories read to them at night. In such implied childhood, children read in bed at night with their parents. The text is a way of inviting the children into the world of children's literature. In a way then the book is 'person-formative' as readers are discursively positioned by the text (Morgan and Ramanathan, 2005).

Based on my discussion with Deborah during interview I would argue that in selecting the book *Goodnight Goodnight* to read Deborah was positioning the children within a particular "cultural model" (Gee, 2001b) of childhood that expects children to be familiar with certain nursery rhymes and traditional stories from their socialisation into literacy in the home: *"And am I thought it would engage the children's interest and provide opportunities for them to make connections with other well-known children's stories ... I presume the children here would have been read to and that they would ah be familiar with them"*.

4.4.3.1 The English Storybook Reading Event: *Goodnight Goodnight*

As noted above, in selecting the big book *Goodnight Goodnight* to read Deborah was promulgating a cultural model of childhood associated with middle class homes where parents read traditional children's stories and rhymes to children at bedtime. As Excerpt 1 below reveals, to participate in the storybook event the children needed to be familiar with characters from traditional children's literature including fairy tales and nursery rhymes, which they obviously were. Deborah has just finished reading the story and asks the children to predict who else might visit the girl in the story the following night. Deborah is making **significant** (Gee, 2005) the practice of storybook reading. She is facilitating the

children to express their **identities** (Gee, 2005) as readers of books. All participating children revealed at interview that their parents read to them at bedtime. The full lesson transcript is included in Appendix 9.

Excerpt 1

- [The teacher turns the page.]*
Who else might come the next night?
342. Sheila: Ahm. *[Sheila holds her hand to her mouth and tilts her head to one side thinking.]*
343. Clement: The witch.
344. Teacher: A witch might come, yeah.
345. Regina: The giant. *[Regina has her hand raised to volunteer an answer.]*
346. Teacher: That's right.
347. Clement: A wolf. *[Clement grimaces and Sheila mimics him.]*
348. Teacher: Oh, my goodness me! And from a different story, who else might come?
349. Choral Response: Mmm.
350. Kevin: Tigers.
351. Teacher: Tigers.
352. Clement: Piggy in the middle. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
No, the, The Three Little Pigs. *[Regina has her hand raised to volunteer an answer.]*
353. Teacher: Maybe The Three Little Pigs.
354. Regina: The frog and prince. *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.] [Regina is standing up and has her hand raised to volunteer an answer.]*
355. Teacher: The...
356. Regina: Frog and prince. *[Regina sits down.]*
357. Teacher: The frog and prince.
358. Clement: I seen that film. They have a golden ball. *[Clement makes the shape of a ball with his hands.]*
359. Daniel: The Queen of Hearts.
-

In selecting this book Deborah is positioning the children as readers who are familiar with the canon of children's literature. She is conveying to the children that she values the literature they read with their parents and creating an 'associational bridge' between the children's primary Discourse and the school secondary Discourse, thus affirming the children's home culture (Bloome, 1992/1994; Gee, 2001b). Interestingly, Deborah's selection of an Irish language version of the story *Chicken Licken* also resonated with some children's primary sense of self as two children, Regina and Clement, said they

had the book at home. (See turns 55 and 57 in the transcript for *Cearc an Phrompa*.) Thus in the Irish reading event Deborah was also creating a link between the school culture as lived through L2 and the children's home culture as lived through L1. In both events she was encouraging the children to enact a particular reader identity. Deborah's approach is consistent with her own convictions about how to promote literacy development as during interview she remarked that she wanted "*to create readers and make them want to read*". And helping children make intertextual connections can help them derive more meaning from texts (Pardo, 2004).

Clement's response at turn 358 is revealing. Children nowadays may be familiar with traditional stories through their experiences with other media such as films. For some children the practice of bedtime reading can be replaced by other leisure pursuits such as playing computer games, as indicated by both Colm and Colin when interviewed. The development of new media has meant that children's literacy experiences also encompass digital literacy. We can no longer assume that children's primary literacy experiences outside school will be with books. Schools and teachers need to be familiar with children's multiliteracies in order to comprehend and assess appropriately children's language and literacy development and prepare children to participate fully in the real world (Gee, 2001b). Digital literacy and multiliteracies for children attending all-Irish schools have not been researched to any great extent to date.

Summary

Data from the literacy events in Class B2 revealed that children's goals during L2 literacy events may differ from teachers' goals as the children in Class B2 viewed the L2 literacy event as an opportunity to improve their Irish. Data also revealed that children may prefer to deploy language learning strategies that are at variance with teachers'

instructional goals. Knowledge of children's preferred language learning strategies could be helpful to teachers so that they could actively promote the use of such strategies. Overall I would characterize Deborah's reading style during the Irish literacy event as didactic-participatory. She approached the event with didactic intentions and also facilitated children's participation by providing ample opportunities for children to use their L2. In turn the children offered unsolicited contributions to make predictions about the story using Irish.

4.5 Summary

Data revealed that literacy practices varied considerably across classes. In each class L1 and L2 literacy practices were more alike than different as the practices established in L2 were being transferred to L1 events. The local norms of the school immersion Discourse shaped the events insofar as the local norms were filtered through the teachers' intentions. All three teachers had very different storybook reading styles. Each teacher's approaches to storybook reading in L1 and L2 were broadly similar. The teachers' styles could be placed along a continuum from didactic-regulatory to didactic-participatory to dialogic-interactional with children having more agency the further along the continuum they were placed. In particular, the children in Class A and Class B1 were experiencing very different ways of taking from texts in both L1 and L2. Data also revealed the functional diversity of L2 in children's worlds.

4.6 Analysis of Pupil Interviews

In June 2008 I interviewed fourteen of the fifteen pupils who participated in the study. Ethan was absent when I visited School A. In presenting and analysing interview data here it is important to bear two things in mind. Firstly, while some of the children's responses were unsolicited, most of the time the children were responding to the questions

I posed. Secondly, interviews reflect participants' perceptions of events rather than the reality of such events. For the purpose of analysis the children's responses have been organised into the following six categories based on the content of their responses.

- Parental support for speaking Irish
- Children's attitudes to speaking Irish
- Parental support for reading
- Children's leisure reading and writing habits in Irish and English
- Children's language of preference for reading and writing
- Children's satisfaction with attending an all-Irish school.

I will also be interpreting the results with reference to the following criteria used to select the focal children for the study.

- Gender
- Academic Progress (as reported by the class teachers)
- Parental Support for Speaking Irish
- Attendance at a *Naíonra*
- Siblings who Attended all-Irish Schools

4.6.1 Parental Support for Speaking Irish

The analysis of the pupil interviews begins with information on the level of parental support for speaking Irish as reported by the children because there was a direct correlation between level of parental support for speaking Irish and some of the other categories including children's language of preference for reading, children's attitudes to speaking Irish in school, and children's satisfaction with attending an all-Irish school.

Five of the children, Philip and Nancy in Class A, and Christopher and Colm in Class B1, and Sheila in Class B2 reported that they spoke Irish frequently with other family members. Three of the children, Nancy, Colm, and Sheila reported that they visited the Gaeltacht regularly with their families. So speaking Irish at home and interacting with native speakers in the Gaeltacht were part of these children's primary Discourse. With the

exception of Philip all of these children were very favourably disposed towards speaking Irish in school and reported that they were pleased their parents had opted to send them to an all-Irish school. The three boys were reported by their teachers as progressing at an average rate. However, during Year 2 of the study it emerged during an informal discussion with the class teacher that Philip was experiencing difficulties with sound-symbol correspondence in English reading. The two girls, Sheila and Nancy, were both considered to be making above average progress by their class teachers.

Five other children, Louise in Class A, Colin in Class B1, and Daniel, Clement, and Regina in Class B2 all reported that their parents spoke a little Irish with them sometimes. Such limited parental use of Irish consisted mainly of simple phrases and instructions to support their children's endeavours to learn the language, as the following examples from Daniel and Regina indicate.

Ní really, ach am i gcónaí deireann mo Mham as Gaeilge, cosúil le 'Faigh do mála' nó rud éigin. (Daniel)

Not really, but am my Mum always says in Irish, like 'Get your bag' or something.

Am sometimes dhéanann mo Mhamaí é nuair am a bhíonn mé ag dul am a chodladh bíonn, sometimes am, am deireann sí 'Oíche mhaith' dom. (Regina)

Am sometimes my Mummy does it when I'm going to bed, sometimes am, am she says 'Goodnight' to me.

All five children were happy to be attending an all-Irish school and they had positive attitudes to speaking Irish in school even if it was a little challenging and frustrating for them at times. Daniel was reported as being the brightest pupil in Class B2. Louise, Clement, and Regina were all reported as making average progress. Colin was reported to be experiencing significant learning difficulties.

Four of the children, Marion and Liam in Class A, Simone in Class B1 and Kevin in Class B2 reported that they never spoke Irish at home with their parents. Marion, Liam, and Simone were all reported as making average progress. Kevin was reported to be

experiencing learning difficulties. All four of these pupils had negative attitudes to having to speak Irish in school all the time.

4.6.2 Children's Attitudes to Speaking Irish

Children with strong home support for the language were generally favourably disposed towards speaking Irish in school even though some of these children found it a little challenging and frustrating at times because of their greater fluency in English, as the following comments illustrate.

I know English, I know German, but I am wanted to know Irish 'coz that's my native language and it's dying and I want to keep it up. (Colm)

Am bhuel ní cuma liom am ar scoil ach is fearr liom ah labhairt Gaeilge sa bhaile níos mó. (Christopher)

Am well I don't mind at school but I prefer ah to speak Irish at home.

Well it's OK, sometimes you just get fed up with it. (Sheila)

Sometimes it gets very annoying. (Regina)

Both Sheila and Regina had very positive attitudes towards speaking Irish. But like many of the other children in the study it was easier for them to express themselves in English because of their greater lexical knowledge and fluency in English. Children with moderate home support for speaking Irish were positively disposed to speaking Irish in school. The children's attitudes may have been related also to their perceptions of their own ability to speak the language as Clement's comment reveals: "*I don't really mind speaking Irish 'coz I know it so well it's just like speaking English*". As Dörnyei (1998) suggests, strong self-efficacy and linguistic self-confidence are strong motivational factors in SLL.

In Daniel's case it went beyond mere parental support. His older siblings who had attended the same all-Irish primary school were performing very well on Irish language tests at second level and this seemed to impact positively on his own attitude to speaking Irish: "*It's nice to know two languages, and like when I go into secondary school yeah, because*

my brother went to this school ... and he got an A+ in his Irish ... He's really good at the Irish now. So because of family circumstances Daniel valued being able to speak Irish.

With the exception of one pupil, Philip, children who had a connection with the Gaeltacht had very positive attitudes to speaking Irish.

Well it's our language and I like speaking it and stuff and that's why I go to Inis Oírr (area in the Conamara Gaeltacht) a lot because I like speaking Irish to people and they speak Irish back, so ... that's why I like it. (Colm)

Is maith liom Gaeilge a lán ... mar bhí mo Mhamó a céad ... teanga ah bhí sé Gaeilge.
(Nancy)

I like Irish a lot ... because it was my Granny's first ... language it was Irish.

Colm, Nancy, and Sheila visited the Gaeltacht frequently. This seemed to impact positively on their attitudes to speaking Irish. They valued opportunities to speak Irish with others outside the school environment. It was important for them that friends and relations in the Gaeltacht spoke Irish with them thereby affirming their identities as Irish speakers. Such integrative elements can increase learners' motivation to learn the target language (Dörnyei, 1998).

The one exception here was Philip. His father is from the Gaeltacht and speaks Irish with him regularly. Despite such positive home support he seemed to have quite a negative attitude to speaking Irish as did some children who had no home support for speaking Irish, including Marion, Kevin, Liam, and Simone.

Ní maith liom é ... Ní maith liom Gaeilge. (Philip)

I don't like it ... I don't like Irish.

Ní maith liom Gaeilge at all ... I'd say I hate it. (Liam)

I don't like Irish at all.

Oh I don't like it. (Kevin)

Ní maith liom é. [I don't like it.] ... Mar you see caithfidh tú labhairt Gaeilge all the time.

[Because you see you have to speak Irish all the time.] (Simone)

Am kind of angry ... I just don't like Irish ... Like when I speak English it's just normal, when I speak Irish it's just not normal. (Marion)

While Liam's attitude is very negative it may also be influenced by his lack of confidence in his own ability to speak Irish, as self-reported: "Sometimes I try to teach my

brothers a few words, but I don't really speak Irish that good". Drawing on self-efficacy theory Dörnyei (1998) notes that poor self-efficacy can lead to demotivation.

Simone's comment above refers to the obligation on pupils to speak Irish at all times even in the playground with classmates in accordance with the school's total immersion policy. Both of these schools implemented the total immersion policy rigorously. Use of Irish in the playground in both schools is closely monitored and offending pupils are reported to the principal for sanctioning. Pupils who transgressed this school rule were written up in the *Leabhar Dearg* (Red Book). One reason for children having a negative attitude towards speaking Irish all the time in school, particularly in the playground, related to their perceptions of what they felt was unfair implementation of school rules, as the following discussion illustrates.

