

Raising my Voice

Report of a Graffiti Pilot Project

July 2016

True to our philosophy of respecting authentic voice, we have not edited or corrected this very articulate student:

“Through all the weeks you were here you really helped us to make the right decision. You put us through tasks some easy some hard. You even helped us make a real life decision. Every week you made us do something fun. Thank you so much for helping us to raise our voice.”

This research report was compiled by the Raising my Voice team at Graffiti Theatre Company:

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VOICES

“1. Children and young people will have a voice in decisions made in their local area.

2. Children and young people will have a voice in decision-making in early-education, schools, and the wider formal and non-formal education systems.”

(DCYA, 2015, pg4)

I thought the Raising my Voice Project was fun. I enjoyed the activities because they were fun but helpful, and I learned that it is more important to be heard and seen than just seen. I also learned that there are many different kinds of decision-making skills like your gut feelings, pros and cons list and flip a coin and I thought nothing needs to be changed (in the project).

Child - School 5

They learned strategies for making a decision and have tried this out in normal everyday situations, e.g., the coin toss/ Pros and Cons/ Gut feeling, etc. From the point of view of the school it was a very worthwhile Project. What has come out of the process will most definitely influence the strategies which we put in place for the minding of Junior Infants next year. (The decision of the class in this school was linked with playground duties.)

Teacher – School 5

I would like to say that the boys in fifth class were privileged to have taken part in this project this year. I also feel that the teachers within primary schools benefit immensely from ‘outside’ professionals that come in and deliver well prepared lessons which the Raising my Voice Project did. Help with the Student Council would be beneficial for the school. (The decision of the class related to a Student Council.)

Principal – School 4

Key areas and Terms used in the *Raising my Voice* Report: A Glossary

The following terms are used throughout the *Raising my Voice* Report, and are explained here in the context of the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project.

Primary School Settings:

The *Raising my Voice* Project worked in partnership with six primary schools in Cork city, primarily with fifth class and one group of fifth and sixth class. The children were aged between ten and twelve years old. The primary schools follow the Primary Curriculum (1999). The *Raising my Voice* Project focused on three areas of the Curriculum: English, SPHE and Drama.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document, National Strategy On Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020, released in April 2015:

This document was released in April 2015 and highlights the strategies that are to be put in place to support the 'seldom-heard voice' (DCYA, 2015, pg4) and to develop children's decision-making strategies.

Practice-based Research (PbR)

Practice-based research uses practice as its primary tool to carry out an original investigation to gain new insights and knowledge. There are two types of practice-related research: *practice-based* and *practice-led*. The practice-based research can be informed by both the practice itself and the outcomes of that practice. This research methodology is used by practitioners such as teachers, artists and others. Practice-led research is concerned with the nature of the practice and leads to new knowledge that can have an impact on the operational significance for that practice.

(Description derived from: Candy, L. (2006) *Practice Based Research: A Guide* (2006) Creativity & Cognition Studios, University of Technology, Sydney.

Action Research

Action Research is a "... a form of on-the-job research, undertaken by people in any context, regardless of their status, position, age or previous experience.") (Mc Niff, 2013, 3Ed., pg 23) The people involved in the project are researchers and self-reflection and questioning forms the basis for the research. It follows a cyclical process of planning collaboratively, acting, documenting, reflecting and applying the sequence over a specific period of time.

Definition derived from: McNiff, J. (2013) *Action Research Principles and Practice*, 3rd Ed. Routledge, London and New York

Drama

Within the Primary Curriculum drama "... is a creative process that allows children to explore the full potential of drama as a learning experience. It is improvisational in nature and has as its aim a quest for knowledge that involves every aspect of the child's personality: spiritual, moral, emotional, intellectual and physical. In making this drama the child enters an imagined

context (the drama world), through enacting a fiction about characters in certain circumstances, at some particular time and in some particular situation, and **so can explore in a unique way conflicts, issues, consequences, attitudes, emotions, concerns and preoccupations that are important to the understanding of real life.**" (Available from: NCCA Primary School Curriculum, Drama Arts Education, Teacher Guidelines, 1999, pg 3.)

Voice

The National Strategy document outlines that "It is a key priority of this strategy **that seldom-heard children and young people are enabled to take part in decision-making.**" (DCYA, 2015, pg 12) Another important aspect of the National Strategy document is "... recognition that children and young people are not 'beings in becoming', but rather '**citizens of today**' with the right to be respected and heard in childhood, their teenage years and in their transition to adulthood." (DCYA, 2015, pg 12) Throughout the *Raising my Voice* Project the children are **encouraged and empowered to use their voice** through the use of a process-based drama approach and other active methodologies.

Decision-making:

It was the aim of this Project that the children should be encouraged, informed and enabled to make decisions that affect their lives within their schools, local communities and homes. In this Project the children were supported with a range of strategies to increase their understanding of a decision and how a decision can and could be made by them and within a group context.

Encounter:

It was decided to use the term Encounter during the *Raising my Voice* Project as a means of differentiating the meetings with the classes from a drama workshop. By naming the workshop an Encounter possibilities were opened for planning and delivering the different strategies with the classes and teachers. As the *Raising my Voice* Project is **linked across the Curriculum** the Encounters used Drama as the primary tool for engaging and enabling the children's voices. The title of Encounter allowed for a wider use of influences from the fields of Philosophy 4 Children, SPHE and English teaching methodologies.

Section One: Raising my Voice in Context

Many of the quieter boys felt safe in Raising my Voice because the encounters were very structured and had purpose.

Teacher – School 1

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1. Overview

Raising my Voice is a Practice-based Research (PbR) project based on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document, **National Strategy On Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020**, released in April 2015. The *Raising my Voice* Project is based on empowering children by giving them opportunities to use their voice and to be a valued part of decision-making which impacts on them as individuals and the wider community and society.

The project works in partnership with the Primary Curriculum, particularly Drama, English and SPHE, and with the **National Strategy On Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020**. Both of these documents highlight the value and importance of giving children and young people real opportunities to be heard and respected.

