



STER Podcast

Season 1, Episode 3

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SPEAKERS

Dr Aimie Brennan, Lorna Sheehy

Aimie 00:04

Welcome to this STER podcast, a student staff partnership project that supports education students to share their dissertation research with the wider community. In this podcast series student researchers will have the opportunity to discuss their research findings, to reflect on their own personal research journey, and to impart some advice for future students researchers. The STER team hope to promote a culture of research and initial teacher education across all sectors by encouraging current students and recent graduates to engage in dialogue and to consider the significance of their research for practice. We hope that you'll enjoy our conversations and learn more about the kinds of research being conducted by students across the country.

Aimie 00:54

This is the first part of a two part episode, where we're joined by Lorna Sheehy, a primary school teacher and graduate of the professional masters of education, Mary Immaculate College, she talks to us about her research exploring teachers attitudes to collaborative and cooperative learning. You're very welcome.

Lorna 01:15

Thank you so much. Thank you for having me.

Aimie 01:17

Can you start us off by just telling us a little bit about yourself, Lorna.

Lorna 01:20

So my name is Lorna Sheehy, I completed the Liberal Arts degree in Mary Immaculate College straight after my leaving cert in 2013 until 2017. And I studied Gaelige and history and TEFL it was my elective teaching English as a foreign language. Then I completed the Professional Masters in Education

programme in Mary I 2017, or 2019 and I was absolutely thrilled to get it because I always wanted to do teaching. And when I finished in May, I began substitute teaching in a school and I've secured a job in that school, beginning the end of August, and I'll be teaching junior and senior infants and I will be completing Droichead the teacher induction program.

Aimie 01:55

Brilliant! So why did you want to you say you always knew you want to be teacher? Why was that?

Aimie 01:59

I had probably fantastic memories from my own primary school. I was in a country school, really small school, and everyone kind of knew each other. And I actually fabulous teachers the whole way up. And when I was younger, I used to be playing school and my brother who hated school the creature, so I used to be there, and I'd be teaching him during the summer. Why are you doing this to me like? It's my holidays as well. So yeah, I always loved kids. I was lucky that like my aunt always had small kids was all while I was minding kids and things like that. No, I just had a grá for it. I think like a lot of people that I chat to, you always just kind of know that that's what you want to do. Yeah, so that was kind of it.

Aimie 02:32

So you got into you, you went the back door?

Aimie 02:35

And it's actually we were just talking, the leaving cert results are out today. And it's so weird because, a lot of people will probably be really disappointed. But you know, if they didn't get their first choice, but I mean, I'm just proof that like, if you want it hard enough that you will get it. And it was very hard. I mean, there was four years of a course. And there was lots of placements. And you kind of had to work that bit extra hard in order to get into the Masters because it's quite difficult. You have to do an interview through English one through Irish, and it's quite grueling, but it was they were really, really nice in the interview, and they gave you every opportunity to show all the work hard work that you had done. So um, so yeah, so like I got in, I was very lucky. But I also worked really hard as well. But if you want it enough, you will get it I think in the end. Yeah. And what's for you wont pass you.

Aimie 03:19

As part of the PME programme, then you did a dissertation, which you had to start then in your first year, and worked on it then throughout.

Aimie 03:29

Yeah, up until the end. Yeah, that was the last thing to be submitted. Now, I was lucky in my undergrad year. I actually did a dissertation also. And I did it in TEFL. So I was doing, what parents and teachers thought of gaelscoils because I did my I did my third year off campus placement in a gaelscoil. And again, I want to do a bit of education, research in education, considering I was going to be doing I was hoping to do the PME at that stage. So that gave me kind of a good background into the likes of getting ethical clearance. And then just what a literature review was and all that so then when I started in the post-grad, I kind of knew some of the lingo of how to do a dissertation. And then yeah, so then I we started with the research modules now so it was fantastic. Yeah, okay. Yeah.

Aimie 04:11

So you kind of had an idea then before you came in was, what the research was about, or at least what steps were involved that you were gonna have to do. Yeah, exactly. Do you remember it's probably a while then since you first came to research just out of my own interests? I'm always I'm always interested in how students approach the dissertation initially, like what actually like what were your initial concerns? What were you looking forward to?