- Researcher: *And how do you feel about speaking Irish with your friends?*
Clement: *Well we don't.*
Researcher: *You don't ach, ach sa chlós, ar scoil? (but, but in the yard, at school?)*
Kevin: *Never, we never do it.*
Clement: *Like maybe once.*
Kevin: *Like if the teacher comes by we just start speaking it and then if she, when she goes again.*
Daniel: *Oh if the teacher comes by we just hum. [Daniel hums.]*
Researcher: *Ach nuair nach mbíonn an múinteoir timpeall labhrann sibh Béarla?*
But when the teacher isn't around you speak English?
Daniel, Kevin, Clement: *Yeah.*
Researcher: *Tuigim. (I understand.)*
Daniel: *Bhuel sin an fáth like cúpla uair níl fhios againn na focail.*
Well that's the reason like sometimes we don't know the words.
Researcher: *Yes, yeah, tuigim (I understand).*
Clement: *[undecipherable]*
Kevin: *Yeah, once am Clement, or Seán said 'Chelsea' and then like,*
Clement: *Níl aon Ghaeilge ar Chelsea like. [There's no Irish for Chelsea like.]*
Kevin: *Chelsea has no,*
Researcher: *Níl aon Ghaeilge ar Chelsea. [There's no Irish for Chelsea.]*
Clement: *Yeah.*
Researcher: *Tuigim, agus cad a tharla? [I understand and what happened?]*
Clement: *[undecipherable] agus chuir sí Seán isteach sa Leabhar Dearg.*
And she put Seán in the Red Book.
Kevin: *Tá Seán isteach sa Leabhar Dearg cúpla uair.*
Seán is in the Red Book a few times.
Clement: *Mise a trí. (laughs) Hero!*
Me three. Hero!

The boys in Class B2 felt that sometimes they were unfairly reported for speaking English if they used an English word for which they did not have any Irish. But it must be stressed that this was the pupils' perception as reported during interview.

The final remark by Clement, "*Hero!*" shows that being reported for speaking English in the playground gives the children a certain status within their own peer group. In making the remark Clement is seeking recognition from his peers as a defiant pupil. Similar to the "naughty boys" whom Davies (2006) reports on, the pupils in Class B2 are submitting to the school's positioning of them as uncooperative pupils but they do not submit to the expected emotion of regret or the appropriate desire to reform, at least not among themselves. The school immersion Discourse attempts to position pupils as competent, co-operative Irish language speakers. The pupils submit to this positioning when they are within earshot of a teacher. The disclosure by the pupils that they frequently transgress the school rules and speak English in the playground demonstrates that schools 'in shaping the conditions of possibility for their students, do not wholly determine who their students are' (Davies, 2006: 430). This is because the children subvert the school's institutional power in order to achieve autonomy and achieving autonomy 'is necessary for the accomplishment of oneself as a recognisable and thus viable subject' (Davies, 2006: 427).

But this subjectification is illusory. The pupils are not defying the institutional rules because they speak Irish when the teacher is within earshot, thereby subjecting themselves to the school Discourse. They only get caught when they are unaware of the teacher's presence. They then attempt to transform the 'uncooperative pupil' positioning by the school by becoming 'heroes' in their own eyes and in the eyes of their friends. The school Discourse positions the pupils as 'uncooperative' but in doing so it also affords them the opportunity to position themselves as 'heroes' in their peer culture and in their psychic

worlds. It is the school Discourse which makes possible the children's resistance. As Morgan and Ramanathan (2005: 156) note, 'the rules of a social field both limit and create their possible transgressions'.

For the school the *Leabhar Dearg* is a symbol of control. It is the material embodiment of the school Discourse and how the Discourse is imposed. But the children in their psychic worlds have subverted this and transformed it into an underground symbol of heroism, of defiance, and of peer acceptance. The *Leabhar Dearg* is simultaneously both a part of what gives the school its institutional identity and also one of the 'founding techniques' (Nayak and Kehily, 2006) through which the peer group identity of 'hero' is realised.

Through such acts of resistance pupils position themselves as uncooperative and establish their own cultural norms in the playground. In doing so they are acknowledging the school Discourse and giving meaning to it. But it is the school Discourse which initiates and sustains the children's agency, 'albeit a radically conditioned agency' (Davies, 2006: 426). In Chapter 3, with reference to Gibbs (2002), I noted that we construct the material, social, and psychic worlds we inhabit. The data presented here are evidence that the social, material, and psychic worlds which the pupils construct and inhabit differ considerably from the social, material, and psychic worlds the school is attempting to impose on them.

4.6.3 Parental Support for Reading

Parental support for reading was very strong among the participating children. All children mentioned that their parents read to them in bed when they were younger. Some children still read with their parents while many of the children read themselves at

bedtime. So bedtime reading was part of the children's primary Discourse as evidenced by the following comments.

Ah yeah, my parents would always read to me. (Daniel)

Mo Mham agus bhí sí ag léamh Horrid Henry agus bhí sí ag cur voices. (Louise)

My Mom and she was reading Horrid Henry and she was putting on voices.

My Dad read something when I was going to bed, he'd read me a story. (Philip)

Am when I was younger my Dad used to get the Roald Dahl books and read them to me when I was going to bed. (Sheila)

Well I do when I'm going to bed ... I just read and when I get tired I just put the book down and I just go to sleep. (Colm)

It is clear that the parental practice of reading to the children at bedtime has led to a habit of bedtime reading which many of the children still enjoy and find intrinsically rewarding. The children were highly motivated to read as their comments show.

Because I like to. (Nancy)

Am we kinda have to and I like it. (Marion)

Ah well I like to read. (Christopher)

I read because I like to read going to bed. (Liam)

Well most of the time I like to read. (Clement)

I enjoy reading. (Sheila)

I just like to read before going to bed so I'd have something to dream about. (Daniel)

The one exception was Philip whose father had read to him at bedtime but nevertheless he did not appear as highly motivated to read as the other children. Interestingly, during the second year of the project the class teacher reported that he was experiencing difficulty with sound-symbol correspondence in English reading. It is likely therefore, that Philip was a reluctant reader due to reading difficulties he was experiencing. This brings to mind Stanovich's (1986) paradox that many children do not read books because they cannot read fluently and they cannot read fluently because they do not read books regularly.

4.6.4 Children's Leisure Reading and Writing Habits in Irish and English

The children reported that they read extensively across a wide range of literature genres. They read a wide range of popular children's fiction including adventure stories, horror stories, humorous books, and books populated by characters with superhuman powers. Favourite authors with many pupils included Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl. Favourite series included *Mallory Towers*, *Horrid Henry*, and *Harry Potter*. Both Philip and Marion mentioned that they liked *Winnie the Pooh*. Interestingly, only one child, Regina, mentioned that she liked fairy tales.

I like Roald Dahl. (Philip)

I love Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl. (Regina)

I love them as well. I love Roald Dahl. (Sheila)

The Secret Seven is ... I have four of them. And am I'm collecting them. (Colin)

I love my favourite fairy tale book. My Dad used to always read it to me every night and every Christmas night. (Regina)

Many pupils liked to read information texts for leisure including books about nature, cars, science, and history. Nancy reported that her mother read history books to her.

Am because I'm interested in nature and ah I like the way how the dragons fly. (Colin)

Ba bhreá liom An Titanic. (Christopher)

I loved The Titanic.

I really like the Horrible Science Books and Horrible Histories. (Daniel)

I have a book about Mercedes. (Liam)

The children also liked to read magazines and books related to popular children's culture. The three girls in Class A read magazines and books about the television programme *High School Musical* and the boys in Class B2 read books about their favourite football teams. Both Regina and Sheila enjoyed the challenges posed by puzzle books.

Some children liked to write as a leisure pursuit using a variety of genres. Nancy kept a diary with entries in both Irish and English. Marion, Christopher, and Louise reported that they liked to write poems. Simone enjoyed writing humorous stories.

Tá diary agam agus scríobhann mé rudaí istigh ann i nGaeilge agus Béarla. (Nancy)

I have a diary and I write in it in Irish and English.

Yeah I write lots of stories at home in my storybook ... Funny stories, poems. (Simone)

It was interesting to hear children's opinions on the value of being able to read. Pupils found reading intrinsically rewarding. They enjoyed reading and were highly motivated to read, as Colin's comment reveals: *"I like it and I like the way it tells you once you get a dinosaur book or something the way that they am lived and how did they and things like that"*.

Some children took an instrumental view and spoke about practical uses of reading for work, for reading road signs, for learning, to gain knowledge and information, and learn vocabulary. They placed much educational value on being good at reading as the following comments indicate.

Am I think it really does help you am because like if you were a businessman or something like ... you always get files of work and stuff, you have to read them and ... I think it's very educational. (Colm)

Is féidir leat foghlaim níos mó. [You can learn more.] (Christopher)

When you're an adult you'll be able to if when you're driving you'll be able to read the signs. (Simone)

The boys in Class B2 were of the opinion that reading helped to improve their creative writing skills as Daniel explains: *"Ah it's easier to make up stories if you read ah stories"*. Some children took an instrumental view of the purpose of writing suggesting it would be useful for writing letters and would enhance future job prospects. Children were of the opinion that writing helped them improve their spellings, their reading, and their handwriting. Sheila reported that writing helped her with her maths.

I'd like a good job so I like writing. (Colm)

Well I think it helps with maths as well and if you're doing it in your mind you're kinda trying to figure out things but when you write it down it makes it kind of easier. (Sheila)

Prior to interviewing the children in both schools I suggested to the school principals that the children be asked to bring two books with them that they liked reading.

Bragg (2007) and Punch (2002) recommend using props or stimulus material when interviewing children as props can help them expand their answers. The purpose was to give the children the opportunity to speak about their own reading preferences. I suggested that the children might select one book that had appealed to them when they were younger, perhaps read to them by a parent, and one they had read recently or were currently reading. I also suggested to the schools that I would prefer if the choice was left up to the children themselves to select either Irish or English books or one of each. None of the children in School A brought books with them to the interviews as the school had not conveyed the message to them. In School B all the children brought Irish books with them. It emerged during the interviews that the children were instructed by the school to bring Irish books only with them, indicating that the school immersion Discourse was being imposed on the children rather than being negotiated with them.

The teacher told us we had to. (Clement)

Yeah. (Daniel)

I wanted to pick a different one. (Kevin)

As it transpired it did not make much difference as the children spoke very willingly about the English books they liked to read. The selection of Irish books presented me with the opportunity of exploring with the children the types of Irish books that appealed to them. The children reported that they liked Irish books that were humorous, imaginative, and attractively illustrated. Both Daniel and Regina liked the book *Labhraí Loingseach*. This is a well-known traditional tale about a king with horse's ears and versions of the story exist in other languages.

Mar tá an ceann seo sort of imaginary. [**Because this one is sort of imaginary.**] (Regina)

Sin an ceann is maith liom anois mar tá sé an-ghreannmhar. [**That's the one I like now because it's very funny.**] (Daniel)

What was noteworthy about the discussion of Irish reading material was the very limited variety of genres the children read compared with English. For most of the children

Irish reading was confined to school. Only three of the children, Colm, Christopher, and Sheila, reported that they engaged in leisure reading of Irish books at home. These three children had very strong home support for speaking Irish and two of them visited the Gaeltacht regularly. Leisure reading in Irish whether in school or at home seemed to be confined to fiction. While the children read history, science, and nature books in Irish in school for subject specific lessons, they did not report reading information texts in Irish at home. I had noted during classroom observations and from informal conversations with the teachers that many information texts in Irish are available to the children for leisure reading in school and at home but it is not clear from the pupil interviews whether or not the children read such books as a leisure pursuit. Some children did read information texts in English at home as a leisure pursuit. No children mentioned that they read magazines or puzzle books or books related to children's popular culture in Irish.

For many of the participating children reading in Irish is seen as school work and is not part of their primary Discourse. Where reading in Irish is confined mainly to the school, this limits the range of genres available to the children for leisure reading. For most of the children in the study leisure reading in Irish was confined to reading class novels. And as one of the teachers, Deborah pointed out when I interviewed her, even the range of fiction books available in Irish is not sufficient to promote widespread leisure reading in Irish. She also felt that the dearth of reading material available in Irish imposes limits on her own work as a learning support teacher: *"The choice is limited ... in Learning Support I don't like to use books that they have been using in the classroom and in English that's no problem. I can't do that in Irish because there aren't enough series"*.

All three teachers whom I interviewed were of the opinion that the reading material in the *Séideán Sí* programme was having a positive impact on children's motivation to read in Irish. They reported that the children derived a lot of enjoyment from such reading

material, were more likely to select Irish books for leisure reading, and standards in Irish reading seemed to be improving: “*The Séideán Sí stories are fantastic ... it really appeals to them you know ... they love it*”. (Claire)

The teachers’ optimism is tempered somewhat by the children’s opinions of the school reading material. For example, some of the children seemed resistant to reading the material sent home by the school.

I never ever read the books we’ve to bring home, never. (Kevin)

Because I have to, because I already read them before I don’t really want to, because I know the story. (Simone)

For some children Irish reading is associated with school work and drudgery. Simone obviously found repeated readings of stories for homework quite tedious.