The *Raising my Voice* Project involves Graffiti Theatre Company and Graffiti Teaching Artists working in partnership with six primary schools with their principals, teachers and children over six months from January to June 2016. The *Raising my Voice* Project works with fifth class children and one group of mixed fifth and sixth class, their teachers and schools to support and enhance the development of decision-making tools and strategies and to empower children to use their voice.

It involves eight Encounters over the six months, working with each of the six schools every two weeks in their classroom or school hall. The Encounters take place over an extended period of time and this facilitates the development of trust, team-teaching, shared decision-making strategies and offer the opportunity to build a process-based drama approach with each class group and teacher.

The purpose of this document is to provide a report of the pilot phase of the *Raising my Voice* Project and to share and present the observations of the principals, teachers, children and Graffiti Teaching Artists. These observations are based on a Practice-based research approach which includes; a pre-meeting and workshop with the teachers, reflective journals from the children, planning, observations from the teachers and Graffiti Teaching Artists, practice, follow-up work and analysis over a six month period.

1.1.2 Background

The *Raising my Voice* Project developed from the reading and discussion of Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document, **National Strategy On Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020.**

Through analysing and working through the National Strategy document the team recognised the potential and possibilities in using drama as a key resource and tool to empower and support children and teachers in building on decision-making skills and using their voices.

A proposal including objectives from the National Strategy document and Curriculum links; English, SPHE and Drama was created for the funders. Graffiti Theatre Company consulted with six Principals in primary schools in Cork City and agreed the classes and teachers that would be involved in the Practice-based research pilot project.

Following this an Ethics review was developed with Graffiti Theatre Company. The funding application for the *Raising my Voice* Project was created after this.

1.1.3 Terms of Reference of the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project

- *Raising my Voice* will use the objectives and priorities as stated in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document to inform and guide the school Encounters.
- *Raising my Voice* will investigate how to support giving children a voice in decisions made in their local area.
- *Raising my Voice* will enhance the work being done in primary schools in Ireland to give children a voice in decision-making in their schools.
- *Raising my Voice* will focus on children aged ten to twelve years, in fifth class and one mixed fifth and sixth class.
- *Raising my Voice* will work in partnership and actively engage with the six primary schools in Cork City within the pilot phase.
- *Raising my Voice* will work to link Drama, English and SPHE Curriculum to develop children's voices and decision-making skills and strategies.

1.1.4 Guiding Principles of the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project

Raising my Voice is guided by this core principle:

Graffiti places young people at the core of our artistic work valuing the importance of their voice, respecting their needs and empowering their development. (See www.graffiti.ie)

The *Raising My Voice* Project will be facilitated by Graffiti Theatre Company with a particular focus on enabling the voice of the 'seldom heard' child (DCYA, 2015, pg4). The project aligns with the objectives and priorities as stated in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document to inform and guide the school Encounters.

We place a particular focus of the document objectives 1 and 2:

1. Children and young people will have a voice in decisions made in their local area.
2. Children and young people will have a voice in decision-making in early-education, schools, and the wider formal and non-formal education systems. (DCYA, 2015, pg4)

1.1.5 Partnership Structure

The *Raising my Voice* pilot partnership structure is comprised of:

- The Graffiti Theatre Company team, the Graffiti Teaching Artists from a Primary and Secondary Education and Drama and Theatre background;
- The fifth and sixth class children, seven teachers and six principals of the six participating primary school settings;
- The *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project Support Personnel in Graffiti Theatre Company;
- The Project Funders and their support personnel.

1.1.6 Research Objectives

The overall research aims of the project were developed in support of the Terms of Reference outlined above. The research objectives can be categorised as follows:

The aims of the project are:

- To empower the voice of children and young people through participative workshops/Encounters which encourage collaboration between the children and young people and their teachers, schools, families and their communities.
- To enable children to have informed opinions about their rights and roles in their communities by, for example, sharing information about the Rights of the Child.
- To encourage children to be active participants in society by giving them real opportunities for: analytical thinking, decision-making, listening, and questioning.
- To support and collaborate with teachers as they continue to empower children's voices

1.1.7 A brief outline of the Raising my Voice pilot project

Raising my Voice is a Practice-based Research (PbR) project involving the Graffiti team, Graffiti Teaching Artists, primary school teachers and fifth and sixth class children in Cork city. The initial idea for the project developed after reading the Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document, **National Strategy On Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020**.

The development phase of project took place in October to December 2015, and continued with planning for Encounters, delivering of Encounters, reflective observations, analysis and development of the project up to June 2016.

The Encounters for the *Raising my Voice* Project took place in the cleared classroom spaces or the school halls every two weeks from January to June 2016. The RmV project made links with the Primary Curriculum (1999) focusing on English, SPHE and Drama.

Each Encounter was based on a particular theme and and the Encounters were assessed and developed throughout the process. The final Encounter enabled the children, teachers, Principals and the Graffiti Teaching Artists to reflect on the whole process.

1:2 Procedures and Methodology

1.2.1 Collection of Data

A range of data collection methods were chosen in order to inform and further develop the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project. Observation and reflection formed the main part of data collection during the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project. During the pre-meeting with the teachers the Observation Sheet was discussed and suggestions were taken and adapted accordingly. A range of the data collections methods are outlined below:

- Graffiti Teaching Artists' planning, observations and reflections on the process;
- Seven teachers observations: Pre-meeting reflections, observations on the Encounters, post-Encounter reflections;
- Reflective journals by the children, posters and Encounter documents;
- Literature and web searches on decision-making skills, drama approaches and practice

These documentation and data collection procedures were established at the beginning of the Pilot Project and maintained throughout the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project.

1.2.2 Methodology

Raising my Voice is a Practice-based Research Project (PbR).

It is developed in response to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document, **National Strategy On Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020**.

The practice-based research approach aims to enrich and empower the practice of the participants involved through enabling their voices to be heard within the process and through the process.

The PbR project systematically collects data - observations and uses the Action-research methodology to plan, collaborate, act on and reflect on the process throughout the duration of the project.

This approach enables action, observation, reflection and facilitates analysis, documentation and evaluation.

Section Two: Observations and Outcomes

Also, I know we were speaking briefly about child C after the last session. I have noticed that although she is not particularly active in the sessions, I have seen a change in her in class. For example, if she had a question in class she would be inclined to come directly to myself or the SNA to ask, whereas now, she is beginning to put up her hand and ask in front of the class. It may seem a small step but it's something that she never did before so it's smiles all round.