Aimie 04:34

Yeah, so I suppose my concerns were okay, what topic will I choose? That was kind of okay will there be information? will I get participants to actually want to partake in interviews because I mean, teachers are busy as well. And so yeah, those were kind of some of my concerns. But then I was, of course excited for the moment when you get a dissertation and it's all printed. You're like, oh my god, I wrote that. And you know, I was able to write some people into the acknowledgments and showing them that and submitting it that was exciting. And I thought it was quite nice and Mary I because you work in a group. So you have a supervisor, and then you have your group. So I actually became really close with my group mates because we probably had stressful Facebook messages of what's the supervisor looking for? Have you got this done? What? How many words is your is your lit review? All those? So it's actually really nice, it was a real bonding session as well. It was nice to be in a group and things like that. But yeah, I suppose I was worried, though of or will it be really difficult because it's at a master's level now. And I was thinking of you know, when you see people doing their thesis for their PhD? Is it going to be something like that, because it's masters. But thankfully, it wasn't as tough as it thought it was going to be, it was actually rewarding. I learned an awful lot,

Aimie 05:42

Good. So tell us a little bit then about your actual research. What was your research question? Why did you choose it? What were you hoping to achieve?

Aimie 05:49

So my research question was teachers attitudes to using collaborative and cooperative learning in the Irish primary classroom. So it kind of began like when we were in our lectures, the lecturers were always saying to us, like, Okay, try to incorporate active learning methodologies try to incorporate some collaborative and cooperative learning. So and it seems that when you did these things on placements, the inspector was very happy with you. And so obviously, then everyone wanted to get their kids up and get them active and working groups. And then we were learning about Vygotsky and Piaget's theories of like kids work well when they work together. So it was really like encouraged. So then I was like, like, Why? Why is group work? So such like, a great thing? And what are the benefits and what do teachers think of it. And then I read into, I was actually recommended by one of my friends to read the Chief Inspector report by Harold Hislop¹² and the Growing up in Ireland study³. And when I read them, I discovered that collaborative and cooperative learning isn't really implemented as much as it should be, considering it's an underlying principle of the 1999 primary school curriculum. So then I was kind of like okay that could be my research question if it's recommended, and if it's told us to use these methodologies, then why aren't they being used? Why what to teach? Why aren't they being used in some classrooms? Why? What is the problem with them? Why don't teachers use them to the extent

¹ Department of Education. 2020. Chief Inspectors Report January 2013 – December 2016. Available from: <https://assets.gov.ie/25245/9c5fb2e84a714d1fb6d7ec7ed0a099f1.pdf>

² Department of Education. 2020. Chief Inspectors Report September 2016-December 2020. Available from: <https://assets.gov.ie/219402/d70032eb-efdf-4320-9932-7f818341afe6.pdf>

³ Growing up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children. <https://www.growingup.ie/>

they should be? So what are the attitudes to them? So that was kind of my research question. And then I want to discover I suppose, like, is there any maybe like, factors you could take into consideration? Is it the likes of if the teacher, is newly qualified, they're more inclined to use the collaborative and cooperative learning is it if the class size is too big, or if it's a multi-grade school? Do the teachers not want to use it because it's not enough time, the resources available, and all of those kinds of things, so I just I found, I also found there was an awful lot of information on it, because it's really topical and because our lecturers were always talking about using collaborative and co-operative learning. So I was like, you know, that's what I'll go with and then I was like, I wanted my own teaching to be really active. I like it. I like that those are my memories of primary school, or when I was completing group projects with my friends, or classmates, or if I was completing groups, science experiments, things like that. So I was like, okay, that's what I want my teaching to be, ill research it a bit more and see if I can learn a few things to maybe.

Aimie 06:08

Yeah, that's interesting, because you were just talking about being in the dissertation group.

Lorna 08:00

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I guess I must work better in a group.

Aimie 08:04

So you're talking about collaborative learning and cooperative learning? Now, you're saying collaborative and cooperative, is a difference between the two? What is the difference do you think?