It is evident from the interview data that the partnership model between the schools and parents is succeeding in promoting leisure reading in English across a wide range of literature genres. It is somewhat less successful in promoting recreational reading in Irish.

4.6.5 Children’s Language of Preference for Reading and Writing

A majority of the children reported that they found it easier to read and write in English than in Irish. In particular, they noted that their limited lexical knowledge in Irish and their greater fluency in English made reading in English easier for them. So despite the fact that these children had begun formal literacy instruction in school in Irish with literacy instruction in English being delayed by approximately 16 months, they still experienced more difficulties when reading in Irish.

English is easier. (Louise)

English is easier. (Marion)

The words are harder in Irish to understand. (Liam)

The words are hard. (Philip)

Ah I would like English better because am ... some of the words in Irish in some books I don’t really understand, I know most of the words in English. (Daniel)

I prefer English. (Kevin)

Inflections in Irish seemed to make reading and writing in Irish more complex for some of the children, as Simone articulates very well: “*Because when you’re writing in English you don’t really need to put ‘h’s if there’s an ‘an’, (definite article in Irish) you don’t need to put am kinda new letters if a letter, if a word is before the word you need to put in a different letter*”. Simone is referring to the fact that feminine nouns in Irish are lenited when preceded by the definite article. For example the Irish word *fuinneog* (window) becomes *an fhuinneog* (the window). Irish is a highly inflected language whereas English has relatively few inflections. A number of pupils mentioned that inflections made reading in Irish more difficult for them. Similarly Daniel remarks on the use of a ‘*fada*’ (length accent) in Irish orthography which is a source of confusion for him when writing: “*English, ah yeah it’s still easier in English because you know how to spell the words, the fadas (length accents) sometimes in Irish you’d put in a fada that doesn’t have to go there*”. The *síneadh fada* or length accent is important in Irish as its inclusion or exclusion changes the pronunciation and meaning of a word. For example the Irish word *briste* (broken) becomes *bríste* (trousers) when a length accent is placed over the letter ‘*i*’.

It is interesting to note the children’s comments about the difficulties they were encountering given that they had been introduced to the Irish orthographic system well in advance of being introduced to the English system. The learning support teacher, Deborah, was of the opinion that learning to read in Irish in the initial stages would be easier for the children than learning to read in English. In particular she noted that Irish has a more transparent orthography than English which, in her opinion, makes the initial process easier for the children. She also felt that the length accent in Irish made reading in Irish a little easier but as noted above, this opinion was not shared by the children.

In the Irish I ... put the emphasis on the guta fada, (long vowel) ... the long vowels and I think it’s easier for them actually in, in Irish because the long vowel is clearly identifiable ... with the síneadh fada (length accent) over it, whereas in English you don’t know when it’s a long vowel or a short vowel ... So I think that makes it easier in Irish. (Deborah)

This disparity between teachers' opinions and pupils' experiences highlights the need to elicit children's opinions regarding the difficulties they may be experiencing when reading and writing in Irish as teachers may not always be aware of the challenges Irish orthography poses for young L2 Irish readers. The highly inflected nature of Irish makes the orthographic system unstable and presents quite a challenge for young L2 Irish readers and writers thus supporting the Script Dependent Hypothesis (Geva and Siegel, 2000).

Three children reported that for them reading and writing in Irish were easier. These children spoke a lot of Irish at home and two of them visit the Gaeltacht frequently.

Bhuel uaireanta tá Gaeilge níos am éasca. (Christopher)

Well sometimes Irish is am easier.

Well if I know most of the words ... I do prefer reading the Irish than the English kind of.
(Sheila)

I understand both the languages ... I like Irish more than English. (Colm)

Three pupils, one of whom visits the Gaeltacht regularly, reported that they enjoyed reading in both languages.

It's not that hard like so I guess they're the same. (Clement)

I like them both. (Regina)

*B'fhéidir Béarla, ach is maith liom Gaeilge a lán. **Perhaps English but I like Irish a lot.***
(Nancy)

Language of preference for reading and writing, as reported by the children themselves, did not seem to be related to rate of academic progress in school, as reported by the teachers. For example, Daniel was reported by one of his class teachers to be the brightest pupil in the class. Nevertheless Daniel himself reported that he found English reading easier and he experienced difficulty with the Irish orthographic system. Neither was it related to length of time for formal literacy instruction in the language. With the exception of one pupil, Philip, the factors which were most closely related to children's

language of preference for reading and writing were home support for speaking the language and social proximity to the Gaeltacht community.

4.6.6 Children's Satisfaction with Attending an All-Irish School

By and large the children were happy with their parents' selection of all-Irish schools for them. In particular a number of the children were particularly pleased with the friendships they had formed in school.

If I did go to an English school I wouldn't have Daniel or I wouldn't have Kevin.
(Clement)

Like Clement said there if I'd a went to another school, I, I have a couple of friends in my estate ... and they go to different schools but I'd rather stay here 'coz I have more friends here. (Daniel)

Tá sé scoil maith agus go beidh a lán cairde agus tá gach duine anseo agus tá sé go deas.
(Sheila)

It's a good school and a lot of friends will and everyone is here and it's nice.

Christopher, Colm, and Nancy had a lot of home support for speaking Irish and reported that they preferred to attend an all-Irish school. Louise and Colin who had limited home support for speaking the language were also happy with their parents' choice of an all-Irish school.

I wanted to come here. (Louise)

Scoil Ghaeilge. [An Irish school.] (Nancy)

Am I think it's good and I like the decision that they choosed and I hope that because my Mom and Dad speak it as well with me sometimes when they're having dinner or something. (Colin)

It seems the investment made by parents to speak Irish and support their children's efforts to learn the language mattered to the children. This in turn impacted positively on children's satisfaction with attending an all-Irish school. Children such as Simone who had no home support for speaking Irish were unhappy with their parents' choice of school.

Am níos fearr. [Am better.] (Christopher)

Not níos fearr. [Not better.] (Simone)

Children's satisfaction with attending an all-Irish school correlated with home support for speaking Irish. Most of the children in the study were pleased to be attending an all-Irish school. Other factors which mattered to the children were the friendships they had made in school and the efforts their parents made to support their learning of Irish by speaking the language with them. It did not seem related to academic progress. For example, Colin was reported to be experiencing significant learning difficulties but it is clear from his comment above that he was happy with the choice of school made by his parents.

4.6.7 Summary

Analysis of pupil interviews revealed that four of the five children with strong home support for speaking Irish had very positive attitudes to speaking the language even though they found speaking Irish a little challenging and frustrating at times. The same four children also reported that they enjoyed reading in Irish as much or more than reading in English. All four children indicated that they were pleased that they were attending an all-Irish school. Three of the children also visited the Gaeltacht regularly. These children valued opportunities to speak Irish with friends and relations in the Gaeltacht which affirmed their identities as Irish speakers. The only exception was Philip who had a lot of home support for speaking Irish but was quite negative about having to speak Irish in school and was a reluctant reader in both Irish and English.

The five children with moderate parental support for speaking Irish all had positive attitudes to speaking Irish despite the challenges they experienced. They all indicated that they were pleased that their parents had opted to send them to an all-Irish school. Most of these children reported that they preferred to read in English because it was easier for them. None of these children reported that they visited the Gaeltacht on a regular basis.

Four of the children whom I interviewed had little or no home support for speaking Irish. Neither did any of them seem to have any connection with the Gaeltacht. All four children had quite negative attitudes to speaking Irish in school all the time. Some of these children reported that they found reading in Irish difficult and preferred to read in English. They also revealed that they were not pleased that their parents had selected an all-Irish school for them.

Analysis of pupil interviews revealed that academic progress was not related to children's attitudes to speaking Irish, to children's language of preference for reading, or to children's satisfaction with attending an all-Irish school. Neither were children's attitudes to speaking Irish, to reading in Irish, or to attending an all-Irish school related to gender or to having attended a *naíonra*. Of the six girls interviewed four of them had positive attitudes and two were negatively disposed to speaking and reading in Irish, and to attending an all-Irish school. Five boys had positive attitudes to speaking Irish and to attending an all-Irish school. Three of the boys were negatively disposed to speaking Irish and attending an all-Irish school. It is evident therefore that children's attitudes were not related to gender.

Three of the children had attended a *naíonra*. Two of these children had positive attitudes to Irish while one was of a negative disposition. Of the ten pupils interviewed who did not attend a *naíonra* seven were of a positive disposition towards Irish and three were negative in their attitudes. Therefore, children's attitudes were not related to attendance at a *naíonra*. Neither were children's attitudes to speaking Irish related to what school they were attending as pupils in all three classes expressed both positive and negative attitudes.

Not enough information was elicited from the pupils to draw any conclusions regarding the influence that having siblings attending all-Irish schools might have on

children's attitudes to Irish. Daniel was the only pupil who spoke about the attainments in Irish of his older siblings now attending a second level school and who had attended the same all-Irish primary school. His family circumstances seemed to impact positively on his own attitude to speaking Irish and he valued being able to speak the language for future academic attainment.

It may be concluded from the data that the most significant factors impacting on children's attitudes to speaking Irish in school, to children's language of preference for reading, and to children's satisfaction with attending an all-Irish school were home support for speaking the language and social proximity to the Gaeltacht community. In other words the children whose primary Discourse was most closely aligned to the school Discourse had the most positive attitudes to speaking Irish, to reading in Irish, and to attending an all-Irish school.

All pupils had very strong parental support for reading. Most of the children read extensively in English from a wide range of genres but leisure reading in Irish was mostly confined to class novels. The partnerships which the schools had forged with the parents through 'book clubs' were successful in promoting recreational reading in English but somewhat less successful in promoting leisure reading in Irish. The teachers were of the opinion that the children's motivation and ability to read in Irish were improving due to the recent publication of reading materials for all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools but interviews with the children revealed that some of this reading material was demotivating for them. It also emerged that teachers are not always aware of some of the difficulties children encounter with the Irish orthographic system which is highly inflected.

The compulsory nature of the school immersion Discourse was resisted by some pupils in a number of ways. Some pupils divulged that they frequently spoke English in the playground and one pupil disclosed that he never read the reading material sent home with

him from school. Based on the evidence presented from the pupil interviews I am arguing that the social, material, and psychic worlds which the pupils construct and inhabit differ considerably from the social, material, and psychic worlds the school is attempting to impose on them.

4.7 Children's Identities as Bilinguals and Bilingual Readers

As noted in Chapter 2 examining instances of code switching during literacy events can give valuable insight into how children are constructing their socially situated identities as bilinguals and bilingual readers. It is important to bear in mind that the young children in the present study may not be fully aware that they are switching languages. In fact all teachers were of the opinion that most of the time the children were unaware that they were switching codes, as Anna explains: *"I think that was done very naturally ... I suppose mainly to communicate ... it helps them to engage in discussion and gain comprehension, and I suppose to express themselves"*.

In analysing the juxtaposition of the two language systems I am using an interpretive approach to bilingualism as opposed to a structural approach (Auer, 1998a). Such an approach implies that code switching may be viewed as an interactional achievement negotiated by the participants (Auer, 1998a). The aim is to analyse 'how the meaning of code-switching is constructed in interaction' (Li Wei, 1998: 169) (emphasis in the original).

In the following interaction we have an example of a child and the teacher using code switching to co-construct the child's identity as a bilingual. The teacher is reading the English story *'Lazy Ozzie'* to the children. So in this example, drawing on the terminology used by Deuchar *et al.* (2007), English is the 'matrix' language and Irish is the 'embedded' language.

Excerpt 1

140. Teacher: We'll start the story. Are we ready?
-
141. Ethan: We're, we're supposed to speak Gaeilge [**Irish**]. [*This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.*]
142. Teacher: Gaeilge [**Irish**].
143. Ethan: Yeah.
144. Teacher: Oh. [*This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.*] The story's in English so we'll speak in English for this story. Okay. Is that okay?
145. Ethan: Tá [**Yes**].
146. Teacher: Okay. Buachaill maith [**Good boy**]. Now.
-
147. Teacher: [*The teacher begins reading the story with intonation.*]
Ozzie was a very lazy owl. [*Text*]
So what, what's an owl?
148. ? He, he... [*I can't identify which child speaks here.*]
149. Teacher: It's a type of something.
150. Louise: They come out at night.
151. Ethan: They go like ooh, ooh, ooh. [*This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder. Ethan makes high-pitched sounds to imitate an owl.*]
-

In turn 141 Ethan reminds the teacher that *Gaeilge* is the language of communication in the classroom. While this does not represent a code switch *per se*, Ethan is proposing a code switch. This is because he views the discourse practice in use as deviating from the usual classroom discourse practice. In turn 144 the teacher assures Ethan that it is acceptable to speak in English as she is reading an English story and seeks his approval. Interestingly, he agrees but his response is in Irish (turn 145) thus asserting his identity as a bilingual. In turn 146 the teacher affirms this by embedding an Irish phrase [*'Buachaill maith'* ('Good boy')] within the matrix language, English, an example of alternation (Deuchar *et al.*, 2007). Subsequently in turn 151 Ethan responds in English to the teacher's English question in turn 147: '*So what, what's an owl?*' So here is an example of how code switching by both the teacher and the pupil can help to co-construct the pupil's socially situated identity as a bilingual. Identity is discoursed into being by the teacher and pupil as Ethan comes to inhabit his particular persona (Auer, 1998b).