Teacher, School 3

2.1 The *Raising my Voice* Project: An Outline

The *Raising my Voice* Project is a Practice-based Research (PbR) project involving Graffiti Theatre Company, Graffiti Theatre Artists, a funding body, seven teachers and six primary schools in Cork City.

In this section a more extensive outline of the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project will be provided.

2.1.1. Timescale of the *Raising my Voice* Project

The initial development of the project began in April 2015 after reading the **National Strategy On Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020** produced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in Ireland.

After discussions and reviewing the document an outline for the *Raising my Voice* Project was developed. This included an Ethics Review, research into the Primary Curriculum links with Drama, English and SPHE and discussions with school principals.

Commitment of funding enabled recruitment and planning in November 2015. Development and planning took place from November 2015 to January 2016, with ongoing planning and development throughout the project and process.

The pre-meeting with the teachers took place in December 2015 wherein the project was outlined and observation approaches were discussed and adapted following the consultation with the class teachers.

The Encounters took place every two weeks from January to June 2016, with dates being changed to suit the different primary schools and school calendar.

2.1.2.Pre-meeting with the teachers

A pre-meeting with the teachers was developed and held in December 2015 in Graffiti Theatre Company. The Graffiti Theatre Artists presented an outline of the Raising my Voice project to the teachers and explained the format the Encounters would take over the period of January to June 2016. This pre-meeting highlighted Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation as used in the DCYA document: "This checklist aims to help organisations, working with and for children and young people, to comply with **Article 12 of the UNCRC and ensure that children have the space to express their views, their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence.**" (DCYA, 2015, pg 22)

The importance and value of supporting and enabling children's voices to be heard and listened to especially in relation to decision-making and decisions-made was highlighted.

The teachers were encouraged to give feedback on the ways in which their schools were already supporting children in raising their voices and being heard and this information informed the planning and delivering of the Encounters.

The teachers also participated in a mini-version of an Encounter and discussed what activities might work with their classes and practical considerations (scheduling, space, schools practices) were discussed and agreed. This sharing of information and strategies enabled the team-teaching and shared approach for the Encounters to be established from the beginning of the *Raising my Voice* Project.

Dates for Encounters were discussed. As 2016 was the Centenary year the schools were very busy and this needed to be taken into account when planning dates for visits and the *Raising my Voice* project team needed to be flexible. The role of the teacher during the Encounters was discussed – the Graffiti Teaching Artists explained that learning objectives and a focus for each Encounter would be shared at the beginning of each Encounter after the initial song and clapping activity.

It was explained that the children would be using Drama as a the main methodology for accessing the different focus themes so at times they would be working-in-role, work in groups to create still images. The teacher too would work in-role and would be observing and team-teaching.

Graffiti Theatre Company/Raising my Voice

An active approach to discussions would be tried as much as possible – using walking debates and the space in the classroom and halls to support children in raising their voices. The Artists also drew the teachers' attention to the Observation Sheets that they would use in every Encounter. These observation sheets asked three key questions:

**How did the child engage with the group activities?
In what way did the child use their voice?
What types of activities did the children enjoy most? Why?**

The teachers were asked to choose three children as their focus group:
Child A - Actively speaks in class,
Child B - Speaks sometimes
Child C – Is quieter and speaks only occasionally in class.
The teachers' Observation Sheets would form a backbone of the project's analysis.

After the pre-meeting it was decided that each question should have a particular focus and be rated **1, 2, 3, 4, 5** for observations - for example **1 - participated a little, 5 - fully participated.** (See sample sheet in Appendices)

The teachers added in a focus on questioning for the second question - **In what way did the child use their voice?** (Asked clarifying questions/Asked complex questions?)

This collaboration with the teachers provided a good starting point for the team-teaching and nature of the *Raising my Voice* project wherein every voice was valued.

The pre-meeting also enabled a discussion about **links with the Curriculum**, the **Follow-up work** after each Encounter and provided an opportunity to discuss the **Reflective Journal** that the children would be completing during the *Raising my Voice* Project.

2.1.3 Roll-out of the programme into the primary school settings

The *Raising my Voice* Project was rolled out to the six primary schools in January 2016. The project worked with fifth class children and one group of mixed fifth and sixth class and their teachers and schools to support and enhance the development of decision-making tools and strategies and to empower children to use their voice. It was decided that the Encounters would take place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at a time that suited the different schools. The Encounters were completed in June 2016.

2.1.4 Description of the Encounters.

Each Encounter had a particular focus:

Name of the encounter	Theme
1. Think	Opening encounter - introducing the project
2. Let's start talking!	Communication
3. Know your rights	Rights of the Child
4. Let's ask questions!	Questioning
5. Voice your Rights	Rights of the Child II
6. Make a change	School focus - decision
7. Make a choice	Voting - choices
8. Reflection	Closing encounter - feedback

The first three Encounters were planned in advance of delivering the Encounters so that the Encounters had a clear focus and through line, but they were also open to change and development following an Action-based Research approach.

Encounters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were planned after completing the initial Encounters with the teachers and children and adapted using an Action-based research approach. Each Encounter was informed by the engagement and interaction of the children and teachers and tailored to suit the different class groups and settings.

Each Encounter **began with a ritual Introduction, Sharing the Learning Objectives, two to three Focus activities, a Reflection and a Closing activity**. To create a space and setting for the Encounters we used a song with a clapping rhythm and added clicks as the Encounters developed. We also had a Closing activity asking the children to let the words they had said and heard float away and to bring themselves back to the classroom. The children enjoyed this opening and closing to the Encounters as it set up the atmosphere before and de-rolled the children after each Encounter.