Lorna 08:12

Yeah there is a pretty huge difference. It's both kids working in groups, but collaborative is more so if you're all working on like a project together, and you're on like your tablet, and you're looking up stuff whereas cooperative can be something like, if you're working, maybe doing your spelling test together, and you're not kind of finding out stuff. Whereas in collaborative, you're discovering new information, you're piecing it all together, everybody might have a job, whereas cooperative could be in a Maths group, you'll be cooperating by putting 10 grams or something together. So collaborative is more so piecing information together and finding out things like creating a project together having your specific role.

Aimie 08:49

And just the size of the group matter. I mean, does it work as well in pairs as it does in groups of three or four?

Lorna 08:54

That was something interesting that I actually discovered from research and one of the participants told me that a group of three seems to be the ideal group. So yeah, so I thought that was really interesting. Now they say like you know, maybe bigger groups can work better if it was a bigger project. So they could all have maybe one role each. For example, if you're doing something like France, you'd have one person research in history, one person researching the food. So then you know, there's a lot more components, but she told me that a group of three seem to be in the ideal group she said that worked really well for her when she had them in groups of three. Yeah. Which I find interesting.

Aimie 09:23

Yeah, as I would wonder. When you were saying there that you read, you started off with Harold Hislop's report. And you were interested in the fact that it was recommended. Can you remember what that report talks about or what it said or the reasons why it's recommended?

Aimie 09:38

So it was the Chief Inspector report, yeah, so the reasons as to why collaborative and cooperative learning are recommended. So apparently, kids work better when they work in groups. As I said, it's kind of rooted in Vygotsky's theory. And they also peer tutoring is like is huge also, it's a form of collaborative and cooperative learning. So they say that you work the best when you're learning from a peer. So for example, if you were coming in teaching me about something I learned, (well, maybe not you because you're my research lecturer), maybe if my friend was coming in and she was telling me teaching me about something, I might learn it better from her than I would from maybe a more authoritative figure because you're maybe that little bit under pressure that you must understand it then. Whereas, I can ask my friend kind of any question that I want to you know but maybe feeling that I'm stupid or whatever, which is, obviously no child is it meant to feel that in the classroom but, it's just recommended that it's better kind of from a coming from a friend. It That's why even I found one of my results was that it seemed to work really well in a multi-grade classroom, the participants are interested in were teaching in the multi-grade school, because they were using peer tutoring a lot. So maybe the sixth class are teaching the fifth class fractions, because the sixth class had done it previously, in fifth class, they had a better grip on it. So the teacher found that bringing them together, they learned the fifth class are a lot better rather than her standing at the top of the classroom saying, right, this is fractions. They learned better when they were doing it together.

Aimie 10:57

Okay, so actually, I'm going to skip forward. So we come back to your methodology, because just as I have you there, when you're talking about peer tutoring, like that scenario, if you're a teacher in a classroom, you have fifth class and you have six class, how do you ensure that the sixth class understand it well enough that they are able to teach the fifth class or vice versa? How do you know like, what did the teachers talk to you about? Were they confident that they knew the sixth class, were going to be able to tutor their peers?

Lorna 11:23

Yeah, no, I completely get that. She kind of she told me that like it would have, they would have to know, like, she would not get them to teach something that they weren't sure of. So for example, there could be many topics in Maths and she know from when they were in fifth class, okay, they had a really good grip on 2D and 3D shapes. So then she was like, I would get them then to teach them that. But she said, she did make that rule to me that if I thought that a child wasn't maybe that strong, I might pair them up maybe with a stronger ability, sixth class child then the two sixth class children, might teach the fifth class child. So she was saying, it's all about kind of the mixed ability, we wanted each child to feel included, because she said it did give the sixth class a bit of confidence in themselves that they were teaching a child, but she did say that she'd always have a strong child, there would always be a strong child within the group. So that she'd know then that they were definitely consolidating the knowledge. But it is something and that's something I was concerned with that I did have a concern about before I teach collaborative in our use collaborative and cooperative learning methodology. What about if I was walking around the classroom and the children were going off topic, and it asked the teachers about that and they said that they would teach the rules of group work before they would do any collaborative, cooperative learning. And she said that that was really important. Because otherwise,