His identity is manifested not just through the actual code used but also through the content and the context (Sebba and Wootton, 1998). Ethan is expressing a dual identity and seeking a negotiable identity for himself (Brijball, 2004, cited in de Klerk, 2006). This excerpt is indicative of how verbal interactions between bilinguals are determined by local processes of language negotiation and choice of code (Auer, 1998a).

In Excerpt 2 below the teacher is reading the Irish story ‘*Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamáí*’ to the children. Irish is the matrix language and English is the embedded language. In turn 7 the teacher asks a question in order to elicit a specific lexical item in Irish. All four pupils respond correctly (turn 8). In turn 9 the teacher asks a higher-order inferential question of one pupil: ‘*Cén fáth anois, lámha suas, a bhfuil liosta aici, [pause] Simone?*’ (Why now, hands up, does she have a list, [pause] Simone?) Simone responds correctly in English (turn 10). In turn 11 the teacher recasts Simone’s response in Irish thus providing valuable language input. In doing so she pauses to invite the children to complete the sentence by providing the correct lexical item in Irish. In turn 12 all four children again respond correctly.

Excerpt 2

6. Teacher: Tá sé gorm. Go raibh maith agat.
It’s blue. Thank you.
-
- Céard atá ina láimh ag Mamáí?
What has Mammy got in her hand?
7. Choral Response: Liosta. *[All four pupils respond here.]*
A list.
8. Teacher: An-mhaith. Tá liosta aici. Cén fáth anois, lámha suas, a bhfuil liosta aici, *[pause]* Simone?
[All four children have their hands raised to volunteer an answer.]
Very good. She has a list. Why now, hands up, does she have a list, [pause] Simone?
9. Simone: Am, so they won’t forget what they need to buy.
10. Teacher: Iontach. Ionas nach ndéanfaidh siad dearmad ar na rudaí atá siad ag dul ag ceannach sa...
[The teacher pauses to invite the children to complete the sentence.]
Excellent. So that they won’t forget the things they are going to buy in the...
11. Choral Response: Siopa. *[This word is said by all four pupils.]*
Shop.

It was a common feature of the Irish stories that children code switched to L1 when their responses required more complex language such as responding to higher-order questions. Such interaction does not represent a deficit. In turn 10 Simone code switches to L1 to achieve her communicative goal of responding correctly to the question she is asked. This represents an achievement by her as she has understood and answered correctly the question posed in L2 despite the fact that her only contact with the language has been within the school setting for less than one year. The acceptance and recasting of her response by the teacher as well as the teacher's elicitation of lexical items in Irish demonstrates how the teacher facilitates classroom discourse practices according to the children's linguistic skills in L1 and L2 (Reyes, 2004). Facilitating children to select from their L1 and L2 linguistic resources supports their developing reading ability as well as their language identities (Kabuto, 2010).

Similarly, in the following interaction Nancy code switches to English when responding to a higher-order question. Here the teacher is reading an Irish language version of the story Hansel and Gretel to the children. Therefore, Irish is the matrix language and English is the embedded language.

Excerpt 3

453. Teacher: Okay. Okay, Nancy. Cad fútsa? Cén pictiúr ab fhearr leat? Cén píosa ab fhearr leatsa? *[Nancy is standing.]*
Okay. Okay, Nancy. What about you? What picture did you like best? Which part did you like best?
454. Liam: I don't know.
455. Nancy: Am, is fearr liom...
Am, I prefer...
456. Teacher: Liam, bhfuil tú ag éisteacht? *[This rejoinder overlaps with the previous rejoinder.]*
Liam, are you listening?
457. Nancy and Teacher: Is fearr liom... *[Long pause. Then Nancy picks up the fourth picture in the sequence.]*
I prefer...
458. Teacher: An ceann sin. Cén fáth go maith leat an ceann sin?
That one. Why do you like that one?
459. Nancy: Because she's just sitting there agus tá siad cara **[and they're**

- friend]** [*English syntax mapped on to Irish syntax*] and she's, she's sittin' there and her friend and sheee's not leaving him out.
460. Teacher: Okay, agus tá sé ceangailte istigh, an ea?
Okay, and he's locked inside, is it?
461. Nancy: Tá.
(He) is.
462. Teacher: Ó, okay, agus is maith leat an ceann sin.
Oh, okay, and you like that one.
463. Nancy: Tá.
Yes.
464. Teacher: Ana-chailín. Is féidir leat é sin a chur thar nais.
Good girl. You can put that back.
-

In turn 455 Nancy responds in Irish to the teacher's lower-order question cast in Irish in turn 453. In turn 458 the teacher asks a higher-order 'why' question. In turn 459 Nancy responds in English which has now become the matrix language but her response involves an intra-sentential code switch to Irish, the embedded language. In doing so she maps English syntax on to her phrase in Irish. This is an example of congruent lexicalisation (Deuchar *et al.*, 2007). The remainder of the rejoinders in this interaction are in Irish. Here Nancy is demonstrating her ability to alternate between the two languages to accomplish her communicative goal. Her rejoinders, therefore, are indicative of a positive relationship between code switching and language proficiency. The acceptance of her responses in both languages by the teacher is indicative of classroom discourse practices that are highly sensitive to the children's L1 and L2 linguistic skills.

In Excerpt 4 below the teacher is reading the English story '*The Smartest Giant in Town*' to the children. Therefore, English is the matrix language and Irish is the embedded language. In turn 55 Colm responds in Irish to the teacher's question cast in English in turn 54. This is an example of a lexical item being more readily available to the child in L2. This is likely because the children had developed their concepts of print in L2 originally with English language arts having been introduced much later in the year. It is unlikely that

the child did not know the word in English as is evidenced by the teacher's response at turn 56.

Excerpt 4

50. Teacher: I'm at the end of my sentence. How do we know? What can you see to tell me where I ended?
51. Colm: I know. [*This rejoinder interrupts the previous speaker.*]
[*Colm raises his hand to volunteer an answer.*]
52. Teacher: The sentence, Colm?
53. Colm: Am, because, am, you stopped there. [*Colm points to the book.*]
54. Teacher: What can you what, what's that called, that little dot?
[*The teacher points to the full stop at the end of the sentence.*]
55. Colm: Lánstad. [*This is the Irish word for full stop.*]
56. Teacher: A full stop or a lánstad. So we'll turn the page.
-

In Excerpt 5 below we have an example of insertion (Deuchar *et al.*, 2007). The teacher is reading the Irish story 'Ag Siopadóireacht le Mamaí' to the children. So Irish is the matrix language and English is the embedded language. At turn 321 Christopher responds in English (thus making it the matrix language) but inserts the Irish word 'milseáin' (sweets) into the English sentence. This intra-sentential code switch demonstrates his sensitivity to the discourse pattern as most of the discussion was in Irish, as well as his linguistic competence of knowing the correct lexical item in Irish. The teacher then recasts the full sentence in Irish thus providing the correct language model for the children.

Excerpt 5

320. Teacher: Céard atá á dhéanamh ag Róisín, Christopher?
[*Colm and Simone have their hands raised to volunteer an answer.*]
What is Róisín doing, Christopher?
321. Christopher: Ah, she has milseáin in her hand.
Ah, she has sweets in her hand.
322. Teacher: Tá na milseáin ina lámh aici. Cén dath atá ar an mála milseán atá aici, ah, Simone?
She has the sweets in her hand. What colour is the bag of sweets that she has, ah, Simone?
-

Such insertions were also common when Irish was the matrix language. In Excerpt 6 below the teacher is reading the Irish story ‘*Cearc an Phrompa*’ so Irish is the matrix language. At turn 28 Daniel inserts the English word ‘because’ into the Irish sentence without disturbing the Irish syntax. Had he used the correct Irish word ‘*mar*’ it would occur in exactly the same place. This exemplifies how the children used intra-sentential code switches to English when speaking in Irish as a strategic coping device.

Excerpt 6

26. Daniel: B’fhéidir go bhfuil sé ag rith ‘because’ tá an Garbhán thall ansin.
 [This rejoinder interrupts the previous speaker.]
 [Daniel says this while pointing to the picture on the cover.]
 Perhaps he’s running because the Gruffalo is over there.
-

4.7.1 Summary

Students are acquiring new languages in educational contexts all around the world ‘and their identities are constructed in their discursive practices’ (de Klerk, 2006: 598). In the present study the children code switched from L1 to L2 to construct their identities as bilinguals. They also code switched from L1 to L2 to demonstrate sensitivity to the prevailing discourse pattern, and when they associated a particular discourse pattern in L1 with their L2 experiences. The children code switched both from L2 to L1 and from L1 to L2 when a lexical item was more readily available to them in the embedded language. Intra-sentential code switches from L2 to L1 were used as strategic coping devices by the children. They also code switched from L2 to L1 to answer higher-order questions and to engage in critical reading of stories read to them in L2.

The examples presented here suggest that strict adherence to one language by the children may not be the most effective way of learning to read for young bilinguals. Language should perhaps be viewed as a mediator in accomplishing the reading objectives of the activity. School discourse practices that promote the use of multiple languages view

multilingualism as an educational asset. Viewed through this lens the examples of code switching presented here are not the result of linguistic confusion or deficit but are indicative of enhanced communication and linguistic and cognitive ability.

4.8 Chapter Summary

Research Question 1: *In what ways are storybook reading events in Irish and English shaped by local norms?*

Irish literacy events in each school were shaped by the school immersion Discourse insofar as the local norms were filtered through teachers' convictions, motivations, and intentions, highlighting the centrality of the teacher in shaping the events. Two teachers, Claire and Deborah in School B, tended to promote interactions during storybook reading events in Irish that elicited responses mostly in Irish from the children. Both teachers aligned themselves very closely to the local school norms of promoting total immersion and their instructional practices reflected their positions. Anna promoted dialogic interactions that elicited responses from the children mostly in their L1 during the L2 storybook reading event. Her instructional practices were largely influenced by her focus on developing children's comprehension strategies. The nature of the storybook reading events gave evidence of different kinds of communities of readers. Barton and Hamilton (2000) have suggested that literacy practices are shaped by social institutions. The evidence from the present study suggests that the events were shaped by the school Discourse *as mediated by the teacher*. The teachers had much more agency than the children and could choose where to position themselves in relation to the school Discourse. The teachers and children were not reproducing systems and regimes but were creating their own versions of them.

Research Question 2: *In what ways are storybook reading events similar and different in the two languages?*

Research Question 4: *In what ways do teachers' convictions about language and literacy development mediate their approaches to storybook reading events?*

In Class A the storybook reading events in Irish and English were very similar. The teacher tended to ask higher order open questions to elicit children's ideas, opinions, and predictions in both languages. She focused on developing children's interpretive literacy skills by inviting the children to author and inhabit the stories. The literacy practices established in L2 were being transferred to the L1 event. In both events knowledge was co-constructed by the teacher and children who had equal status within the interpretive reading community. In Class B1 the reading events in Irish and English were broadly similar. In both events the teacher focused on developing children's functional literacy skills. She also privileged an efferent reading of both texts. Knowledge resided with the teacher who controlled the events tightly and the children had very little agency. Again the literacy practices established in Irish events were being transferred to the English event. The argument being put forward here is that the literacy events in both languages were shaped primarily by the teachers' convictions about language and literacy development which also determined how closely the teachers aligned themselves to the school immersion Discourse.

Research Question 3: *What factors impact on children's attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in Irish?*

Analysis of the pupil interviews revealed that attitudes to speaking Irish were closely related to parental support for speaking the language and social proximity to the Gaeltacht. Children whose primary Discourse was closely aligned to the school immersion

Discourse tended to have positive attitudes. Some children had quite negative attitudes to speaking Irish and some pupils found the school Irish reading material demotivating. Such negative attitudes could affect children's motivation to learn Irish and to learn through the medium of Irish. As Cummins (1996/2001) has noted, children need to invest their identities fully in the enterprise of learning in order to derive maximum benefit from the process.

A number of inter-related issues related to immersion pedagogy emerge from these findings and have important consequences for children's language and literacy development in all-Irish schools.

- What are all-Irish teachers' implicit views of knowledge, language development, and literacy development?
- Where do teachers in all-Irish schools position themselves and the children in relation to the school immersion Discourse?
- What balance do all-Irish schools wish to achieve between the twin goals of effective L2 immersion pedagogy and effective literacy development?
- How do all-Irish schools manage the transition from storybook reading in L2 to storybook reading in L1?
- What language models are children being immersed in in all-Irish schools?
- Where a child's primary Discourse is not closely aligned to the school immersion Discourse, how can the school build associational bridges between the child's primary Discourse and the school secondary Discourse to enable children to invest their identities fully in the learning process?

The implications of the findings from the study and of the emergent questions for theory, practice and research form the basis of the discussion in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The overall aim of the present qualitative study was to examine literacy practices in all-Irish schools as evidenced in storybook reading events in L1 and L2 with a view to informing theory and practice. The broad sociolinguistic context of the study was outlined in Chapter 1. In particular it was noted that the Irish language is of huge cultural and symbolic significance to Irish people but it has very limited practical use outside the educational system. The research process was guided by cognitive theories of literacy development, sociocultural theories of learning, language learning, literacy development, and identity formation, and research into storybook reading in L1 and L2. A comprehensive review of relevant literature in those areas was presented in Chapter 2.