Graffiti Theatre Company/Raising my Voice

- Giving the Encounters a name and theme gave them a clear focus and objectives ensuring that the Encounters built on the skills achieved each week in order to support the children in making their decision in Encounter 7.
- The initial Encounter introduced the project to the class and used a die/cube with six key words based on the *Raising my Voice* Project that the children developed into still images.
- Then the Graffiti Teaching Artist explained why we were delivering the project and created a contract that all the children, the class teacher and the Graffiti Teaching Artists signed.
- The children then had opportunities to ask questions about the *Raising my Voice* project and the Graffiti Teaching Artist discussed how the project would use drama as a way of developing their voice and their decision-making skills.
- The making and signing of the contract for the *Raising my Voice* Project in the first Encounter formed a good basis and reference point for the teachers, children and the G.T.A.s.
- As the project developed the Encounters were adapted to focus on areas of interest of the children and teachers. For Encounter 7 each school had an Encounter tailored specifically to the decision they would be making with their class.
- The decision for Encounter 7 was discussed with the teacher and the Principal of the school and encouraged the children to implement the strategies and skills they had developed over the six month project.
- The process for deciding upon a decision with each school, teacher and class is an area that could be considered for the future development of the project. It may be useful to offer more suggestions for possible decisions at the beginning of the project and to have the possible decision be decided upon by the principals, teachers and classes by Encounter 3 or 4. This will be discussed further in Section Three: Discussion of Findings.
- The final Encounter 8 was a reflection on the process, this asked the children and the teachers to consider the process and what they had enjoyed, learned, would adapt, change or improve on the project. The children also completed their Reflective Journals about the process.
- A greater analysis of this reflection is available in Section Three: Discussion of Findings.

2.1.5 More detailed information on the Encounters

The Graffiti Teaching Artists created a programme of Encounters that focused on a particular theme and all supported the development of skills and strategies for developing decision making links with the DCYA 2015 document and Primary Curriculum 1999. The project used **Walking Debates, Drama games, In-role work, Still Images, Improvisation, Philosophy 4 Children and SPHE active- learning strategies** to create a safe and creative learning environment where children were encouraged to raise their voices.

- Each Encounter in the Primary School setting took approximately forty-five minutes to one hour on site, including arrival, set-up, introductions, opening activity with the children, the activities in whole groups, small groups, in-role work, de-roling, feedback with the group, observation sheet from the teachers, observation from the Graffiti Teaching Artists
- There were three Encounters each week, one Encounter in each of the six schools every two weeks. The Encounters took place from January to June 2016.
- The Graffiti Teaching Artists worked together to prepare in advance, create resources, plan Curriculum links, adapt the Encounters, email teachers and schools and write up observations on the project.
- In planning each Encounter the Graffiti Teaching Artists had a clear focus and objectives that build on previous Encounters and were based on the DCYA 2015 document. The Encounters were reflected upon and after each new Encounter feedback was analysed – looking at timings of activities, how best of work in small groups, what activities worked well, what needed to be changed. This enabled the Encounters to be tailored for the needs of each class group and space.
- The timetable for the Encounters was decided in advance with input from the teachers and schools about dates that suited best. Any change the school needed to make was facilitated and each Encounter was delivered and worked **in partnership with each school.**

2.1.6. Documentation

Graffiti Theatre Company/Raising my Voice

The *Raising my Voice* Project was documented using an **initial questionnaire** for the teachers about how the children were already using their voices, **observation sheets** by the teachers and Graffiti Teaching Artists, **Reflective Journals** by the children, a **final questionnaire** for the teachers and the Principals and a **final reflection** by the Graffiti Teaching Artists.

An example copy of each of the documentation sheets is available in the Appendices.

The documentation of the Project offered each participant a voice and an opportunity to be heard and informed how the *Raising my Voice* Project was developed and delivered. **This open and interactive exchange of ideas between the teachers, the Graffiti Teaching Artists and the classes enabled the children to have their voices heard.**

After each Encounter the Graffiti Teaching Artists **reflected** on the activities and the feedback from the teacher and class. This informed the structure and plan for the next Encounter. By being open and aware of how the process of developing in-action meant that a real partnership took place.

Because the teachers and the Graffiti Teaching Artists gave feedback and **reflected** immediately after each Encounter the Encounters could then be adapted, developed to suit the different class groups and teachers. It also meant that the Graffiti Teaching Artists could **respond** to the needs and areas of interest of the different groups.

This made the Encounters a safe and creative space where the teachers and their classes were encouraged to use and share their opinions and ideas about the various themes and topics being discussed.

2.2 Primary School Settings - An overview

2.2.1 Primary School Settings

There were six primary schools involved in the *Raising my Voice* Project. Graffiti Theatre Company choose to work with a diverse group of schools across Cork city: two all-boys schools, two all-girls schools and two mixed primary schools, one of which was a Gaelscoil.

In this section an overview of the participating primary schools will be provided to further illustrate the context for the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project.

The primary schools were selected based on **previous evidence of interest in the arts** and for their **willingness to participate fully** in the *Raising my Voice* project. The teachers from five of the schools attended a pre-meeting in Graffiti Theatre Company in December 2015 and a Graffiti Teaching Artist went to meet the teacher from the sixth school in her setting to discuss the project.

2.2.2 Criteria for Selection of the Primary Schools:

Criteria for the selection of the primary schools can be summarised as follows:

- Schools across Cork city
- Diversity of socio-economic contexts
- Range of approaches to education in terms of curricular bias, ethos or philosophy
- Willingness to participate over a six month period on the pilot project and undertake observations and for the teachers to team teach in the Encounters
- Willingness to engage in the research demands of the project
- An interest in supporting the children in their schools to develop decision-making skills and strategies
- Interest in using drama and theatre as a key resources and strategy within the curriculum

The six participating schools are described in the following section in terms which protect their individual identities.

2.2.3 An Outline Description of the Six Schools:

School 1: This school is based near the city centre. It is an all-boys school. This was a mixed fifth and sixth class group. The class really enjoyed engaging in Drama games and Working-in-Role. The Encounters took place in the school hall and one Encounter took place in the classroom.

School 2: This is an all-girls school based close to the city centre. This was a fifth class group. The girls in this group Particularly enjoyed working with Still Images and Working-in-role. The Encounters took place in the cleared classroom space.

School 3: This school is based outside the city centre, it is a mixed school with boys and girls. This class group particularly enjoyed Working-in-Role and the Town Meeting. The Encounters took place in the classroom which changed during the process as the class moved into a new building.