if you can't rock into classrooms, and say right, we're going to collaborate and cooperate learning everyone in their groups, because it'd just be chaos. She said, there, you'd have to motivate children before they would even know that they're going to be working groups, she was like, you'd have to teach them background knowledge of the topic that they were going to be working on. You'd have to do your you'd have to teach them the rules of group work. Because one person can't be over dominant, everyone should be allowed to participate, give everybody a role, she said was a great idea. Because then there's an it's reducing the conflict, because you could have the maybe fair, the child who likes to take control, compared with the child who might be kind of quiet. So she thought it that was she thought at the role, giving them a role was a good idea. She also said that creating groups is very, it's a difficult enough task, because you have to make sure that there's mixed ability in the groups, and that the personalities, there's no point in putting children into group who, you know, clash, or they still get on because that's just life, kids aren't always going to be the best friends. So she was like, make sure that you put a lot of thought into groups before you actually group the children just so that it'll be even more successful, when you actually get them to collaborate.

Aimie 11:23

So, there's quite a few kind of practical considerations before you start.

Lorna 11:23

And that's something that really stood out to me, because when I went substitute teaching, those things are in the back of your mind before it. Whereas if I hadn't done this dissertation, I probably would have rocked on and said, right guys into our group. So without this kind of prior knowledge, so in that sense, I think it's really benefited me.

Aimie 13:56

And so when you were kind of thinking about, obviously, you're talking there about your participants and what they are telling you how they do it. But are there practical resources? Like how did you find books or readings or case studies that you were able to say, Okay, this is how it worked before, this is how it works in this context? I'll learn about that, like, Are there any places that teachers can go now to find out more about it?

Lorna 14:18

Yeah. So I actually thought it was really interesting. So Ireland is actually really ahead in terms of its planning for collaborative and cooperative learning. And I only discovered this when I started doing this dissertation, there's a European initiative called Co-lab⁴. And basically, it's Ireland and a certain number of other EU countries. It's about five of them. I know there's Belgium, Estonia. And it's actually really interesting, because they were doing case study how they want to teachers and students alike, to become more collaborative in their work. And they said that Ireland was actually really ahead in terms of planning for collaborative and cooperative learning, Ireland, and I think Portugal. So I actually found that really interesting. So then when I was doing the research on it, it kind of showed like teachers opinions and maybe teacher feedback, and they actually did workshops. teachers know how to educate them how to use collaborative and collaborative learning more so in the classroom. So I actually thought that was a fantastic initiative. And I was surprised that it wasn't more widely known about. And yeah, it just it didn't like it took me a while to come across is when I started researching collaborative and cooperative learning whereas I thought the minute you'd write collaborative learning in Ireland into

⁴Valente, L. (2018) Co-Lab Guidelines for Assessing Collaborative Learning in the Classroom. Erasmus Project. Available from: https://ncca.ie/media/3446/colab_guidelinesforassessingcollaborativelearning_2018_pub.pdf

Google, it would come up, whereas you had to do a little bit of digging, but it's on the Department of Education website.

Aimie 15:22

And that that provides resources in case studies and readings.

Lorna 15:26

Yeah, it kind of gives teachers feedback on like, what the workshops that were done and why teachers might not feel confident and how they could feel more confident. And using collaborative learning in the classroom. Yes, it was quite interesting. Yeah. And actually, it was great for my lit review.

Aimie 15:43

exactly like, where did you go? But that seems like it's a good start and gives you pointers for other places that you could look.

Lorna 15:49

Yeah, exactly. No it really was because it did have like bibliographies, and things like that. But no, I did find it was really was a really topical, I didn't have to look too hard for readings, there was a lot of others, even our lectures or lectures had readings up about collaborative and corporate learning, like for example in SEN, we had a whole lecture on just on using collaborative cooperative learning with children with SEN. So that really, a lot of my readings did overlap, and I was able to use them for assignments. So I was very lucky.

STER 16:26

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Aimie 16:41

So go back then and tell us how did you approach it? So in terms of methodology in terms of your participants, how did you go about doing the research?