Specific research questions were presented in Chapter 3 and are re-presented in section 5.3 below. A micro-ethnographic case study approach yielded rich data that has given a deeper understanding of the ecological complexity of storybook reading events in Irish and English in all-Irish schools. Video-recordings were used to capture data on literacy practices through a micro-ethnographic analysis of storybook reading events in L1 and L2. Using pupil interviews children's attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in Irish were explored. Teachers were interviewed to gain further insight into their approaches to language and literacy development in all-Irish schools. Ethnographic observation allowed me to understand better the context for literacy development in the research settings. A phenomenological approach was favoured and data from storybook reading events, observations, pupil interviews and teacher interviews were analysed using inductive analysis and interpretive discourse analysis. A number of issues that emerged from the findings were outlined at the end of Chapter 4. A discussion of these issues along with the implications for theory and practice are the focus of this final chapter.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

Conducting a micro-ethnographic case study limited the amount of data that could be gathered and analysed. The small number of classes and participants cannot be viewed as representative of the total target population in all-Irish schools. Working as an individual researcher also placed limits on the quantity of data that could be processed. The amount of data from six storybook reading events is relatively small and comprises no more than a series of snapshots. Nonetheless it represents a first attempt to gather information on literacy practices and approaches to storybook reading in Irish and English in infant classes in all-Irish primary schools. For a small-scale, short-term project the limited but rich, detailed data gathered were adequate for the purposes of analysis. Bronfenbrenner (1979) has noted that within a culture or subculture settings of a given kind (such as schools) tend to be very similar. In the current study the micro-analysis of a limited set of data revealed that the literacy practices being established varied considerably between the research settings showing that when one delves beneath the surface one can unearth striking variations across settings within a subculture.

Any contributions will necessarily be small because of the restrictions in terms of sample size, coverage, and the young age of the pupils. However, because little or no data are available on the topic any contribution is significant. Despite the narrow focus of the present micro-ethnographic case study, analysing storybook reading events combined with observations and pupil and teacher interviews provided insight into themes such as children's attitudes to speaking and reading in Irish, children's negotiation of their L2 identities, as well as some of the challenges of immersion education.

Data were gathered in naturalistic settings and although the contexts for learning during the literacy events differed from the classroom context, the ecological validity of

the study was not compromised. My presence during observations and the fact of video recording may have influenced teachers' and pupils' behaviours and may have had a bearing on the opinions expressed by participants during interviews. Withdrawing children from class for the video-recordings no doubt disturbed the natural context of the classroom setting to some degree. This was a necessary compromise to allow for more overt, observable involvement of the focal children and to keep all children within the visual frame of the camera lens.

By working with small groups the aim was for depth rather than breadth and to draw theoretical inferences rather than making empirical generalisations (Hammersley, 1990/1994). Any conclusions must be tentative. Readers can judge for themselves the extent to which the phenomenon investigated in the present study and the conclusions reached fit with their own contexts, a form of 'reader generalizability' (Merriam, 1998). Adopting a micro-ethnographic approach to researching reading as a social process enabled the generation of detailed, thick descriptions of the literacy events as well as an emic interpretation of what was happening in the events (Bloome, 1993) to generate 'working hypotheses' (Cronbach, 1975, cited in Merriam, 1998).

5.3 Summary of Main Findings

Research Questions

Young children and their teachers participating in literacy events in Irish and English in all-Irish immersion schools:

- 1. In what ways are storybook reading events in Irish and English shaped by local norms?*

It was concluded that the local norms of the school immersion Discourse shaped the events insofar as the norms were filtered through teachers' intentions and motivations

during the storybook reading events based on the teachers' own convictions about best practices in early literacy instruction.

2. *In what ways are storybook reading events similar and different in the two languages?*

Data revealed that each of the three teachers had a distinctive approach to storybook reading and for each teacher their approaches to storybook reading in L1 and L2 were quite similar. I have characterised teachers' styles as a continuum from didactic-regulatory to didactic-participatory to dialogic-interactional with children having more agency the further along the continuum they were placed. Literacy practices established in L2 were being transferred to literacy events in L1.

3. *What factors impact on children's attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in Irish?*

Parental support for speaking Irish as well as social proximity to the Gaeltacht community were the factors most closely associated with positive attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in Irish. Children from homes where no Irish was spoken had quite negative attitudes to speaking Irish, to reading in Irish and to attending an all-Irish school. An examination of some instances of code switching during storybook reading events, revealed ways in which teachers facilitated children to select from their L1 and L2 linguistic resources to support their reading development and to negotiate their socially situated identities as bilinguals and as bilingual readers which were performatively accomplished.

4. *In what ways do teachers' convictions about language and literacy development mediate their approaches to storybook reading events?*

Different teachers' styles led to quite different literacy practices being constructed in each class. In Class A the teacher promoted dialogic interactions and knowledge was distributed among the interpretive community of readers in both Irish and English events. Literacy practices which were co-constructed by the teacher and pupils took precedence over the classroom immersion Discourse. During the Irish storybook event children responded mostly in English but children's utterances also revealed that they could switch between L1 and L2 to articulate their interpretations of the story and justify their interpretations with reference to the pictures. The emphasis in both literacy events in Class A was on developing children's story comprehension using a range of strategies.

In Class B1 the teacher approached the Irish storybook event with didactic intentions using the literacy event as a conduit for language practice. Discourse interactions were tightly controlled by the teacher and the children responded mostly in Irish. In both L1 and L2 literacy events, discussion of the stories was confined mainly to story content thereby privileging efferent reading. Knowledge resided with the teacher and in the text suggesting the teacher espoused an epistemology that views knowledge as transmissionary. There was little or no discussion of story themes or characters and their inner motives, activities associated with story comprehension development (Morrow, 1984; Morrow *et al.*, 1990). However, the children were capable of discussing story themes at a conceptual level when facilitated to do so. Classroom literacy practices in Class B1 were being imposed on the children who had very little agency in the events. In turn the children responded in accordance with the teacher's wishes thereby giving meaning to the classroom immersion Discourse.

In Class B2 the teacher's goals did not always correspond with the children's goals during the Irish storybook event. Whereas the teacher wished to focus on listening comprehension to develop the children's receptive skills, the children availed of

opportunities to develop their productive skills by appropriating phrases in the story during the event through the use of imitation. The teacher discussed story content mostly at an efferent level and facilitated the children to use their L2 to monitor comprehension. During the Irish literacy event the children responded almost exclusively in Irish. In her choice of both English and Irish stories the teacher created a bridge between the children's primary Discourse and the school secondary Discourse. She did not discuss story themes or characters and their motives in either language thereby privileging efferent reading.

The representational and regulatory models of language were the dominant models for the teachers during storybook reading events. In contrast pupils' utterances revealed the functional diversity the L2 played in children's speech including personal, interactional, imaginative, and heuristic models.

5.4 Discussion

The following discussion addresses Research Question 5 *What might the implications of the findings be for pedagogy and research?* with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The implications for pedagogy in all-Irish schools discussed include

- balancing the dual goals of promoting effective L2 learning through total immersion and developing young children's interpretive and critical literacy skills
- promoting literacy practices that are closely aligned with children's literacy practices outside school
- promoting leisure reading in Irish
- promoting positive attitudes to Irish and to reading in Irish
- examining the interplay of epistemologies and immersion pedagogies

The implications for research include

- the need for more extensive research into literacy practices in L1 and L2 in all-Irish schools and the contingent effects of such practices on children's cognitive and literacy development
- researching children's reading habits in L1 and L2 with a view to supporting all-Irish schools in promoting leisure reading in Irish among their pupils
- examining teacher talk and classroom interactions across a range of activities to determine what language models pupils are immersed in and what are the likely impacts of the immersion experiences on children's language and literacy acquisition.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 represents the substantial part of my initial reading which informed my research questions and my research approach. As the study progressed and as I analysed the data I revisited the literature to help me make sense of the data. Consequently, in the discussion which follows I draw also on some further reading to illuminate certain implications which arose as the study evolved.

In outlining my own epistemological approach to research inquiry in Chapter 3, I drew on Biesta and Burbules (2003) who provide us with a view on what makes educational research distinctive. The authors draw substantially on the writings of Dewey who viewed education as an art that can be informed by the outcomes of educational inquiry. The purpose of educational inquiry is to make the actions of educators more intelligent. Educational challenges happen in unique ways and therefore, require unique responses. Dewey argued that educational research should involve educators in meaningful ways. I have attempted to achieve this by involving the teachers in reviewing the video-recordings of the storybook events which may have prompted reflection on their part. In

outlining his Model of Pedagogical Reasoning and Action, Shulman (1987) notes that reflection can help teachers develop new understandings of their pupils, the subject matter and pedagogical processes. Offering the teachers opportunities to reflect on their practices in ways that may not have been available to them previously was an attempt to give something back to them. Thus it was hoped that participation in the study would have been intrinsically rewarding for the teachers.

For Dewey knowledge and action are intertwined. My provisional findings are the result of actions undertaken jointly with others, what Wells (2001) labels ‘situated knowing’. These ‘warranted assertions’ might help some other educator to know more intelligently in a new situation. Verification of my findings is only possible through onward social processes which might test out some of my emergent ideas in new contexts.

The micro-analysis of classroom inter-actions and the context surrounding the inter-actions, as presented in Chapter 4, might help teachers to reflect on their own practices and develop a better understanding of the local social and power relations at play in literacy events in their own classrooms. It might also help educators discern whose interests are served by particular classroom literacy practices and whose are not. Such analysis and reflection might lead educators to consider alternative instructional practices. The provisional findings presented here may help other teachers in all-Irish schools to be reflexive and self-conscious about their theories of knowledge, of language and of literacy development, about their convictions and motivations, and about the texts they use. The findings might help teachers to consider the agency children have as well as ways of devolving more power to the children during literacy events.

Dewey sees it important to see the world intersubjectively via communication – we share what we know and do (Mannion, 2011) (personal communication). And, although knowledge is situated and provisional, it is the ‘cultural situatedness of meanings that

assures their negotiability and, ultimately, their communicability' (Bruner, 1996: 3). This is my view of knowledge which frames the following discussion in an attempt to offer some answers to Research Question 5: *What might the implications of the findings be for pedagogy and research?*

5.4.1 Literacy Practices in all-Irish Primary Schools

Data presented in Chapter 4 revealed that literacy practices established in L2 in Class A and Class B1 were quite different. Different instructional approaches will most likely lead to different patterns of development both cognitively and affectively (Morrow *et al.*, 1990). In Class A the primary focus was on developing children's story comprehension by enabling children to deploy a range of comprehension strategies to monitor the emerging meaning from the text. Children were encouraged to discuss their predictions and interpretations resulting in much use of English by the children but not the teacher during the Irish storybook event. The primary focus in both the L2 and L1 events was on developing underlying cognitive processes for interpreting texts first on an interpersonal plane. The data revealed that the children were beginning to internalise such higher cognitive functions and learning to interpret stories and monitor their comprehension on an intrapersonal plane.

In Class B1 the teacher subverted the Irish literacy event transforming it into a language learning event. The primary focus was on developing children's L2 linguistic skills during the L2 literacy event, an endeavour that was, no doubt, cognitively challenging for the children. The English literacy event focused primarily on an efferent reading of the text. In response to Research Question 4 above, the tentative conclusion drawn from the evidence presented is that the literacy practices being constructed in L2 events in both classes were shaped by the teachers' convictions about best practice in

relation to language and literacy development in all-Irish schools. In Class B1 the teacher privileged the school immersion Discourse over other considerations. Her didactic-regulatory approach resulted in literacy practices being imposed on the children during the Irish storybook event. In Class A the teacher privileged comprehension development over the school immersion Discourse. Her dialogic-interactional approach resulted in literacy practices being co-constructed by the teacher and pupils during the Irish storybook event. The literacy practices constructed during the Irish events were then being transferred to the English events.

Schools might need to consider how best to manage the transition to storybook reading in L1 during Year 2 of schooling, particularly if the literacy practices established in L2 are not considered appropriate for storybook reading events in L1. If different literacy practices promote different cognitive skills, then we need to learn about the effects of different literacy practices privileged by teachers in all-Irish schools. It would be important for schools to be aware of the potential of storybook reading events to promote reading skills other than functional literacy. The nature and amount of verbal interaction surrounding the text being read is critical to promoting literacy development (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1982; McKeown and Beck, 2006; Morrow and Smith, 1990; Morrow *et al.*, 1990; Tabors and Snow, 2001). Even very young children are capable of sophisticated interpretive responses to stories including prediction, association, and elaboration (Morrow, 1988). Promoting active participation can enhance children's story comprehension and their sense of story structure (Morrow *et al.*, 1990). Critical reflection that encourages children to construct considered responses and defend their interpretations, or to alter their interpretations when confronted with conflicting evidence from the text or from their interpretive community should be fostered during storybook reading events (Almasi, 1995).