School 4: This school is in the centre of the city and it is an all-boys school. The group particularly enjoyed discussions using the Walking Debate, Working-in-Role and engaging in Drama games to learn. The final Encounter took place outside as this had been decided in the Contract for Encounter 1.

School 5: This is an all-girls school close to the city centre. This school had two smaller fifth class groups that collaborated for the Encounters. The two classes particularly enjoyed Working-in-Role and using Still Images. The Walking Debates with 'Agree, Disagree and Undecided' encouraged lots of discussions. The Encounters took place in the school hall and two Encounters took place in the classroom.

School 6: This is a Gaelscoil close to the city centre. It is a mixed school with boys and girls. The Encounters took place through the medium of English although the class are usually taught through Irish. The class particularly enjoyed Working-in-Role and the Walking Debates. The Encounters took place in the classroom space and the final Encounter took place in the school hall.

2.2.4 Education and the Curriculum

The project works in partnership with the Primary Curriculum 1999, particularly Drama, English and SPHE. Each Encounter was clearly linked across the Curriculum and focused on the Strands and Strand Units for each curricular area. Examples of the Curriculum links and plans for the Encounters are available in the Appendices of the report.

Each Encounter had learning objectives and was differentiated to ensure that all children could access the activities in the Encounters. **When working on activities which including reading text a visual aid was added where possible and key words and language were discussed prior to beginning different activities so that each child could access the learning.**

The Graffiti Teaching Artists and the teachers worked to support groups and it was clear after the first Encounter that **working in smaller groups for the activities enabled more talk from more children and more listening. It also created more opportunities for the 'seldom-heard voice' to be heard.**

Questioning and time for feedback and wait time after asking questions was allowed to ensure that each child had the opportunity to offer their ideas.

The Graffiti Teaching Artists led the Encounter and the class teachers observed and led some activities with the support of team teaching from the Graffiti Teaching Artists. Activities were also modelled for the teacher. In addition, some Encounters had two Graffiti Teaching Artists so that feedback could be given to the active Artist about timings and reflection on activities that worked well or that needed to be adapted.

2.2.3 Graffiti Teaching Artists in the schools

- The Graffiti Theatre team and the Graffiti Teaching Artists began the discussions for the *Raising my Voice* Project in September 2015. The Project developed from the **Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document, National Strategy On Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020**, released in April 2015.
- The Encounters were informed by this document and the Primary Curriculum 1999. The Graffiti Teaching Artists worked with the Graffiti Theatre Company team to create, plan and deliver eight Encounters.
- Each Encounter had a particular focus and two to three activities with **Drama as the active learning approach** and methodology for delivering the activities.
- The Graffiti Teaching Artists facilitated the Encounters in each of the schools and received **feedback** from the teachers and the children at the end of the Encounters.
- The Graffiti Teaching Artists planned the first three Encounters prior to beginning Encounter 1 and then adapted the Encounters throughout the process, building and changing the Encounter **activities to best support each class group in raising their voices and making decisions**.
- After each Encounter the Graffiti Teaching Artist wrote up a **reflective observation** and this informed the both the next Encounter with the class group and the planning and delivering of the Encounters for the other class groups in different schools.
- The Graffiti Teaching Artist collected the **observation sheet** from the teachers at the end of each Encounter and briefly discussed how the process was developing over time.
- The **participation and partnership** with the class teachers was an integral part of the *Raising my Voice* Project.

As the *Raising my Voice* Project took place over a six month period it enabled the teachers and classes to develop a **rappport** with the Teaching Artists and ensured that the Encounters were **tailored** to the needs and interests of each group and school.

2.2.4 Observations and reflections on the process

The opportunity for Graffiti Theatre Company and the Graffiti Teaching Artists to work with the six diverse primary schools, their Principals, teachers and classes to over a **six month period** was fundamental to the *Raising my Voice* project.

Rapport

The **timeframe** ensured that a rapport could be built up with the schools, the Principals, the teachers and the classes so that the children were enabled to use and raise their voices. The time frame of six months offered the Graffiti Teaching Artists a real opportunity to create a series of Encounters that built on each other and reflected the ideas and voices of the children in the six schools. Because of the timeframe the Graffiti Teaching Artists were able to learn from the teachers and the children in the different fifth and mixed fifth and sixth class and **to listen to their voices** and so offer the children tailored strategies and drama approaches that worked for the different classes.

Partnership

This approach to working over a longer period of time to deliver and facilitate Encounters similar to Drama workshops was a new approach for Graffiti Theatre Company and it offered the chance to share best practice for both the Graffiti Teaching Artists and the class teachers as both were working in partnership with each other. The *Raising my Voice* Encounters gave the teachers the chance to see **drama strategies** being used to develop **oral language and literacy**.

Drama

This **process-based** approach opened up the possibilities for using Drama across the curriculum and it highlighted the effectiveness of Drama for supporting children in sharing their ideas, especially in relation to SPHE and for the development of social skills.

Participation

Working with six different schools and seven teachers enabled the Graffiti Teaching Artists to work collaboratively with seven different people and to share their teaching styles and approaches. The teachers were open to sharing their classroom management strategies and to **participating** in the Encounters, **working with small groups**, **working in-role** and **observing** the three children (Child A - Actively speaks in class, Child B - Speaks sometimes and Child C - Quieter and speaks out only occasionally in class).

Investment

The teachers' openness and responsiveness to the *Raising my Voice* Project ensured that each Encounter was focused and fully supported. The interest and investment by the teachers, the Principals, the children and the Graffiti Theatre Company team and the Graffiti Teaching Artists allowed for the

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project to develop, to be adapted and to have **a possible future** in both primary and early secondary school.

Safety

The Graffiti Teaching Artists were challenged to create engaging, inclusive and exploratory Encounters over the six month period of the *Raising my Voice* Project. The project encouraged the Teaching Artists to explore how to develop **a safe environment** for active discussions – **how to support children in using and raising their voice**. Each Encounter needed to build on the previous Encounter; this needed to be researched and devised. The Encounters were planned, re-planned, reflected upon and facilitated. Then adapted to suit the different class groups.