Lorna 16:49

So we had our first meeting with our supervisor, and we were kind of chatting to him about what ideas we might like to use, what methodologies so I had used, in my dissertation my undergrad, questionnaires, and I had used interviewed. So it's kind of like ooh I'd like to use that approach again. I thought questionnaires were quite easy to analyse. So then we were just chatting. And he was like, because your question seems to be kind of more qualitative, he was like, I go with semi-structured interviews. And he kind of gave the same feedback to my group mates as well. So I went with semi structured interviews, and I was actually really happy I did, because there was a lot of times I'd ask a question. And then the teacher gave me something, give me back information. And I'm like, Oh, tell me more about that. Now. So it was it was it was a fantastic methodology, I thought. So I was really happy that it kind of gave me the freedom then to ask. And if I thought something was more interesting, I was able to probe that a bit more. So semi structured interviews, and then I use convenience sampling. So I went to my local primary school where I was going to be going on placement, because I actually found during that time, we were quite busy with college. But if I was to go back again, I think I would went to a different school, because I would be afraid that the teachers would have given me the answers that I thought I wanted to hear. But they were fantastic. And it like I did get feedback of from one of the

teachers who say she was the teacher of infants, and she was retiring the following year. And she did give me kind of her negative thoughts about collaborative and cooperative learning do you know it was just this fantastic methodology. It's tough with infants. The infants aren't as independent. She was telling me all that. And I actually did see that in the literature as well, that infants are quite off to use collaborative and cooperative learning with because even from second class upwards, they are able to work away by themselves. They don't need the teacher kind of helping know by looking into the mode. They don't need feedback every couple of minutes or the teacher walking around. So yeah, definitely with infants she thought it was tough, but I liked that. I liked having a bit of the conflicting views on it. I thought it was quite and again and I thought it gave the dissertation a bit of a whole more rounded look.

Aimie 17:20

Absolutely because nothing is ever straightforward. Exactly. Yeah. And different context. But now, so the participants that you actually had, were all from the same school, were they?

Lorna 18:56

Yeah they were so either teacher who was retiring to follow your I had the SEN teacher was completing Droichead. And then I had two other participants as well. But they were all teaching in multi-grade context. So I was wondering, even did that affect it, if I could do it again. Now, I didn't time I was quite restricted by time because I had given my supervisor this idea will I do multi-grade and will I do single grade and compare the two and he said he wouldn't have enough the word count, he said you would go way over and which I almost did with just the multi-grade. But if I was to go back again, if I had more time, I would have liked to have seen if single grade teachers agree with the multi-grade or does multi-grade give a conflicting view.

Aimie 19:34

One for the PhD. So how many participants do you have altogether four?

Lorna 19:54

four Yeah, I didn't have the principal. She was out at the time and I would have liked to have seen her views because she would have been doing, obviously the policies and things like that in the schools or would have been interesting to see.

Aimie 20:07

All right. So, you have talked a little bit about what you found out. What do you think was the most important finding for you?

Lorna 20:15

The factors to take into consideration, I thought that was quite there, to be honest, was actually quite a good few. I was like, well, the infants definitely finding collaborative and cooperative learning challenging with them. I was like, that's something I can definitely take, especially considering that I'm going to be teaching infants in September. And I was kind of that participant, she didn't use Aistear in the classroom. And she was retiring next year. So I was kind of wondering if I done it in another school, would it have been the same outcome? But again, that's just the way that research is. But I so I was kind of saying, Okay, what, how could you make it easier for infants, she kind of did give me a few tips. But she did have Junior infants and senior infants. And I taught them on placement. And there is a huge difference between the two of them. You had your junior infants who were drawing it drawing and they were tracing where a senior infants were able to write the news straight from the board they so in that

sense, maybe it is quite difficult in a multi-grade context, context to use collaborative and cooperative learning with infants. Maybe if you just had Junior infants, collaborative and cooperative learning might be easier to implement in the classroom.

Aimie 21:17

So in when you start in September, now, are you going to have multi grade?

Lorna 21:23

yeah, multi grade. Yeah. So there was, there was kind of a leftover of junior and senior infants, we made one multi-grade classroom. But again, I did kind of, from the research from second class upwards, I do feel now that I could implement some of what I learned into the junior and senior infant classroom. So I think if you have to go into the mindset of it's going to work. I'm going to make it work. I'll have to make tweaks, make adjustments, but I will, I will make it work.

Aimie 21:45

And is there any plan? Do you like you're saying, Okay, I think I can Yeah, in some way trying and include it? Yeah, do you have an idea in your head for an activity or for something?