Lewis (2001) argues for literacy instruction that would encourage students to look out for the multiple voices in texts. Evidence presented in the current study suggests that a prerequisite for such literacy instruction might be that teachers themselves would listen for the many voices in texts and consider how the children as readers are positioned by different texts. Only then can teachers hope to make their students aware of the multi-vocal nature of texts.

The examples of code switching presented in Chapter 4 suggest that strict adherence to one language by the children may not be the most effective way of learning to read for young bilinguals. Language should perhaps be viewed as a mediator in accomplishing the reading objectives of the activity. School discourse practices that promote the use of multiple languages view multilingualism as an educational asset. As Swain and Lapkin (2000) have cautioned, if immersion programmes insist that only the L2 be used to complete linguistically and cognitively challenging tasks then children might be denied the use of a valuable cognitive tool. When interviewed all three participating teachers said that the children were free to respond in either language during L2 literacy events. However, an analysis of the discourse interactional patterns in Class B1 revealed that the teacher controlled the interactions so as to elicit responses mostly in L2. The teacher in Class A promoted dialogic interactions that elicited responses from the children mostly in L1. However, at times the children in Class A drew on their linguistic resources in both Irish and English to develop their interpretive literacy skills during the L2 event. The evidence suggests therefore, that the L2 storybook reading event in all-Irish schools can be both a site for inhabiting stories and for inhabiting the L2.

Children should be viewed holistically and not just as language learners. Consequently, in some cases all-Irish schools might need to consider the balance they wish to achieve between the dual goals of promoting effective L2 learning through total

immersion and developing young children's literacy skills, including interpretive and critical literacy skills through storybook reading in L2. This might also entail examining critically the suitability of some of the specifically produced reading materials for promoting literacy skills other than functional literacy as well as incorporating other available reading materials into L2 literacy events. The balance aspired to is likely to vary from school to school and probably from class to class within schools. Evidence from Class A and Class B2 would indicate the potential of storybook reading events as an effective means of building bridges between children's primary Discourse and the school Discourse by acknowledging children's 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 2000). All of the children in the study had considerable experience with books outside school. If schools wish to enable all pupils to invest themselves fully in the learning process then they will need to promote literacy practices that are closely aligned with children's literacy practices outside school.

It is important to point out here that no value judgement is being made in relation to literacy standards in the participating classes and schools as children's literacy skills were not assessed. As noted in Chapter 1, previous research has shown that pupils in all-Irish schools tend to outperform their counterparts in ordinary schools in measures of Irish reading attainment, English reading attainment and mathematics (Department of Education, 1991; Harris *et al.*, 2006; Ó hAiniféin, 2007; Shiel *et al.*, 2011). These results are encouraging for parents, children, and teachers in all-Irish schools. However, most reading tests only assess superficial aspects of reading such as mastery of decontextualised skills. Children learn ways of taking from texts through participating in storybook reading events. The inter-actions of the group are internalised and become the intra-actions of the individual. The children in Class A and Class B1 were learning very different ways of being readers. And different literacy practices are likely to promote different cognitive

skills (Bloome, 1992/1994). Future research might explore in greater detail, incorporating a broader range of schools, literacy practices in L1 and L2 in all-Irish schools and examine the effects of such practices on children's cognitive development and literacy development across a range of literacy skills. Pedagogical intervention studies could be designed to promote different approaches to storybook reading and their relative merits assessed in terms of learning outcomes.

5.4.2 Leisure Reading in Irish

Data revealed that the partnership model between the schools and parents was very successful in promoting leisure reading in English. Schools were somewhat less successful in promoting leisure reading in Irish. Pupil interviews revealed that very few children engage in recreational reading in Irish. Some children resisted the school reading material as they found it demotivating. All three teachers noted the success of the reading materials in the *Séideán Sí* programme in terms of improving children's motivation to read in Irish as well as improving literacy standards in Irish. However, one of the teachers, Deborah, remarked on the dearth of reading materials available in Irish compared with English and felt her work as learning support teacher was being adversely affected as a result. Teachers in all-Irish schools interviewed by Ó Duibhir (2009) also remarked on the lack of suitable reading material in Irish for children. Addressing this lacuna might therefore be productive. Failure to do so will only reinforce the dominance of English.

All-Irish pupils may not encounter much Irish language print outside school and they will likely not be reliant on Irish literacy for future employment. In fact reading rates in Irish among the general population are very low. Based on her analysis of survey data collected from the adult population at ten year intervals (C.I.L.A.R., 1975; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984, 1994) Murtagh (2003) noted that ninety-three per cent of the population

never read in Irish. About five per cent read an Irish column in daily newspapers a ‘few times weekly’. Less than 2 per cent of respondents said they read an Irish language book or newspaper ‘daily or a few times weekly’. Nevertheless literacy in Irish is still valued and is essential for academic success in all-Irish schools as it permeates all aspects of the curriculum. Stanovich (1986) has noted that many children do not read books because they cannot read well enough and they cannot read well enough because they do not read books. It seems important therefore, that every effort be made to promote leisure reading in Irish among pupils in all-Irish schools.

Those bodies charged with developing materials for all-Irish schools might consider how they could provide a much greater variety of children’s reading material in Irish as a means of supporting all-Irish schools in their endeavours to promote more leisure reading in Irish. While this issue is being addressed somewhat by the development of the *Séideán Sí* programme, by the state-sponsored publisher of Irish language books for children *An Gúm*, and by *An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta* (COGG) all-Irish schools will require a much greater range and variety of reading materials in Irish to promote more widespread recreational reading in the language.

The present study revealed that the participating children enjoyed reading across a wide range of literature genres in English. Some children also enjoyed reading humorous fantasy tales in Irish. It would be hugely beneficial therefore, to research in detail the leisure reading habits of children in all-Irish schools and their preferred genres for reading in L1 and L2 with a view to developing Irish reading material that would be of intrinsic interest to children. Research by Elley and Mangubhai (1983) demonstrated that extensive reading of high-interest illustrated storybooks resulted in rapid second language growth as well as significant gains in reading and listening comprehension. Therefore, the development of further reading material would be likely to support all-Irish schools in

promoting second language acquisition as well as reading skills and positive attitudes to reading in L2.

Promoting leisure reading in Irish among all-Irish school pupils will entail addressing a number of issues. It would be important to provide a much greater range and diversity of reading material for pupils. In her study of literacy acquisition in Gaelic-medium primary classrooms in Scotland Pollock (2006) found that the low numbers of books in Gaelic in children's homes as well as the limited number of books and narrow range of genres in Gaelic-medium composite classrooms placed limits on pupils' extra-curricular reading development. Few pupils were reading independently in Gaelic outside school. Reading progress was greatest in classes where pupils had access to a wide range of books outside the class reading scheme, including books translated from English. Even at the early stages greater exposure to reading was associated with more confident and creative writing. Similarly, some pupils in the current study reported that reading helped improve their own creative writing skills.

Authors could be commissioned to write new children's books in Irish. Professional translators could be employed to translate much popular children's literary fiction. Teachers in the current study read Irish language versions of *Hansel and Gretel* and *Chicken Licken* thereby creating a link between the school culture as lived through L2 and the children's home culture as lived through L1. Familiar stories in L1 can activate children's prior knowledge helping to reduce anxiety and improve self-confidence and motivation, factors associated with learners' affective filters, thus enabling children to process L2 input more effectively (Morrow and Gambrell, 2001).

Much excellent reading material, including an extensive range of information texts, has been produced for pupils in all-Irish schools in Northern Ireland by *An t-Áisaonad* located in St. Mary's University College, Belfast. It would only require a small investment

by the state to make these books available to schools in the Republic of Ireland in the various dialects. *An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta* (COGG), a state funded body charged with developing materials for use in all-Irish schools in the Republic of Ireland, could play a key role in promoting these recommendations.

For some children in the present study Irish reading is associated with school work and drudgery. Some children were reluctant to read school Irish reading material for homework, particularly if they were already familiar with the story. We know from research by Tina Hickey (1992) that repeated readings are effective for developing reading fluency in L2. Schools might therefore need to consider more creative ways of promoting repeated readings of Irish texts that would motivate the children to want to read. For example, the boys in Class B2 had very fond memories of having performed a dramatic interpretation of *An Garbhán* (*The Gruffalo*) at a national drama competition when they were in Senior Infants. This was a particularly creative way of motivating the children to engage with the text repeatedly over a prolonged period.

It might also be worthwhile considering how parental support might be harnessed to promote children's leisure reading in Irish. All of the children in the present study reported that their parents read to them frequently in English. Parental support for speaking Irish was associated with positive attitudes to the language. The evidence presented in the current study supports previous research results from Harris and Murtagh (1999). The same authors also noted that a major obstacle to parental support for reading in Irish was lack of confidence in their own reading skills in Irish. Pollock (2006) has also emphasised the importance of parental support in allowing children to continue to develop literacy skills outside the classroom but many parents lack confidence in their Gaelic reading skills.

Nowadays audio books and e-books are relatively common media. Book companies could be incentivised to make existing children's books available using such media.

Teachers could record themselves reading books for children to take home and read with parents. In time schools could build up their repertoires of recorded books. Children could be involved in the process by recording themselves reading some of their favourite books to replay on computer for their parents. This would encourage repeated readings by children as well as involving parents in the reading process. As Pollock (2006) suggests, addressing parents' concerns could encourage children's L2 literacy development by providing children with further input at home.

5.4.3 Reconceptualising Immersion Education in all-Irish Schools

Data presented in Chapter 4 revealed that the representational and regulatory models of language were the dominant models for the teachers during storybook reading events. In contrast pupils' utterances revealed the functional diversity the L2 played in children's speech including personal, interactional, imaginative, and heuristic models. It is important to note that the data presented were limited and a study of a larger corpus of teacher talk might reveal a greater diversity of language models. However, as Halliday (1973) notes, the representational model tends to become the dominant model for adults and this is particularly the case in educational contexts. So there can be a mismatch between children's linguistic capabilities and the demands made on them by the educational institution.

A question emerges therefore, regarding the models of language children are immersed in in all-Irish schools. Young children are dependent almost exclusively on the teacher for second language input. But the children may be receiving restricted input in terms of the range of uses of L2. If some functions of language are developed one-sidedly this could result in the child developing only a limited proficiency in the language. It is important to remember that these are models of language use and not models of language

acquisition so there is no attempt here to link the data presented in the current study with children's language acquisition. The language input recorded from the teachers during storybook reading events in both L1 and L2 was rich in vocabulary and structures. The substantial point is that the teacher's model of language should not fall short of that of the child (Halliday, 1973), particularly during the early immersion years.

Schools need to be aware that the linguistic demands the L2 speech community will make on the child may differ considerably from the linguistic demands made by the school. Research in Canada suggests that the language register of formal schooling does not always prepare pupils adequately for participation in the L2 speech community outside the school (Cummins, 2000). In the case of pupils attending all-Irish schools the L2 speech communities might include Gaeltacht communities as well as networks of secondary bilinguals. Some children in the current study reported that they visited the Gaeltacht regularly and interacted with native speakers. The children valued these experiences which affirmed their own identities as Irish speakers. Therefore, immersion schools may need to consider carefully what speech communities they envisage for their pupils and their own roles in preparing the children to function successfully in such speech communities. This seems an important point in the light of research results on pupils' language acquisition in immersion schools.

Much research has demonstrated that immersion pupils can acquire high levels of competence in the second language at no cost to their L1 skills (Johnstone *et al.*, 1999; Swain and Lapkin, 1982). They attain near native competence in their receptive skills of listening and reading but their productive skills lag behind native speaker peers. In particular immersion pupils acquire non-target like forms that persist over time despite extended exposure to the target language and their teachers' efforts to correct them.

Specifically within the Irish context Ó Duibhir (2009) found that the most common errors of all-Irish pupils included (1) the use of the substantive verb *Bí* in place of the copula *Is* for classificatory purposes; (2) difficulties with the use of dependent form of all verbs and irregular verbs in particular; (3) the use of incorrect syntax with the verbal noun; (4) incorrect morphology of verbs in indirect speech; (5) incorrect usage of prepositional pronouns, numbers and interrogative pronouns; and (6) a tendency to map English syntax on to Irish. Harris *et al.* (2006) found that significant percentages of pupils in all-Irish schools did not attain mastery of *Control of the morphology of verbs* and *Control of the syntax of statements in speaking*. To date research has focused on pupil talk in all-Irish schools. The impact of teacher talk on children's language acquisition in all-Irish schools has not been researched to any great extent. The teacher's use of Irish is a critical factor in mediating the curriculum for pupils in all-Irish schools (Ó Baoill, 1999).

Research by Ó Giollagáin and Mac Donnacha (2008) is also relevant to the discussion. Irish-speaking children in some Gaeltacht areas are not evidencing the full range of linguistic competencies associated with native speakers because English is the lingua franca among peer social networks. The lack of social reinforcements of Irish language use among young people in the Gaeltacht is resulting in incomplete acquisition and the emergence of an interlanguage. Young L1 Irish speakers do not exhibit a level of fluency in Irish that would enable them to develop their narrative abilities and the creative use of language.