“The delivery of the project, (i.e., one encounter per fortnight over a number of months) was non-intrusive. Curriculum links were very strong, and I felt that as the class teacher, I was still involved in all activities and very much participatory in the encounters.”

Teacher Reflection and Observation – End of Project, School 3, June, 2016

Pupils really enjoyed the safe environment that was created so that they could voice their opinions and they were listened to. Everyone’s opinion was valued. The class teacher enjoyed team teaching and the opportunity to learn from someone else in the class. The pupils really enjoyed the debating topics.’ Is it helpful, is it necessary, is it true?’ Are really helpful questions for the pupils to have before they make decisions’

Principal Reflection – End of Project, School 4, June 2016

The *Raising my Voice* Project was successful in:

- Creating and facilitating Encounters with six schools over a six month period that highlighted the value of giving further supporting the work already in place in schools on developing children's decision making skills and strategies.
- Working collaboratively and in partnership with the six schools and seven teachers and the children in their classes.
- Facilitating the Encounters using Drama as a key methodology.
- Using collaborative Action-based Research and observing and reflecting on the process.
- Raising the awareness among teachers of the value of a process-based approach to drama to give children opportunities to use and share their voices and opinions.
- Giving each school and each class an opportunity to make a real decision about the life of the school. This was either put into practice immediately or is in development for September 2016

A continuation of the *Raising my Voice* Project could provide children from Fourth class up to Sixth class (and possibly First Year in Secondary School) with **opportunities to develop their confidence** in using their voices and in **building skills and strategies for decision-making** for their lives now and in the future.

For the future of the *Raising my Voice* Project it would be essential to work again in **partnership** with the Principals, class teachers and the children in the classes and to share observations about the Encounters, about what is working well and areas that could be developed or adapted to best suit the needs of each class.

Ideas for the development of the project and for working in partnership with schools to build on the present *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project are proposed in Section Four.

Section 3: Discussion of Findings

3.1 Framework for Exploration of Outcomes

The framework for discussing and exploring the *Raising my Voice* Project uses (i) the Terms of Reference of the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project and (ii) the Guiding Principles of the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project, outlined in Section One.

(i) Terms of Reference of the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project (a reminder)

- *Raising my Voice* will use the objectives and priorities as stated in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs National Strategy document to inform and guide the school Encounters.
- *Raising my Voice* will investigate how to support giving children a voice in decisions made in their local area.
- *Raising my Voice* will enhance the work being done in primary schools in Ireland to give children a voice in decision-making in their schools.
- *Raising my Voice* will focus on children aged ten to twelve years, in fifth class and one mixed fifth and sixth class.
- *Raising my Voice* will work in partnership and actively engage with the six primary schools in Cork City within the pilot phase.
- *Raising my Voice* will work to link Drama, English and SPHE Curriculum to develop children's voices and decision-making skills and strategies.

Practice-based Research Methodology

- To analyse the effectiveness of the *Raising my Voice* Encounters programme in supporting children in developing their decision making skills and strategies and in using their voices.
- To observe if the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project encourages children to develop decision-making skills, decision-making strategies, builds confidence, enables the seldom heard voice, encourages communication and highlights the value of drama in developing social skills.
- To identify the opportunities and any obstacles for developing the *Raising my Voice* project in the next academic year (2016 – 17)
- To assess the feasibility of continuing the *Raising my Voice* Project considering funding and support

3.1.2 Practice

This section of the report looks at the Practice parts of the Research Objectives. The observations in this section are taken from:

- (1) The Teachers' Observations after the Encounters;
- (2) The Teacher Questionnaire at the end of the Project;
- (3) The Graffiti Teaching Artists' observations on the Encounters;
- (4) The end of the project reflection from a G.T.A.
- (5) Quotations from the Children's Reflective Journals

Note: Several quotations from these reflective practice observations have been used throughout the report.

The first part of this section tracks one school throughout the project using the voices of the children, the class teacher and the Teaching Artists.

Encounter 1:

The **teacher** observed that: Child A participated a little in group activities – ticked 2, Child B participated at 3, Child C participated at 3.

The **teacher** notes, "V. Unexpected! Many spoke who I didn't think would. My Child A was very reserved. Child C felt safe."

Graffiti Teaching Artist observation notes: "The children were very engaged with all of the activities, refer to the contract – "thumbs up" – circle. (Check) Time for activities – ensure time for feedback on games/activities – closing worked well."

Child: "I liked the activity (*Would you rather?*), good to see how some people respond quickly and how they make decisions."

Encounter 2:

Teacher: Child A – 4, Child B – 5, Child C – 1. Teacher notes, “ Child B v. Comfortable today – thoughtful answers. Child C – lacked confidence – (Not sure why). Different dynamic today with return of one child.

Graffiti Teaching Artist observation notes: “Try to include small group/pairs activity – or opportunity for pairs discussion – during end of w/s. Teacher made a great classroom link – “Gates of Speech” – maths – “Is it true, helpful, necessary?” Lovely to bring the encounter back to a familiar experience for the class. Overall lots of engagement – Walking debate. I would adapt the Status activity – T – “clearer objective” perhaps freeze during the activity – discuss how we are communicating – gestures, eye contact – listening – awareness of other people.”

Encounter 3:

Teacher: Child A – 2, Child B - , Child C 1. “ Not many opportunities to ask questions, mostly giving answers. Restless today. Apologies.”

Graffiti Teaching Artist observation notes, “Overall the group were invested in the activities about the Rights of the Child. Try a “Talking Object” for group discussion. Discuss: How can we enjoy the Encounter today? Look at the contract – focus on circle, thumbs up. How can we support each other with our listening? More opportunities for asking questions – Who, What, When Where, Why, How – talking hand. It would be interesting to meet with the teachers after Encounter 3 or 4 to discuss how it is going – share feedback and give ideas – what is going well, areas to develop.”

Encounter 4:

Teacher: Child A – 5, Child B – 5, Child C – 4. “ Child A – Good opportunity to talk about own opinion (School activity), Child B – Choices exercise – opportunity to discuss, Child C – School A/B – smaller groups.