Lorna 21:54

So I, I, as I was saying, I that Aistear was implemented in the school, but we were kind of strongly recommended to implement play when we went to a teacher practice why she did that. And I actually was surprised at how well the kids talk to Aistear, I got them working in their groups. So they were doing the likes of playing with the sand. They were doing their small world with the animals. And I explained to them, I was like, okay, guys are going to work in your groups. This is how we work in groups, we have to share, we have to be kind, we can't take all the animals and we, we have to take turns and things and it actually worked really, really well. So I think like if you go in teach them the rules, explained to them that look this, if we play well, we'll get to play every day. If we don't play well, we won't get as much time. So and I think they took to us like fish to water. They were amazing. And even I was kind of nervous with the likes of I had to push back tables. So the tables were usually in rows. And then I had to block the tables. So that was kind of a stressful thing. Get it and then you let the kids go out of the classroom for a few minutes. While me and the SNA and the class teacher ran around frantically moving desks and things like that. But they were so good. Because they knew they enjoy doing the play. And they knew that if they were really quiet, they were good that they were going to get to do the play. Okay, yeah. So yeah, I found and like that is a form of collaborative and cooperative learning Aistear⁵. So Yeah. Yeah, it is it is. So I found that, again, you have to kind of go in with a positive mindset, you have to have your bit of research on as to how it will work. And we I think you can, if you it's all about the attitude. And I think more newly qualified teachers, that's what the research says, are more inclined to implement the collaborative and cooperative learning, not not saying that the more experienced ones aren't. But they just seem to they probably weren't taught it as much in when they were doing their initial teacher education than we were, there seem to be a huge emphasis on it. And that was something that came up with in one of the interviews, the teacher did say that, yeah, it was more so whole class teaching, and that you can see the like whole class teaching is a lot easier at times, because you don't have to be getting them into groups. You don't have to be moving

⁵ NCCA. 2009. Aistear: The Early Years Curriculum Framework. Dublin, NCCA. Available from: https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/484bcc30-28cf-4b24-90c8-502a868bb53a/Aistear-Principles-and-Themes_EN.pdf

around the classroom, I can see why teachers would choose at times, but the benefits for the students are huge.

Aimie 23:54

Okay, yeah. And do you like when you're when you're actually spending when you're when you're planning activities? Do you think the amount of time you dedicate to collaborative and cooperative learning has an impact on how effective it is? Like, yeah, you know, if it was infants and senior infants, we'll say, Do you think that having a time limit or, you know, the amount of time that you dedicate to it makes a difference? Like, would you be worried about dedicating a lot of time to cooperative learning

Lorna 24:20

I remember in one of the articles that I read, for the literature review, it said that you collaborative and cooperative learning can feature for a short time in a lesson, and you know it can simplify the benefits, but obviously, the longer you spend on it, the more benefits it will bring to the students but I mean, it doesn't mean that every single lesson you do has to be there has to be collaborative and cooperative learning you can only have a five minute introduction and a five minute conclusion. That's not true. And I think whole class teaching is it still is important. I mean, you can't the kids need the teacher like you can't go in and just expect all the kids are going to peer tutor themselves. You still need to teach and things like that. But I think that you know maybe for some lessons, like for example, the teacher was telling me for likes of geography. She might work at a geography project for a few weeks now could be collaborative and cooperative learning within those geography lessons more so collaborative, because they might be doing maybe lesson, but then she was a for history, then you might use your whole class teaching. And that's okay. Because I mean, they're still getting the benefits of collaborative and cooperative learning, you might maybe get a small amount of collaborative and cooperative learning in the history lesson, but you might be doing a little bit of whole class teaching as well. That's what I think. And I think that does work. Because otherwise, I think, you know, the whole day will be spent with kids chatting, and they'll get bored of it. Because I mean, if they're working in their groups for too long, and the same group they are going, it's like anything, you have to kind of keep things moving. Yeah, I think yeah,

Aimie 25:34

As you say, they still need the teacher. Yeah, they do. In order for one group to be able to tutor another group, they obviously have to understand it themselves first.

Lorna 25:41

Exactly, yeah.

Aimie 25:43

Did you find it beneficial for your own teaching? Like, what as you were doing it as you were talking to your participants? As you were doing the interviews? Were you thinking mostly about your own practice?