Similar to the context in the Gaeltacht discussed by Ó Giollagáin and Mac Donnacha (2008), the sociolinguistic context in which many immersion language learners acquire their second language may be limited if there is a lack of exposure to the L2 outside school. Schools are limited in the range and richness of language they can expose children to. In the light of evidence presented in Chapter 4 along with other research results

cited here, all-Irish schools may need to consider what the long-term goals might be in terms of use of Irish for their pupils. They might also consider how they could provide L2 input that includes the full functional diversity of language ‘as purposive, non-random, contextualized activity’ (Halliday, 1973).

One might ask therefore, what exactly does the term ‘immersion’ mean in all-Irish schools? What language model(s) are the children being immersed in? In many texts (e.g. Baker, 1996; Fortune and Tedick, 2008) immersion education tends to be defined in terms of programme descriptions such as age at which a child commences and amount of time spent teaching content through the L2 giving rise to descriptions such as early immersion, delayed immersion, partial immersion and total immersion. Immersion is also defined in terms of curricular and instructional elements such as effective immersion pedagogies. And immersion is defined in terms of intended outcomes such as producing highly proficient speakers of the immersion language who attain normal achievement levels in other curricular areas including L1, who are biliterate, and who appreciate cultural diversity.

Practitioners and researchers working in Irish immersion contexts might now consider how they could reconceptualise the notion of immersion education to include also a consideration of the language models children are immersed in. It would be important for them to consider how schools might provide input in L2 across the full spectrum of language functions identified by Halliday (1973), particularly during the early years when most pupils are dependent on the class teacher as the primary source of L2 input. Future studies might examine teacher talk and classroom interaction across a range of activities, including literacy events, in all-Irish schools to determine precisely what language models pupils are immersed in and what might be the likely impacts of the immersion experiences on children’s language acquisition to build on the findings of the present study. Such future research might draw on varying related epistemologies including ethnography, classroom

ethnography, micro-ethnography, case studies, phenomenology, and discourse analysis, research approaches that have not been deployed to any great extent heretofore in studies of all-Irish immersion education. Future research could also draw profitably on international literature on the type and use of language learned at school (e.g. Baugh, 1999) as well as literature on literacy development and biliteracy in bilingual education (e.g. Baynham and Prinsloo, 2001; Hornberger, 2003; Martin-Jones, 2000; Martin-Jones and Jones, 2000; and Reyes and Halcón, 2001).

5.4.4 Epistemologies and Immersion Education

An analysis of the transcripts of the storybook reading events in Class A showed how knowledge was co-constructed and reconstructed by the teacher and pupils throughout the events. The group functioned as an interpretive community of readers and children learned ways of taking from texts from each other and from the teacher. Children's opinions were affirmed and taken into account in a very real way and not in a tokenistic sense. An analysis of the transcripts suggests the teacher espoused a social constructivist epistemology. The teacher enacted a relationship of co-creator of knowledge with the children. However, it could not be claimed that power was equally shared among the participants. The teacher's management of the events was democratic but one child in particular tended to dominate both events.

In Class B1 knowledge resided with the teacher and in the text as children were subjected to 'gentle inquisitions' (Eeds and Wells, 1989) to ensure their understanding corresponded with that of the teacher. Power resided with the teacher who controlled the events tightly and the children had very little agency. An analysis of the transcripts of the literacy events suggests the teacher espoused a transmissionary epistemology but her views of knowledge were never made explicit.

It is easy to understand how some teachers in immersion contexts might implicitly espouse a transmissionary view of knowledge. Many children attending all-Irish schools are dependent solely on the teacher for L2 input. In such contexts teachers communicate with the children using ‘caretaker speech’ (Baker, 1996). Most of the children in the current study had little or no contact with Irish outside the school. Teachers might consider it their responsibility to transmit the language to the children. But what is the role of the L2 during the L2 storybook reading event? Is language used to mediate the literacy event, or is the literacy event used to mediate L2 acquisition? Literacy practices in Class A privileged the former whereas literacy practices in Class B1 privileged the latter. Or could both goals be accommodated concurrently? Evidence from Class B2 demonstrated that the children used their L2 to monitor the emerging meaning of the text. They also availed of opportunities to appropriate language using imitation during the Irish storybook reading event suggesting they approached the event with both goals in mind. This discussion relates back to the earlier discussion in Section 5.4.1. It seems important that schools would consider the balance they wish to achieve between these two goals of promoting effective language acquisition through total immersion and developing children’s literacy skills during storybook reading events in Irish.

While teachers might feel an obligation to transmit the L2 to the children they might perhaps also consider their implicit epistemological philosophies in relation to children’s agency in the construction of interpretations during reading events. All children in the present study were read to at bedtime by their parents. Their considerable experience with books was part of the ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, 2000) they brought with them to the literacy events. The different approaches to storybook reading in Class A and Class B1 meant that children’s previous experiences with books were acknowledged in different ways.

Cahillane McGovern (2006) has usefully employed the metaphors of consumerism and connoisseurship to characterise teachers' views of knowledge and learning underpinning assessment routines in primary school classrooms in Ireland. Consumerism and connoisseurship are metaphors that might also illuminate our understanding of the ways in which pupils are positioned as readers during storybook reading events. A consumer is understood to be a *user of goods and services*. A connoisseur is taken to mean *a person with discriminatory tastes*. Consumerism positions the children in a way that knowledge is made available to them. Power lies with the teacher and children are expected to match their interpretations of texts with what is in the teacher's head. Connoisseurship implies a more democratic stance from the teacher and children are encouraged to bring themselves, their history with storybooks and their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 2000) to the reading event and develop their own understanding of texts. And empirical evidence suggests that a democratic teaching style fosters intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1998).

Findings from the present study suggest that where the school immersion Discourse takes precedence over other considerations during the storybook reading event, pupils are likely to be positioned as consumers of literacy. Where the development of interpretive and critical literacy skills takes precedence over the school immersion Discourse children are likely to be positioned as connoisseurs of literacy. Considering how they wish to position their pupils during storybook reading events would help all-Irish schools to make explicit their epistemological positions as well as their definitions of immersion pedagogy, as discussed in Section 5.4.3.

5.4.5 Attitudes, Motivation, Identity and the Ideal L2 Self

Positive learner attitudes to the target language are associated with motivation to learn the language over an extended period (Ó Duibhir, 2009). For the present study it was important to gain as much information as possible about all-Irish pupils' attitudes and motivation to speak and read in Irish. All-Irish schools are limited in the range and richness of language they can expose pupils to. Lack of exposure to the L2 outside school can also affect motivation if the second language is associated with the curriculum but not with peer culture (Baker, 2003). The speech community of the school can also exert its own norms on pupils. For example, the children in Class B2 reported that they spoke mostly English in the school playground despite the school requirement to speak Irish at all times. Ó Duibhir (2009) also found that some pupils resisted the compulsory nature of the school norm of speaking Irish at all times.

Previous studies (e.g. Harris and Murtagh, 1999) have shown that parental support and encouragement are associated with positive attitudes to Irish and with higher attainment levels in Irish. Ó Duibhir (2009) found that overall, immersion pupils in sixth class (final year of primary school) had positive attitudes to learning Irish and were keen to identify with the 'Irish-speaking group'. They were less positive in relation to their desire and motivational intensity to learn Irish. The views of the pupils were divided in relation to issues such as motivation to learn Irish, studying other subjects through Irish, and having to speak Irish at all times in school. The author speculates that these factors may have had a bearing on the children's motivation to speak Irish accurately.

By and large the pupils in the present study who had strong or limited parental support for speaking Irish had positive attitudes to Irish, to speaking Irish, to reading in Irish and to attending an all-Irish school. One particularly striking finding was that, with the exception of one pupil, those pupils who had a strong connection with the Gaeltacht

were very favourably disposed towards speaking Irish, towards reading in Irish and towards attending an all-Irish school. However, pupils who had no home support for speaking Irish and one pupil who had strong parental support for speaking the language had quite negative attitudes to speaking Irish and to attending an all-Irish school, giving some cause for concern perhaps.

Motivation is a key factor influencing both rate and success of L2 acquisition and even overrides aptitude effects. L2 motivation and learner autonomy go hand in hand. Integrational orientation is a major factor motivating language learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Ó Baoill, 1999). Dörnyei (2009) argues that integrative orientation may not be fundamental to the motivational process, but has relevance only in specific sociocultural contexts. Therefore, he suggests integrativeness should be interrogated within the context in which the second language is learnt.

Integrational orientation has not been researched to any great extent within the Irish context (Ó Baoill, 1999). The same author suggests that most Irish language learners have no inclination to integrate in any real way with Gaeltacht communities. Many Gaeltacht communities are very small and located in remote areas far removed from large urban areas. Opportunities to visit the Gaeltacht for any considerable length of time are few and far between and may never occur for many Irish language learners. Besides, the vast majority of Gaeltacht people are very competent bilinguals. Therefore, any complicated communicative exchanges between learners and native speakers are likely to be in English (Ó Baoill, 1999). This is likely to be the case also for young language learners integrating with young native speakers (Hickey, 2001, 2007).

Dörnyei (2009: 25) suggests that integrativeness may be related ‘to some more basic *identification process* within the individual’s *self-concept*’ (italics in the original). Ushioda and Dörnyei (2009: 3) propose reframing the notion of integrativeness

‘as an internal process of identification within the person’s self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group’. Building on this concept Dörnyei (2009) reinterprets integrativeness as the ‘Ideal L2 Self’. Operating with this definition learners could be described as having an integrative disposition if their ‘Ideal L2 Self’, that is if the person they would like to become, is proficient in the L2. The lack of a developed ideal self in general or an Ideal L2 Self component of the ideal self is likely to result in a lack of motivation to learn the L2.

While Dörnyei (2009) argues that the ‘self approach’ may not be suitable for pre-secondary students, I find it very useful in making sense of the data from the pupil interviews. Sheila, Colm, Christopher, and Nancy had well developed L2 selves because speaking Irish outside school was part of their primary Discourse. Three of these children visited the Gaeltacht regularly. Colm’s comment that *“I go to Inis Oírr a lot because I like speaking Irish to people and they speak Irish back”* shows the importance to him of having his L2 Self affirmed by other Irish speakers. These children’s L2 selves were shaped in part by their integrative orientation with reference to the Gaeltacht community but not exclusively so.

In contrast Liam who had a very negative attitude to Irish lacked a well developed ‘Ideal L2 Self’ as is indicated by his lack of confidence in his own ability to speak the language: *“Sometimes I try to teach my brothers a few words, but I don’t really speak Irish that good”*. Poor self-efficacy can lead to demotivation (Dörnyei, 1998) and can adversely affect achievement (Baker, 2003). Other comments by the children relating to their superior competence in English and difficulties with inflections in Irish may be indicative of poorly developed L2 selves. It seems then that the ‘Ideal L2 Self’ concept as an internal process within the learner’s own self-concept might be a powerful concept for understanding children’s attitudes to Irish.

Identity investment and cognitive engagement are reciprocally related. The extent to which children are enabled to invest their identities fully in the process of learning propels their academic development (Cummins, 1996/2001). For most children in all-Irish schools their L2 linguistic identities are inseparable from their learner academic identities as the school is their only point of contact with the language. And ‘language itself has no function independent of the context in which it is used’ (Ó Baoill, 1999: 194-195). Children who lack a well developed L2 self may lack the motivation to invest themselves fully in learning the language and in learning through the language.

Children with well-developed L2 selves are likely to benefit greatly from classroom interactions that privilege the L2 during Irish storybook reading events, as was the case in Class B1. They have the cultural capital to derive most benefit from the events. Children who lack the necessary cultural capital are in danger of feeling alienated. But if their experiences as readers in L1 outside school are acknowledged and valued during L2 literacy events, as was the case in Class A and Class B2, they are more likely to invest their identities fully in the events. Thus a challenge for all-Irish schools might be to find ways of using the power of fiction during storybook reading events in L2 to invite children to inhabit the L2 in agentive ways as some of the children in Class A and Class B2 were beginning to do. This would be one important step in the process of helping children develop their ‘Ideal L2 Self’.

5.4.6 Contexts of Learning

The findings from the current study also contribute to our understanding of the interrelatedness of social spaces, participants and artefacts in shaping the learning context during literacy events. As Bang (2008) notes, school artefacts are not neutral and can have a negative functional value for the child. Some children rejected the school reading

material indicating that the cultural tools we deploy can be both restricting and empowering (Wertsch, 2000). Children's motivation to avail of affordances provided by the reading material prescribed by the school was related to the children's primary Discourse and their experiences with texts outside school.

In particular, the findings highlight the centrality of the teacher in shaping the social space of the classroom. The L2 literacy events were shaped by the local school norms insofar as these norms were filtered through teachers' convictions, motives and intentions. The teachers had much more agency than the children who were positioned in different ways in accordance with the teachers' intentions as evidenced in their instructional strategies. Through their instructional strategies the teachers were instrumental in establishing literacy practices which differed from class to class. In shaping the learning environment the teacher acts both as a social agent and as a 'representative of the specific cultural practice' (Bang, 2008: 129).