Graffiti Teaching Artist observation notes, “ ...a very engaging, positive and informed reaction to the encounter. Lots of contributions and interesting ideas about how we make decisions. More children are choosing to speak – especially during small group work. Develop strategies – decisions. Offer opportunities for groups to ask questions – How can this be developed? Maybe Encounter 5 – small groups – question the short film – hotseating to ask questions – Drama activities with questioning. Add “Would you rather?” requested by the group.”

Encounter 5:

Teacher: Child A – 3, Child B – 5, Child C – 4. “Freeze frame discussion, Child C – the film – less talking).”

Graffiti Teaching Artist observation notes, “Beginning to ask more questions, keep up the small groups – develop more opportunities for discussion and feedback in small groups – use the skills – questioning. The short film – fun – good discussion about choices and consequences of our actions.

Child “It’s good to work in that way” - Still Image Choices and move activity – “It’s good to see that people choose different things. It’s interesting.”

Encounter 6:

Teacher: Child A – 5, Child B – 5, Child C – 5. “They were very engaged throughout. Debate is very attractive!! Role play worked really well.”

Graffiti Teaching Artist observation notes, “The children enjoyed working in role as characters. Liked imagined/fictional scenario because they could “be someone else – think in a different way – have a job” Some children felt it was difficult to work in role as the Local Residents – didn’t have a specific choice – they had more choices and decisions. Discussed how it was tricky when more choices were offered or if you didn’t believe in – Wind Turbines – difficult – values and feelings.”

Encounter 7:

Teacher: Child A – 5, Child B – 4, Child C – 2. “Child A has become more comfortable in recent weeks. Child C withdrawn today – not sure why.”

Graffiti Teaching Artist observation notes, “Overall the group were very engaged and passionate about sharing their ideas – asked questions, listened well – some reminders – good response. Enjoyed the discussion – “Like talking about their feelings” “Making a proper decision”, “Finding out what other people think”.

Encounter 8

Child: *Thank you (Graffiti Teaching Artists) and all the other helpers that were with us though all the weeks you were here you really helped us to make the right decision. You put us through tasks some easy some hard. You even helped us to make a real life decision. Every week you made us do something fun. Thank you so much for helping us to raise our voice.*

3.2.1 The engagement of the children

The observations from the Teaching Artists, the teachers and the children and the Principals illustrate that overall the children, teachers and Principals responded very well to the *Raising my Voice* Pilot Project. The children were engaged and reflected that they had been supported in developing their decision-making skills and strategies throughout the process. The children noted the use of drama approaches that supported them in using their voices and in sharing their ideas and opinions.

Listening to the Voices:

Heard and Seen

Child – School 5 – “ I thought the *Raising my Voice* project was fun. I enjoyed the activities because they were fun but helpful, and I learned that it is important to be heard and seen than just seen. I also learned that there are many different kinds of decision making skills like your gut feelings, pros and cons list and flip a coin and I thought nothing needs to be changed.” (in the project).

Sharing opinions

Teacher – School 3 – “The children particularly enjoyed the ‘Walking Debate’ activities. I think these activities encouraged all children to share their opinions, which was helpful in encouraging quieter children to express their opinion in a way that was safe and comfortable for them. With time, these children could be encouraged to use their voices more often. The use of still images and work-in-role was also very helpful in encouraging the children to use their voices.”

Feeling safe

Teacher – School 1 – “ Many of the quieter boys felt safe in *Raising my Voice*, because the encounters were very structured and had purpose.”

Confidence

Teacher – School 3 – “This is definitely as worthwhile project to participate in. It would help to develop a child’s confidence and make them feel more self-assured and comfortable in using their voices. I notices that one child in particular, who prior to participating in the project was very reluctant to use her voice, as the project progressed, she began to use her voice in simple way in the classroom, for example, asking to go to the bathroom.”

Valuing everyone’s voice

Principal – School 4 – “ Pupils really enjoyed the safe environment that was created so that they could voice their opinions and they were listened to. Everyone’s opinion was valued. The class teacher enjoyed team teaching and the opportunity to learn from someone else in the class. The pupils really enjoyed debating topics. Is it helpful, is it necessary, is it true? Are all helpful questions for the pupils to have before they make decisions.”

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Decision-making

Child – School 3 – “ I enjoyed the decision-making. It will be very useful for when we’re older.”

Child – School 2 – “ My favourite game was ‘would you rather’ because you get to make your own decisions.”

Logic

Child – School 6 – “I learned how to think logically and not to vote for my friends all the time.”

Opinion

Child – School 6 – “ I learned alot about debating team work, making decision for yourself and your own opinion. It was alot of fun too!”

Strategies

Teacher – School 5 – “They learned strategies for making a decision and have tried this out in normal everyday situations, e.g., The coin toss / Pros and Cons/Gut feeling, etc. From the point of view of the school it was a very worthwhile Project. What has come out of the process will most definitely influence the strategies which we put in place for minding of Junior Infants next year. Thank you.” (The decision by this school was linked with playground duties)

Support and Comfort

Teacher – School 1 – “ The role-play (division into groups) of making a real-life decision was v. effective (Town meeting). Group discussion allowed for support and comfort in speaking out.

Questions

Principal – School 4 – “The pupils really enjoyed debating topics. Is it helpful, is it necessary, is it true? Are all helpful questions for the pupils to have before they make decisions.”

Clarity

Teacher – School 3 – “ {Name of G.T.A} was always extremely well prepared for these sessions. The content was laid out very clearly and, as a class teacher, I feel that I can confidently stand over the work that was completed in the encounters.”

Skills

Principal – School 4 – “The skills taught to the children during the Raising my Voice Project were invaluable. Having a programe for pupils in 3rd – 6th would teach pupils & teachers new skills that would benefit the school. I’m considering putting in a Student Council for the pupils so that they can contribute more in the vision for the school.”

Preparation

Principal – School 4 – “ I would like to say that the boys in fifth class were privileged to have taken part in this project this year. I also feel that teachers within primary schools benefit immensely from “outside” professionals that

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come in and deliver well prepared lessons, which the Raising my Voice Project did. Help with the Student Council would be beneficial for the School.”