Lorna 25:56

Yeah oh 100%. And I actually got so many even Tips from Teachers like for example, I said about the teacher saying have three in group, I would never, like I we were told we were told that by our lecturers but even hearing from a teacher, it just feel that gets even more so like, oh, so I can see that now. And we, I found out more about maybe the groupings, so make sure, but again, we were talking about that

in college well, but mixed ability groupings, but there was a lot of things that she told me how she uses it for Irish. And so she you know Irish language speaking, the kids are a bit more nervous, where if you know ask the student , raise your hand now and cad is ainm duit? however, they're that bit more nervous to say in front of the whole class. Whereas in front in an intimate grouping, the shy children, way more comfortable than speaking out in class. So you can see them participate a lot more when they're when they're in the smaller group? Definitely. Because sometimes children know the answer, if you pose it to the whole class, but they might not be as inclined to put up their hand and say it, because you know, they might not be as confident. Whereas when it's in a group of four or five, it's a lot easier to say it than when you're in a group of 30 kids.

Aimie 27:00

Yeah. which makes perfect sense, particularly for language teaching.

Lorna 27:05

Yeah, 100%

Aimie 27:06

And did you find that because you obviously did your research on TEFL before? Do you think there was some overlap in the research that you had done? Or at least did you have any interest at that point?

Lorna 27:17

A little bit, I suppose. But I once I started collaborative and cooperative learning, I looked back to my own time in primary school. And as I was saying, it was all a lot of the memories I have are the group work. So the projects that we did like projects in third class in ancient Rome, doing science experiments, small science experiments in groups, doing station teaching, a lot of my memories are actually from group work. And from doing collaborative and cooperative learning, which I found interesting. It definitely does stick in your mind a lot more. And they all of our lecturers said that was like, especially to the SESE lectures, they're all about the active learning, they really, really, really drive collaborative and cooperative learning because they say that, and it does stick and you do learn a lot more. I mean, and oftentimes as well, you might have a group and children could there could be one child who might be really math-sy that their child you really like into English, but then it's nice for like the SESE to have a child who would be really interested in the SESE to you know to bring up those qualities as well. I think it definitely brings out a lot of skills in kids as well. Yeah, I do. Because you have your organization, you have, you know, your communication, your presentation, because a lot of times when you're doing the collaborative and cooperative learning, if they're doing a presentation afterwards, they will have to get up they'll have to present it to the class, that you're getting them more confident. Definitely. That was something that came huge actually teachers that it really improved their confidence. There were even one teacher mentioned how they were going to each other's houses after school, working on projects going to library in our near our neighboring town and everything. So yeah.

Aimie 28:50

So you talked a little bit about the fact that in college, you got some lectures on or at least one definite lecture on SEN, and how you could be inclusive in your collaborative and cooperative learning. Did you experience that at all yourself? Or did any of the teachers talk to you about how to best includes all students?

Lorna 29:10

Yeah. Yeah, two teachers mentioned collaborative and cooperative learning a positive way for kids with SEN. They had children with a SEN in their classroom. So they had a child with autism. And they had a child autism and a child with Down syndrome in one classroom. And I actually had that class in teaching practice as well, and I actually did see how the kids had come on. So she was kind of saying to give them a role that might not put them maybe under too much pressure. So for example, and you might give them the Materials Manager, so they have to come up and they've to say get the materials and be in charge of materials, rather than the group leader, and that would suit the child perfectly. Again, it all depends on the child's ability, and that's one of the other participants said she kind of thought it might be in a negative way of including children SEN that it might put maybe too much pressure on them. But she said again, though, it does depend then the, the need of the child. So for that if the child if you feel like the child is capable, 100% include them. But if you feel that it might maybe put the child under pressure, maybe slowly integrate and have the SNA at the table with them and but again, try and do the best thing for the child and try always, I think definitely try inclusion Anyways, if you can. That's the number one thing to go to. You could even do maybe like the social stories with the children with SEN to kind of get them even used to working in a group or maybe when they're being withdrawn from the classroom, if they're doing resource hours, maybe then work even on group work. I know in the school I was in, they used to take maybe one or two children out from the classroom, and get the child with SEN to learn how to even collaborate, cooperate in a group. But again, yeah, I did. I actually thought that was really interesting. So it will be quite interested in SEN.

Aimie 30:48

Actually what you're what the participants are setting you really is that it's all about preparation, whether you're thinking about inclusion, whether you're thinking about the amount of time you dedicate, or what class group you have, whether it's multi-grade or whole class, it's all about the preparation beforehand.

Lorna 31:03

And I didn't think that beforehand, before that was something I learned. I was like, I thought you'd kind of go in and you'll be like, Okay, this is my lesson, right so guys into your groups. It's not like that you, the more time you spend prepping it, the better it'll go. And I've seen it even on my own teaching practice, because my first pass/fail when I was doing, I was doing value. So I was doing 10s and units and blocks were just everywhere. Crazy Crazy. But then you could see from my second teaching practice, it just I had it organized to a T it went way better, it just flows better, you're more confident in yourself. And I think the kids can see the confidence in you when you feel I feel when you feel prepared, that you will come across as more confident and the kids can get the kind of they can feel the confidence I feel they're not as inclined to mess or anything like that.

Aimie 31:49

Do you think that the teachers you spoke to who were actually implementing collaborative and cooperative learning? Do you think that they were confident in doing it? Or was it something that caused them slight bit of anxiety?

Lorna 32:01

Oh, no, there was no anxiety there? 100% confidence? Yeah. And I've seen them both teaching. I was observing one of them for as part of my teaching practice. And she was just one of those teachers that you sit back and you're like, yep, that's who I want to be. That is That is who I want to be. She was really good, really confident. And she really, she really drove the kids. She really liked when they were doing group work. They wanted to not that they were competitive with each other, but they wanted to do

their best. Yeah. And she even said that she was like, it's almost like competition, but not in the negative light. Because we've kind of been told to create more of a cooperative classroom than a competitive one. But I found that when they were working together, they just didn't want to do their best. And I thought that was really interesting.

Aimie 32:43

Did you discover anything that surprised you?

Lorna 32:46

The infant, the fact that it was challenging for infants, surprised me implementing collaborative and cooperative learning for infants surprised me and I did. I was kind of wondering, okay, maybe was it just the teachers opinion, but there was research there to say that it is more challenging. And at that stage, I had maybe done substitute teaching a few times to infants, but I hadn't had my own stint with a with infant classes, what was then what I was doing. When I when I was starting off with the Aistear there was those kind of junior with the kids after five minutes, not having interest, but they'd be fighting with each other wanting to have that color paint or whatever. But it was, when I took time to really kind of prepare myself and even explain to the kids, look, this is what we're going to be doing. You'll all get a turn at each station. I think sometimes we actually underestimate our junior infants like they're really good at they are caring, and I think if they're explained to and if they understand, I think eliminates so many problems. Yeah. So I think with the collaborative and cooperative learning, it did surprise me that is challenging for infants, but it's possible.

Aimie 33:45

Did you learn anything about yourself as a teacher by doing your research?

Lorna 33:49

Yeah, I learned that I actually think that I would have been quite scared to implement collaborative and cooperative learning. And that came across in I think, was it my microteaching session. I had a lecturer. And she was fantastic. She was brilliant. And she just, she actually gave all of us feedback. After first one, she was like trying to do more active learning methodology. So collaborative and cooperative learning, she would have said, and you know, at that stage, it was micro teaching. So we were all nervous. We were like, Oh, I can't believe I have to get my classmates to match things and stuff like that. But it actually it gave me quite a good bit of confidence. And even after my first teaching practice, compared with my second one, because I had done a bit of research, obviously, in between because we started doing the lit review then I learned that yeah, I would have been nervously implemented. But and but now I'm definitely a lot more confident with it. But again, I think like the more experienced you are, the easier the likes of collaborative and cooperative learning will become and the more familiar you are with the class, the easier it is to pick up because it is hard going into teaching practice, and getting these kids to collaborate. As I said, it's important to get their aptitudes and their personalities whereas when you go in after two days, you don't know the kids as well as you would if you had done for the whole year. So I definitely think experience does stand to you, but yeah I did notice I have become a lot more confident. And I do think I am a teacher who is really into active learning. Like I know I love having the classroom up like, sometimes like when they're working amongst themselves or whatever I'm here to kind of like, so guys and I kind of want to get them talking and things like that. So I definitely learned that I'm that kind of teacher.

STER 35:20

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