The evidence presented in Chapter 4 showed that children deployed a greater range of language functions than the teachers. Sometimes they deployed language learning strategies that were at variance with the teacher's instructional strategies. Children in Class A were also learning ways of interpreting texts from each other. This evidence supports Hedegaard's (2008b) portrayal of children's development as being dialectically related to the institutional practice. Through their activities the children were contributing to the literacy practices being established and to their own developmental conditions. Not only did children avail of affordances provided by the teacher and the text in different ways but they also created affordances for themselves and for their peers. And even though at times the children's leading motives conflicted with the teachers' intentions, the children's efforts and motives were aimed at successful participation in the literacy events. The teachers and the children were not merely reproducing the school Discourse. Rather, each

group functioned as a 'community of learners' (Brown, 1994; Brown and Campione, 1994) as the participants through their intentional interpersonal relations (Bang, 2008) constructed their own literacy practices and created their own versions of the school Discourse.

Findings also underscore Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development that foregrounds the influence of social interconnections on children's development in school and in particular, the nature of the links that exist between the microsystems of the school and the home. For example, positive attitudes to speaking Irish and to reading in Irish were closely related to parental support and social proximity to the Gaeltacht community, elements of the children's primary Discourse.

A complex picture emerges therefore, of the learning context for literacy events in all-Irish immersion schools as a dynamic, socially constructed environment where the social interconnections between children's microsystems of home and school, children's motivations to avail of affordances provided by the school reading material, and the intentional aspect of interpersonal relations in the classroom are all critical in shaping the learning environment for the children.

5.4.7 Professional Development of Teachers

The foregoing discussion highlights the centrality of the teacher in shaping the context for literacy events in all-Irish schools. Consequently, there are implications for initial teacher education (ITE) in the Republic of Ireland that could usefully be addressed, particularly in the context of the extension of the B.Ed. Programme from three to four years, as prescribed by the Teaching Council in its document *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (Teaching Council, 2011). Currently it is not possible for students to take the B.Ed. programme through the medium of Irish in

any College of Education in the Republic of Ireland. Such an option is available to B.Ed. students in Northern Ireland. Most ITE programmes in the Republic of Ireland offer short elective courses in immersion education thus enabling a small cohort of students each year to develop specialist knowledge as part of their preparation to teach in all-Irish and Gaeltacht schools. However, concerns have been expressed by groups with responsibilities in relation to Irish-medium education about the linguistic competence of teachers working in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools and the lack of suitable provision in ITE programmes to prepare teachers who will work in these complex sociolinguistic contexts (Mac Donnacha *et al.*, 2005; Máirtín, 2006; Ó Flatharta, 2007). With the advent of a new reconceptualised 4-year B.Ed. Programme now would be an opportune time for Colleges of Education in the Republic of Ireland to develop a B.Ed. Programme with a specialism in immersion education taking cognizance of some pertinent issues highlighted in the current study.

Immersion education is a highly complex endeavour and the sociolinguistic contexts of Irish-medium education are complex and varied. In particular, the analysis of literacy events in L1 and L2 in all-Irish schools presented in Chapter 4 highlighted the ecological complexity of these events where children draw on all their linguistic resources to interpret texts and where teachers deploy a variety of instructional strategies to develop a range of children's literacy skills.

In preparing teachers to work in Irish-medium schools it would be important for Colleges of Education to offer courses in linguistics, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, courses that are not currently available on B.Ed. programmes. Teachers in all-Irish schools will require opportunities to develop their subject matter knowledge, their pedagogical content knowledge and their curricular knowledge (Nic Eoin, forthcoming; Shulman, 1986). Teachers would benefit greatly from learning about

functions of language and from developing specialist knowledge and understanding of how children learn languages. The data presented in Chapter 4 indicated that sometimes teachers' instructional strategies were at variance with the children's preferred learning strategies. The children deployed a greater diversity of language functions than the teachers. Teachers will also require opportunities to observe, study and research the various sociolinguistic contexts of Irish-medium education. Evidence from the present study suggests that contexts vary from school to school depending on how teachers mediate the school immersion Discourse for their pupils. Children's language attitudes also varied considerably.

The evidence presented in this thesis shows that the literacy practices experienced by the participating children varied in accordance with the teachers' instructional approaches. It would be important for Colleges of Education to develop specialist courses on evidence-based best practices in literacy development in Irish-medium contexts, including sociocultural dimensions of literacy development. Teachers will need to learn about the likely impacts on children's learning of different instructional styles, and of the nature of the interactions teachers promote, as well as ways in which their implicit epistemological philosophies influence children's ways of taking from texts.

Analysis of pupil interviews revealed that attitudes, motivation and social proximity to the target community interfaced in complex ways in the development of children's L2 identities. Affective issues are equally important in shaping teacher identity, particularly in relation to language teaching (Nic Eoin, forthcoming). Bringing these issues to teachers' consciousness would help them understand better their pupils as L2 learners. Language, literacy, culture and identity are intertwined. Ó Baoill (1999) has argued previously for including the study and teaching of culture in ITE programmes. As part of their professional development teachers will need opportunities to develop a deeper

understanding of the L2 culture as lived by L1 speakers. Consequently they would benefit greatly from extended periods of study of Irish language and culture in Gaeltacht communities.

Overall new programmes should aim to develop creative, reflective, critical thinkers equipped to promote ‘inspirational pedagogy’ in all-Irish schools by ‘connecting personally and intellectually with students, activating their prior knowledge and affirming their linguistic talents and personal identities’ (Cummins, 2010: 64).

5.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

For a minority language to survive it has to produce new speakers through intergenerational transmission and through the education system. Where family language transmission is in decline, as is the case in Ireland, the onus to maintain numbers and densities of speakers will fall on bilingual education. But bilingual education by itself cannot ensure language maintenance. Children can become competent in two languages but they may not use the minority language much outside the school (Baker, 2003). The language register learned in bilingual education programmes can be very formal and may not prepare students adequately for language use outside school (Cummins, 2000). Language revitalization requires other institutional support systems if use of the minority language is to be extended to other walks of life (Baker, 2003).

To make an effective contribution to language maintenance bilingual education must demonstrate its effectiveness both as an educational approach and as an instrument of language maintenance. Bilingual education will also require research evidence demonstrating its underlying educational advantages (Baker, 2003). All-Irish schools are making a significant contribution to the political goals of language maintenance and

revitalization. They compare very favourably with Gaeltacht schools and ordinary schools in terms of learning outcomes in L1 and L2.

Bilingual education interacts with a myriad of other factors, including pupil, teacher, curriculum, and contextual variables, such as parental support for literacy development and children's sense of security and acceptance, in complex ways to influence pupil outcomes. Bilingual education can lead to biliteracy allowing for more possibilities in the uses of literacy and broadening choices for recreational reading as well as fostering deeper understandings of history, of heritage, and of traditions. Bilingual education can also be instrumental in establishing identity at local, regional and national levels. Sharing Irish identity 'is aided by the heritage language and culture being celebrated in the classroom' (Baker, 2003: 100).

The present research project represents a small-scale attempt to gather data on literacy practices in all-Irish schools to contribute to our understanding of literacy development within the complex enterprise of immersion education. Literacy events in L1 and L2 in all-Irish schools are ecologically complex. Pupil variables including the child's primary Discourse, previous experiences, funds of knowledge, level of parental support, attitudes, and the child's sense of 'Ideal L2 Self' interfaced in different ways with institutional variables such as the school immersion Discourse to shape the storybook reading events. Institutional factors were mediated by the teachers in different ways depending on their own motivations and convictions about best practice in language and literacy development as well as their epistemological philosophies. Teachers had more agency than the pupils and could choose where to position themselves in relation to the school immersion Discourse. Different teacher approaches to storybook reading, including didactic-regulatory, didactic-participatory, and dialogic-interactional styles, meant that the

pupils' agency varied depending on where along the continuum they were positioned and whether they were cast as consumers or connoisseurs of literacy.

It will be important for all-Irish schools to consider the balance they wish to achieve between the dual goals of promoting SLA through total immersion and developing young children's literacy skills including functional, interpretive, and critical literacy skills. Future research might explore in greater detail literacy practices in L1 and L2 in all-Irish schools and examine the effects of such practices on children's cognitive development and literacy development across a range of literacy skills with a view to developing models of best practice to inform initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD). The research methods deployed in the present study as well as the models identified in Section 5.4.3 might provide a useful starting point to inform future research.

A concerted effort between all-Irish schools and relevant state agencies will be required to develop a much greater range and diversity of genres of reading materials to promote more widespread recreational reading in Irish. Any initiatives need to be grounded in research into children's leisure reading habits in L1 and L2. Schools should also consider creative ways of harnessing parental support for children's leisure reading in Irish.

Practitioners and researchers working in Irish immersion contexts might now consider how they could reconceptualise the notion of immersion education to move beyond programme description and include a consideration of the language models children are immersed in. Research into the nature of teacher talk and classroom interactions in all-Irish schools across a range of activities will be required to examine the impacts of the immersion experiences on children's language and literacy development with a view to informing practice and developing models of best practice. It would be

important for such research results to be disseminated through ITE and CPD programmes. Findings from the current micro-ethnographic study could provide useful baseline data to guide future research projects.

In proposing a theoretical frame for the social study of childhood James *et al.* (1998: 201) have characterised agency and structure as a dichotomy which is ‘continuous in its lived experience’. Data analysis presented in Chapter 4 revealed that in each class the teachers and the children were co-constructing the literacy practices during literacy events in L1 and L2, and also co-constructing their own versions of the school immersion Discourse. I have characterised the instructional styles of the participating teachers as a continuum from didactic-regulatory to didactic-participatory to dialogic-interactive. The children had more agency the further along the continuum they were positioned and whether they were positioned as consumers or connoisseurs of literacy. As Hedegaard (2008a: 16) notes, different teachers provide different ‘conditions of learning’ for their pupils.

Children are social actors who shape and are shaped by their circumstances (James *et al.*, 1998). In literacy events the ‘leading motive’ (Hedegaard, 2008a: 20) for the child may not always coincide with the teacher’s intentions. Evidence presented in Chapter 4 showed that during the literacy events the children occasionally subverted the teachers’ attempts to regulate their language behaviour and used their L2 to mediate personal relationships with their peers and their teachers.

Data from pupil interviews revealed that children resisted the school requirement to speak Irish in the playground indicating that they can adopt different ‘modes of agency’ (James *et al.*, 1998) within the school. So while schools attempt ‘to shape particular educational identities for children’ (James *et al.*, 1998) schools do not determine who their

pupils are (Davies, 2006). The agency of both the teachers and the children is a ‘radically conditioned agency’ (Davies, 2006: 426).

One of the challenges facing all-Irish schools will be to examine critically their assumptions about learning, knowledge and childhood and consider young children’s agency in constructing interpretations of texts. All-Irish schools might also consider ways in which they could invite children to inhabit the L2 in agentive ways so that children are acquiring the school secondary immersion Discourse and not just learning superficial aspects of it.

The positive language learning outcomes reported from all-Irish schools may be posing difficulties for the long-term integrity of the language itself. The growth in Irish-medium education coupled with the decline in the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht is having a profound effect on the linguistic character of the language and on the cultural context in which it is embedded. Consequently, many elements and values associated with the dominant culture are infiltrating the Irish language context (Ó Baoill, 1999). The same author wonders how some of the salient cultural values integral to the Irish language itself might be preserved.

All of the teachers in the present study noted the importance of the Irish language as an integral part of children’s cultural heritage and identity. The teachers’ commitment to all-Irish education is evidence that their vision for the children and the potential role that Irish might have in the children’s lives goes well beyond any tokenistic ideal. ‘The codification of students’ existing experience in a foreign or, in our case a second language, is to enter a way of life, another mode of behaviour no matter how similar to the learner’s own situation it may appear’ (Ó Baoill, 1999: 191).

But what exactly is the nature of children’s experience in all-Irish immersion schools and how does it relate to native speaker culture? Ó Baoill (1999) argues that

communicative outcomes are more likely to be determined by the communicative structure of the L2 classroom than by the cultural background. Consequently, what is culturally transmitted within an all-Irish school is a cultural mix that is influenced strongly by the dominant English culture. Language learners need to see how cultural meanings embodied in the L2 are learnt by acquiring the language itself. The cultural meanings inherent in the L2 need to be brought to learners' consciousness. This will necessitate direct experience of the L2 culture as it is experienced by native speakers (Ó Baoill, 1999). The positive attitudes and experiences of the children in the present study who had strong connections with the Gaeltacht support Ó Baoill's (1999) argument. With support all-Irish schools could provide opportunities for pupils to interact with Gaeltacht peers through participating in age-appropriate Irish-medium activities which are embedded in the L2 culture.

'The mutability of identity construction is at the heart of the question of whether any pedagogy can create lasting change in the larger society' (Palmer, 2008: 115). All-Irish schools offer their pupils alternative academic discourses and, as Palmer (2008) suggests, there may be advantages to pushing students to take on scripts that may be uncomfortable at first. Eventually the students will leave the all-Irish participation frameworks in which they have learned to define themselves. Whether they will carry their alternative discourses with them may well depend on the degree to which they have been enabled to invest their identities in the acquisition of the school immersion Discourse. Ideally the scripts they would carry with them would include a deep understanding of the L2 culture to limit any erosion of the integrity of the Irish language. Perhaps therefore, the most important challenge for all-Irish schools will be to enable pupils to negotiate their L2 identities so that they will have a well-developed sense of their 'Ideal L2 Self'.

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