Section 4: Conclusion

4.1 A Statement from Graffiti Theatre Company

At Graffiti, we have always placed the child or young person at the very centre of all the work we do. Their opinion, their development, their creativity and their needs matter to us, and affect our programming and planning at every stage. *Raising my Voice* was, therefore, a project which honoured that centrality and sought to develop and encourage, to empower and to inspire. As such, we believe it was resoundingly successful for the participants.

Listening to their voices, respecting them and working with their teachers over six months has been an extraordinarily rewarding process for us, and one we believe has true value for all of the participants and partners. This kind of initiative can engender real and positive change. It must be supported and nurtured when possible.

Here at Graffiti Theatre Company, we sincerely hope to be able to facilitate further successes if *Raising my Voice* is supported, developed and grown in the future.

Do you remember the boy who hid under the table and behind the blackboard. We were back in his school today (fifth encounter) and we have adjusted the workshops to increase small-group work in order to separate the dominating voices. In the teacher's feedback today - and as observed by the facilitator – he notes about this boy, 'He offered an opinion for the first time without any prompting'.

Graffiti Teaching Artist

There is a definite shift in confidence in the class regarding giving opinions and debates. All very positive.

Teacher, School 1.

The skills taught to the children during the Raising my Voice Project were invaluable. Having a programme for pupils in 3rd to 6th would teach pupils and teachers new skills that would benefit the school. I'm considering putting in a Student Council for the pupils so that they can contribute more in the vision of the school.

Principal, School 4.

I enjoyed it because I loved the decision making, drama, rights of the child and team work. I really hope we can do something like this again. Thank you.

Child, School 2.

4.2 Proposals for the Future

Graffiti Theatre Company feel that this is a very valuable programme of work and intend:

- To assess the continuation of the project;
- To identify opportunities for developing the project with fourth, fifth and sixth class;
- To develop the *Raising my Voice* project in collaboration with teachers.

Section Five: Appendices

Graffiti Theatre Company/Raising my Voice

Introduction: Introduce the Graffiti Teaching Artists (G.T.A.s) to the fifth class group. Explain a little bit about the Raising my Voice project.

Starter: Begin in a circle with the whole group, class teacher and Graffiti Teaching Artists (G.T.A.s). Introduce a rhythm using clapping (Dum, dum, dah, dah song).

Creating the contract: (Pairs activity) Ask the person beside you what three things they think we need to enjoy the encounters. Model: what do we mean by: listening, respect, kind words, fun. Teacher to note the children's ideas. Share back with the group. Sign the contract once agreed with the group. *Ask children to think about when they choose to speak or not speak in a group. During the encounters try considering how and when you use your voice.*

Play the Stop/Go game: (Whole group activity) Explain that the children move around the space. When the facilitator says "Stop!" they freeze. When the facilitator says, "Go!" they move around the space again. Swap around, when the facilitator says, "Go!" the group stop, when the facilitator says "Stop!" the group move. Move back into a circle. The teacher to lead for two rounds of the game.

Cube - Key words: Share the learning objectives for the encounter. Roll the dice - key words: Voice, Communication, Respect, Decision, Opinion, Trust. Ask the group to think about each word, what do these words mean? Work in Talk Partners (pairs/threes) in the circle. Feedback ideas to the whole group, GTA and the teacher to note ideas about a word around the poster to be used for the still image work. Key questions: Think about the five w's and how – who, what, when, where, why, how? Support questioning

Still Images: (Small group work) Children work in six groups – five children in each group to create a still image to show what is meant by each word. GTAs and teacher to model still image example to explain. Feedback on each still image – model how to give feedback – two things that you liked about how the group showed what the word meant, one piece of advice to make it even better.

Play a game of "Would you rather?" – Use the John Burningham text as a starting point. (Whole group) Ask the children to gather in the middle of the space. Call out an example, "Would you rather lunch with a crocodile or to fly in a hot-air balloon with a snake? Go to this side of the space if you would rather lunch with a crocodile – pointing to the left, this side if you would rather fly in a hot-air balloon with a snake. Think about which you would rather and why. The teacher to call out two statements and ask for reasons why, supported by the G.T.A.s. **Mini discussion about this game:** What was it like to make those decisions? How did it feel to have to give a reason for your choices?

Closing activity: "All the children in fifth class thought about how they used their voice during the encounter today, they remembered the activities they had tried and decided they would think about how they use their voices every day. They took a gentle deep breath and breathed out and thought about moving calmly and carefully back into their classrooms.

They let all the words they had discuss float over them."

Appendix 2: Sample of Follow-up Work

Raising my Voice

Follow-up work

Encounter 4 – Decision-making

You can choose to try one or more of the follow-up activities:

Follow-up work: Developing decision-making strategies

Activity 1:

- Ask the children to write their responses to the activities from Encounter 4 - Decision-making in their reflective journals.

Activity 2:

- How do you make decisions? What strategies do you use? Why? Discuss with the class - create a class approach for decision-making.

Activity 3:

- Create a collage to show how we make decisions - what key ideas need to be included? Why?

*** Begin to think about the decision the school and the children would like to work towards making during Encounter 6 and 7.**

Appendix 3: Teacher Reflection and Observation – Case Studies

Raising my Voice: Reflection and Observation
Case studies:

How did the child engage with the group activities?

	Participated 1-5	Observed Yes/No	Listened Yes/No	Spoke 1-5
Child A	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3 4 5
Child B	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3 4 5
Child C	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3 4 5

(1 = very little, 5 = lots)

Any notes on the above?

In what way did the child use their voice?

	Asked clarifying questions	Asked complex questions	Spoke in groups 1-5	Spoke in pairs 1-5	Listened (but did not speak)
Child A			1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
Child B			1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
Child C			1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	

(1 = very little, 5 = lots)

Any notes on the above?

What types of activities did the children enjoy most? Why?

Child A:

Child B:

Child C:

Other observations:

Appendix 4: Graffiti Teaching Artist – Facilitator Reflection and Observation

Encounter number:

School:

Date:

Facilitator reflection sheet:

Raising my Voice: Reflection and Observation

How did the children engage with the group activities? *What activities went well? What activities would you adapt/ develop?*

In what way did the children use their voice? *Consider the types of questions asked, group work, pairs work.*

What types of activities did the children enjoy most? Why?

Ideas for the next encounter: