DOCTORAL THESIS

Art history in an infant primary school
an intervention in the curriculum

Pitfield Worsley, Laura

Award date:
2011

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton
CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLEMENTING THE ISEE STRATEGY

5.0 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Five, I present the actions and reflection and evaluation undertaken in Cycle Two. The aim of this cycle was to test out and evaluate the ISEE in nine research lessons. The first section consists of a description, reflection and evaluation of the ISEE. I begin by outlining the aims of the cycle, details of participants and their roles and a timetable of actions. Kvale (1996:163) warns researchers about de-contextualising data and therefore I have chosen to report each lesson together with the associated reflection and evaluation.

The second section provides a summary of the observation team’s comments on the setting, pace, pupil behaviour and resources. This is followed by the action team’s final reflection and evaluation of the cycle and my reflections on the actions, ISEE and selection of artworks. It concludes with a list of team recommendations for the next cycle of action.

5.1 CYCLE TWO

5.1.1 Aims

The main aim of Cycle Two was to test out and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the ISEE when it was translated into practice. Another aim was for the team to reflect on the actions to make improvements or amendments for the next cycle.

5.1.2 Timetable

Cycle Two took place between 8 January and 27 March, 2007. The research lessons were taught according to a pre-planned timetable, together with team meetings organised for the purposes of reflection on and evaluating actions on a regular basis. There were two exceptions when meetings were cancelled at short notice and this meant the reflection and evaluation of Lessons Two and Three and Lessons Four and Five were combined. Table 15 shows the scheduled lessons and meetings undertaken in this cycle.

Table 15: Timetable of Cycle Two actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIMING</th>
<th>RESEARCH LESSON</th>
<th>ARTWORK</th>
<th>TEACHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson One</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception</td>
<td>12 January, 1:00</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>How did pupils make meaning?</td>
<td>Tropical Storm: Surprise!</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year One</td>
<td>12 January 1:45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Two</td>
<td>12 January 2:30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team meeting</td>
<td>15 January</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.3 Participants

5.1.3.1 Action team

The action team included the same four classroom teachers, headteacher and researcher from Cycle One. The teachers taught the nine lesson unit\(^1\) (see Table 9, pages 92-93) to each of their classes over nine weeks. On one occasion, the headteacher taught one lesson (Lesson Nine) to Year Two. As a member of the action team during this cycle, my own role varied and included observation of each of the 27 research lessons, attending and coordinating reflection and evaluation meetings, supplying resources and collecting, coding,

\(^1\) With slight amendments related to age range capabilities
interpreting and storing the data. I also offered to support the teachers with their subject knowledge about art and artists. Following the final formative evaluation at the end of the cycle, I carried out a reflection on the actions, ISEE, methodology and artworks.

5.1.3.2 Observation team

Although I observed the research lessons I was not a recognised member of the observation team. This consisted of three teaching assistants (TAs) who observed the lessons in their own classrooms. On three occasions a TA was unable to attend and I was the sole observer. On two other occasions, a TA was joined by either the headteacher (Year One lesson 22/2/07) or a school governor (Reception lesson 7/3/07). The TAs agreed to provide comments about the setting, resources and pupil behaviour on the observation record forms as discussed on page 121.

5.1.3.3 Pupils

Pupils in all three classes (Reception, Year One and Year Two) participated in the nine lessons taught once a week, as part of their regular timetable.

5.1.3.4 Others

On three occasions there were other adult visitors in the classrooms during lessons, including a Special Educational Needs (SEN) County Co-ordinator (Year One), three visiting headteachers observing classroom practice (in Years One and Year Two) and a Graduate Teacher in Training (Year One). Their comments were anecdotal and oral feedback was given to the action team via the headteacher.

5.1.4 Details of actions

The actions in Cycle Two centred on teaching, observing, reflecting on and evaluating the ISEE in research lessons. In this cycle, the teachers’ roles alternated between leading learning, modelling behaviour of looking carefully at paintings, guiding and prompting pupils’ interpretations by posing ISEE questions and informing them about artists and artworks.

Lesson One was intended to be diagnostic so the team could observe and identify the strategies pupils used to explain a painting prior to introducing the ISEE. Lessons Two to Four introduced the three step strategy (one step per lesson). The remaining five lessons
(Five to Nine) were intended to embed the ISEE through repeated, hands-on practice in lesson activities. In Lessons Six, Eight and Nine, pupils explored the paintings and artists by considering historical, social and/or cultural contexts using the ISEE strategy in lesson activities and prepared worksheets. In all, the ISEE strategy was taught, observed, recorded, reflected on and evaluated in 27 class lessons.

Data collected from observer and teacher record forms (see Appendices 1 and 15) and transcripts from lessons (see Appendix 30) were reflected on and analysed on a regular basis in team meetings and later by me in a separate reflection. Seven formative team reflection and evaluation meetings were carried out in Cycle Two and recommendations were made for the next and final cycle. I continued to carry out my own reflections on actions and findings from team meetings, observer and teacher record forms, transcripts from research lessons and my reflective journal. Patterns arising from the data of research lessons and team meetings continued to be coded and categorised on an ongoing basis. Figure 5.1 shows the two ongoing strands of action taking place in Cycle Two.

**Fig. 5.1 Cycle Two: Two strands of action research**

RL = Research Lesson  R & E = Reflection and evaluation meeting
5.2 RESEARCH LESSONS

5.2.1 Lesson One: How do pupils make meaning?

Table 16
Selected painting:
Fig.5.2 A Tropical Storm, Surprised!
Henri Rousseau.

Participants: Teacher A (Reception); Teacher C (Year One); Teacher D (Year Two); three TAs (one from each class); researcher and pupils.

Preparation: All the teachers arranged their classrooms in a similar way for this lesson. The teacher was seated in front of the pupils who sat informally, cross legged on the floor. All three teachers used an easel beside them to display the poster sized reproduction. I gave them 30 laminated postcard sized copies of the painting to hand out.

Activity:
Lesson One was diagnostic and pupil-centred with minimal teacher intervention. Teachers introduced the art project and explained the lesson activity. They posed one question What is this painting about? and after giving pupils time to discuss ideas with each other, they asked them to feed back in a whole class discussion.

5.2.1.1 Description

During the lesson, the classroom TA and I sat quietly listening, observing and making notes without engaging with pupils. In Reception, Teacher A covered the poster initially and unveiled it five minutes into the lesson. One boy immediately shouted out ‘My Dad has this one!’ (Tape: 1:05).

Teacher A and Teacher C began the lesson by introducing me and the art project to pupils. Teacher A explained I was a governor in the school and would be ‘sitting in classes to hear what pupils and teachers were saying about some paintings’ (Tape: 0:42). Teacher C told her class:

You know Mrs W, she pops into the school. She’s a governor which means she has a say in how the school’s run. She’s particularly interested in pictures, how children learn from them and what they like to talk about them (Tape: 0.29).

Teacher D began her lesson without an introduction, telling pupils she had a ‘tricky question’ (Tape: 0.28) for them.

All three teachers gave out the small postcard copies of Rousseau’s painting and asked pupils to look at them and think about the question What is this painting about?, then to
talk about it with learning partners. The teachers wandered around their classroom observing how they talked together and listening to what they said. They did not interrupt or interact other than to repeat the question.

They allowed pupils varying lengths of time to discuss the question together. Two teachers allocated approximately four to five minutes for this before returning to whole class discussion for feedback. But Teacher C gave pupils less than two minutes to talk to their partners.

Afterwards, each teacher asked for feedback in different ways. In Reception Class, Teacher A asked pupils to pretend she could not see the painting and help her to ‘figure it out’. Several pupils gave one word answers such as ‘a tiger’, ‘a snake’ while others developed them saying: ‘a tiger in a jungle’. Teacher A repeated the question and one girl replied:

They look sad (pointing to the tiger’s eyes). (Tape: 9.42)

When Teacher A asked her why, she answered by suggesting there might be something on the tiger’s tail. The teacher decided to participate in the discussion and the following exchange took place with a pupil:

Girl: He’s a bit scared.
Teacher A: Are you talking about the tiger?
Girl: Yes. Thunder. (unclear)
Teacher A: Right, so the tiger. You think he’s scared, and you said you think it shows how frightening thunderstorms can be. What makes you think he’s scared then?
Girl: His face looks scared.
Teacher A: Why?
Girl: Because I think the tiger’s sort of looking like that (acts out crouching down on floor resting on her arms, ready to pounce). (LW fieldnotes, 11/1/07)
Teacher A: What’s the tiger doing that makes you think he’s scared?
Girl: His teeth, he’s showing his teeth. Grrrrhh… (sound of pupil growling). (Tape: 10.52)

In the Year One class, Teacher C posed the question and listened silently to pupils’ responses. Next, she rephrased the question by asking What is going on in this painting? pupils answered by saying, for example:

It’s about trees and a tiger. (Tape: 5.10)
Rain, it’s raining over there and thunderstorms.(Tape: 5.12)

---

2 At this school, pupils work in pairs known as learning partners, frequently from different ability sets, not necessarily same sex or friendship groups.
It’s a tiger and a jungle. (Tape: 5.13)

After several minutes, they began to speculate saying, ‘I think’, ‘maybe’ and ‘it could be’, before they gave a response, for example:

I think he’s running away from the village. (Tape: 6:10)
I think maybe he’s afraid, it could be of the lights. (Tape: 6.27)
Maybe it’s another one, two tigers. He’s afraid of another tiger. (Tape: 6.28)

On one occasion, two pupils spoke together about whether the painting was ‘real’ or not, saying: ‘It’s in a jungle. I think it’s where tigers sometimes run. I think it looks real. Yes, it is real’ (LW fieldnotes, 12/1/07). On another occasion a Year One pupil asked if the painting was from a scene in *The Jungle Book*, a video he ‘always’ watched at home (Observer record form, TA/1).

The Year Two teacher posed the question then silently observed them. Initially, pupils answered in a similar way to those in Reception with one word answers such as ‘tiger’, ‘jungle’, ‘storm’. After several minutes and without prompting they expanded on them by saying, for example:

It’s a tiger, running for shelter, in the jungle, on its own. (Tape: 15.41)

Tiger. It’s about a tiger in a rainforest. It is a rainforest and I think it’s in a thunderstorm. (Tape: 16.18)

Well, it’s like in prehistoric times when you had big trees and then, it’s one of the tigers. He’s waiting to get away and he’s getting into a hole. There’s something there. (Tape: 17:23)

Both the Reception and Year One teachers asked pupils *How does this painting make you feel?* which was unplanned. The majority of pupils responded with one word answers, however, three pupils went into more detail, for example:

It makes me feel scared because I think the lion is chasing the tiger through the trees and after he’ll eat him. (Tape: 15.58)

In Year One, pupils replied to the same question saying, for example:

Scared for the tiger;
Frightened for the tiger;
A little bit upset for the tiger. (Tape: 19:01)

And alternately: ‘Well, it makes me feel strange’; ‘curious’ and ‘it’s a nice painting, it makes me feel happy’ (Tape: 18.42).
A handful of Year Two pupils voluntarily talked about how they felt about the painting. One boy said ‘it makes me sad’ (Tape: 18:54) while other pupils called out one word responses such as ‘excited’, ‘scared’, ‘frightened’. After several seconds they began to answer with more complete statements such as:

I feel scared. Scared and muddled because the tiger’s showing his teeth (Tape: 19:01).
What do you call that when you’re jumping? Pouncing, jumping onto a person, its exciting (Tape: 19:43).
I think it’s quite sad because it looks sad and scared (Tape: 12.25).
It makes me feel a bit sad because the tiger can’t get away ‘cause it’s stuck (Tape: 13:05).
Okay. Because the tiger’s in where he’s meant to be, not in a cage, he’s in the jungle… (Tape: 14:31).

Two of the three teachers ended the lesson after approximately fifteen minutes. In Year One, however, Teacher C asked pupils a new sub question: **What do you think about the colours in the painting?** which led her to a talk about her favourite colours and how artists ‘use light and dark tones to enhance their painting’ (Tape: 19:58).

### 5.2.1.2 Team reflection and evaluation

The three teachers said Lesson One was a positive experience mainly because pupils were enthusiastic and excited about the art project. Two teachers were comfortable with the direction of the lesson, but Teacher A said she felt constrained at times and tried unsuccessfully to detach herself from discussions but found it impossible because pupils needed her direction. The Year Two teacher said her pupils thought it was unnatural that she did not enter into discussion. As a result, she found them unusually reticent and felt initially there was a lack of response to her question. The Year Two TA’s observation form recorded pupils were ‘used to following their teacher’s lead and unsure of what was expected of them’. She said they appeared ‘confused’ and ‘disoriented’ by the simplicity of the question and what they were supposed to do in the lesson.

The team reviewed the questions the teachers posed and realised that subtle changes produced different answers. For example **What is going on in this painting?** resulted in a different interpretations to **What is this painting about?** The Year Two teacher noted that her class had talked about their feelings even though she had not specifically asked about them. The two other teachers had added this as a sub question and one explained she did so to draw out discussion.
The team tried to identify existing strategies used by the pupils. This was difficult because by posing questions the teachers felt they influenced pupils’ responses. In the end, the team concluded pupils used the following four strategies to explain the painting by:

1. poaching others’ ideas and adding to them
2. brainstorming possible scenarios
3. acting out or physically demonstrating what was happening and
4. empathising with the main character in the painting, in this case the tiger.

The team judged the lesson had achieved its goal to some extent since they were able to identify some strategies, although many pupils had needed the teacher’s guidance. The teachers found conducting the lesson difficult, especially taking on the role of observer and all of them were concerned about a loss of control. Regardless of age or sex, the majority of pupils were able to verbalise their ideas about the painting which was encouraging.

On their observer record forms all three TAs noted that pupils did not take enough time to look at the poster painting or postcard before they began to talk about it, so the team decided to monitor this in the next lesson. The TAs mentioned that the way teachers introduced and handled the painting affected pupils’ perception of it and the teachers reflected on this. A final recommendation from the Year Two teacher was for teachers to model behaviour of looking at and reflect on a painting so pupils would follow their lead. Time, or lack of time for discussion was identified as an issue.

### 5.2.2 Lesson Two: Learning the ISEE (Step One)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 17</th>
<th>Selected Painting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Fig. 5.3 Courtyard of a House in Delft, Pieter de Hooch</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participants:** Teacher B (Reception); Teacher C (Y1) and Teacher D (Y2); two TAs (R and Y2); researcher and pupils.

**Preparation:** All the teachers arranged their classrooms in the same way as in Lesson One. They used flip charts to list pupils’ responses. Thirty postcards of the painting were handed out in each class.

**Activity:** Teachers introduced Step One: *What do you see?* and asked pupils to spot subject matter (objects, people, places, events, expressions) in the painting. Teachers created lists of pupils’ responses.
5.2.2.1. Description

Whereas the lesson for the Reception Class was taught under normal weather conditions the lessons for Years One and Two were taught on a windy, turbulent afternoon punctuated by heavy rains. An earlier incident involving shattered classroom windows had affected the pupils’ and teachers’ concentration and mood. The Year One TA did not observe Lesson Two as she was attending to broken glass in the school. In Reception, Teacher B taught the research lesson for the first time.

All the teachers copied Teacher A’s action of introducing the painting in Lesson One. They began by ‘unveiling’ the poster of Courtyard of a House in Delft before explaining to pupils they should ‘look carefully at’ and ‘list everything’ they could see in the picture. Teacher C told Year One pupils about her experience of visiting ‘a famous art gallery in Paris to look at paintings’ (Tape: 0.49). All three teachers distributed postcards of the painting to pupils and asked them to look at it carefully with partners. They gave pupils varied amounts of time to look carefully: Reception (4 minutes); Year One (2 minutes) and Year Two (1 minute 10 seconds). Afterwards they asked pupils to help them compile a list of what they observed in the painting. Pupils in Reception and Year Two gave one word answers, for example: ‘a broom’; ‘a tree’; ‘a hole’; ‘smoke’. After completing the list, the Reception and Year Two teachers asked pupils to describe the subject matter orally, in more detail. Reception Class pupils said things like:

Girl: A little girl and a lady walking out of a farm (Tape: 10:45)
Boy: A lady walking through the tunnel of a house (Tape: 11:06)
Boy: Some leaves, hanging down near the doorway (Tape: 13:13)

But Year Two pupils continued to reply with one word answers.

In contrast, Year One pupils began by, and continued to name specific objects before describing them without being asked to, for example:

A little sign above the window
An alleyway in a dark tunnel through a lady’s house
A broom beside an old barrel that a lady’s using for cleaning (Tape: 16.16).

When they were asked to give further details, these Year One pupils noted the patterns of brickwork ‘the artist used on the houses in the painting’ and discussed whether the bushes in the garden were holly or ivy (Tape: 13.36).
In Reception Class, pupils cited fictitious or imagined subject matter they saw in the painting, for example, one boy said ‘I see a bat in the little window at the top of the house’ (Tape: 24.0) which prompted a discussion amongst several pupils about its location.

At the end, the teachers in Years One and Two asked pupils about the *setting* of the painting. In Year One, the teacher said it was like ‘settings in stories’ and ‘where stories are’ (Tape: 17.20). Two pupils answered, ‘it’s a nursery for girls’ (Tape 17.50) and ‘a village because there are houses where they live’ (Tape 19.20). The Year Two teacher described it as ‘where the painting is’ (Tape: 22.58) and pupils’ responses included, for example:

- A little village
- In a house
- In a street
- Where they work

A Year Two girl said she ‘recognised the kind of place it was’ and added ‘it looks like whenever we go to a garden centre’ (Tape: 26.50).

5.2.2.2 Team reflection and evaluation

Teachers had different reactions to this lesson. The Year One teacher reported her lesson was a ‘disaster’ but later changed this and explained the wind had disrupted it. Teacher D said she purposefully asked every pupil in her class to list an object and was pleased they were able to find so many things. In Reception, Teacher B was initially apprehensive about teaching her ‘first’ lesson but delighted as it progressed because she knew ‘where it was leading’ (Teacher B record form, 16/1/07). However, she voiced three concerns:

i) finding the right pace for a lesson

ii) pupils’ expectations of her knowledge of the painting

iii) not knowing what to do when pupils ‘made up’ things they saw in the painting (LW fieldnotes, 30/1/07).

I asked teachers to reflect on these issues. Several of them expressed a renewed concern about pupils’ expectations of their knowledge. All of them agreed they felt pressured as Teacher B said, to ‘be the font of all knowledge’ (LW/fieldnotes, 30/1/07).
We discussed the pupils’ tendency to make things up and decided to let them use their imagination if they could justify it with evidence from the painting. Teacher D said she did not often work with visual material and noticed more Year Two pupils than usual participated in the lesson (LWfieldnotes, 30/1/07). The team reviewed observation record forms and found the TAs in Reception and Year One concurred that pupils who were normally reluctant to take part in group or paired discussions were participating more than usual. Reviewing the transcripts from the lesson, the team noticed pupils responded in different ways to the question *What do you see?* Reception pupils appeared most animated and eagerly took part in the exercise of looking and listing. They were excited with each discovery and viewed their answers as unique when they exclaimed: ‘I see a window!’ and ‘It’s a door!’ (Tape: 6:36-6:42). However, pupils in Year Two listed objects generically as ‘windows’, ‘doors’, ‘trees’ etc. when asked the same question. I suggested Year Two pupils seemed less enthusiastic since their responses lacked descriptive detail compared to Year One pupils and the team re-examined the transcripts. While Year Two pupils participated in the first activity, they did not go on to describe subject matter in detail. We speculated whether this was due to distraction from the wind or a lack of interest. Teacher D concluded it was a timing issue as having solicited each pupil’s reply there was little time left to listen to detailed descriptions. I asked whether they might have considered the activity too easy as they were older and Teacher D agreed it was possible.

The time taken to look carefully at the painting was an agenda item for this meeting. After reviewing the TAs’ observations, the team concluded pupils did not spend enough time looking at the painting. The lesson transcripts, however revealed teachers did not give them much time. All the teachers said it felt longer and it was difficult to gauge the pace of these lesson. Two reported quickening the lesson to keep control of the class. The team reflected on levels of confidence and all the teachers claimed theirs was growing. All three teachers were satisfied with the way their lessons had unfolded. Teacher D said she wanted to call the ISEE a ‘method’ so her pupils could connect it to a mathematical enquiry method they used in lessons. Year One and Two teachers agreed it was important for the pupils to link the lessons with other subject areas. At the end, two changes were made for the next lesson. The team recommended that paintings from the art
project be displayed in the classrooms after the lessons and I was asked to organise a
gallery of A4 reproduction copies of each painting in each classroom and the school hall. I
recommended that the team redouble our efforts to focus on what pupils said in lessons and
not on what we thought they meant.

5.2.3 Lesson Three: Learning the ISEE (Step Two)

| Table 18 Selected painting: |
| Fig. 5.4 Courtyard of a House in Delft, Pieter de Hooch |
| Participants: Teachers A, C and D; two TAs (Y1, Y2); researcher and pupils. |
| Preparation: All teachers arranged their classrooms in the same way as previous lessons. Flipchart lists from the previous week were displayed on the classroom wall. Only Year Two used postcards of the painting. |
| Activity: Teachers led and guided whole class discussion. They explained Step Two and posed questions about the subject matter pupils listed and described in the previous lesson. They encouraged pupils to pose their own questions, for example, why things were included in the painting, or how they felt about it. |

5.2.3.1 Description

The lesson was taught in Reception Class and Year One on a day of great excitement
because of the first winter snowfall. Teacher D taught the Year Two lesson the following
day on returning to school after a heavy cold. The TA in Reception was ill and unable to observe.

All three teachers began the lesson differently. In Reception, Teacher A read out the list of subject matter drawn up by Teacher B in the previous lesson. Teacher C explained to Year One pupils they would be asking themselves questions about the objects/things/people in the painting (Tape: 1.50). Teacher D reminded pupils in Year Two of a previous lesson and asked them to think about what they had included in the self portraits they painted the day before. She asked them to think about why they had included it. Looking at one pupil’s portrait displayed in the classroom, she commented:

This artist (pupil A) has drawn a music player with her passport and suitcase next to her. Why did she put these things in the picture? What do you think they mean? What does it tell you she likes to do? How do we know this? (Tape: 3.23)

Then she asked them to think about the subject matter they had listed in Lesson Two and why de Hooch may have included them in his painting.
Teacher A asked Reception pupils about setting for the first time. She defined it as ‘where the picture’s set’ and ‘where it’s happening’ (Tape: 5.55). She offered them suggestions such as ‘Is it on a beach?’ or ‘in a jungle?’ (Tape: 6:03-6:05). They typically answered ‘in a home’ (Tape: 7.11) but one boy said, ‘it’s happening in a very long road where you put your car, behind the house where those people live’ (Tape 6.34 min.). In Year Two, for the second time in lessons, Teacher D asked pupils to comment on setting, which she reminded them was ‘where the picture’s set (Tape: 3:53) and ‘where the artist put the picture’ (Tape: 5.18).

Next, the teachers posed questions about the ‘objects, things and people’ in the painting to the whole class. The teacher asked Reception pupils to describe the three main figures in the painting, for example, who they were and their relationship to each other. There was little discussion. The teacher in Year One asked pupils to think about the purpose of the objects/things and people to the overall picture and to describe how they looked. Some pupils said outbuildings in the painting looked like WW2 air raid shelters. A girl, referring to the outer doors of a house in the painting said, ‘the artist put those doors there to make it so no wind goes in’ (Tape: 15.34) and a boy explained the broom was lying on the ground because ‘someone’s just been cleaning and they’ve left it out and haven’t tided it up yet’. (Tape: 18.29)

As in previous lessons, pupils were interested in whether the subject matter was ‘real or not’, for example in Year One, the following exchange took place:

Girl: Those two there, they’re talking. (Tape: 21.25) [about the lady and girl in the painting]

Boy (1): Yes, their mouths are open because their mouths are moving. (Tape: 21:46)
Teacher C: Would you see them moving in a painting? (Tape: 21:51)
Boy (1): Um, no, they aren’t really. But they’re like this [demonstrates his lips ajar]. (Tape: 21:53)
Boy (2): And she’s walking down over the steps. She’s had to move her leg. She’s stepping down. She is real, she’s really moving. (Tape: 21.58)

Teachers in Years One and Two asked pupils *How does the painting make you feel?* and Year One pupils replies included:
It makes me feel sad, because they (woman and little girl) are thin and so hungry. They don’t look like they’ve had any food for a while. (Boy, Tape: 29.35)

I’m interested in the way the artist has painted it. Like the writing up there on the wall, it makes you think. (Boy, Tape: 26.35)

Year Two pupils replied with mainly one word adjectives such as ‘safe’, ‘happy’, sleepy’ and ‘joyful’. However, one girl, said: ‘It makes me feel gentle looking at it’ (Tape: 20:47) and a boy said: ‘like I was there’ (Tape: 20:28). At the end of the lesson, two teachers posed sub questions not included in the lesson plan. Teacher A asked Reception pupils if they would like to ask the painter ‘a question about the picture’ (Tape: 21.20). A boy responded saying: ‘I’d ask what that stone lion is for’ (Tape: 23.54). Teacher D asked Year Two How has the artist portrayed the people in the painting? (Tape: 21:51) but stopped the class when an incident occurred involving a group of boys laughing at another boy’s comments about the painting. The Year One lesson concluded after 30 minutes; but informal discussion between five pupils went on for a further six minutes and into their lunchtime.

5.2.3.2 Team reflection and evaluation

I began the meeting by asking teachers what difficulties they experienced in teaching Step Two (Questioning, analysing, relating). The team recognised there were logistical problems matching ISEE questions with emerging class discussion. Two teachers said it was confusing trying to remember the sequencing. We discussed if the ISEE was too rigid and one teacher said it was awkward posing set questions when discussion moved in unpredictable directions. Teacher B said she found it challenging trying to think ahead of pupils. Another teacher commented she felt uncomfortable playing along with pupils when they fantasised or imagined events in the painting.

The team reflected on the question How do you feel about this painting? which produced curious answers such as ‘like I was there’. They agreed that emphasising links and making associations stretched pupils’ thinking about the painting. Two teachers reported it helped them to understand how pupils were thinking about and interpreting the painting when they said how they felt about a scene or people in it. For example, when the Year Two girl said she felt ‘gentle’ looking at the painting, one teacher interpreted that she felt calm or peaceful engaging with it.
When they reflected on pupils’ ability to talk about the painting, the three teachers who taught the lesson expressed surprise at their confidence and how they used the phrase ‘I think’ and ‘because…’ without prompting. This happened mainly in Years One and Two but there were several examples in Reception. Teacher D found pupils in Year Two were more responsive and willing to participate in this lesson then the previous one, particularly when she asked them to rationalise their ideas. The Year Two TA had written down:

The pupils really liked when Teacher D asked them *Why is this [subject matter] in the painting?* It was like a challenge to them and they wanted to prove they knew why. There were lots of hands up. (Observer record form, TA2)

I drew the team’s attention to another observation that pupils appeared to enjoy sharing their ideas with teachers. One teacher reported that the dynamics of the whole class discussion had changed in a positive way when she joined in. This happened when she asked Reception pupils to compare their gardens with the subject matter in de Hooch’s painting and then told them about her own patio garden and flowers. The team acknowledged that pupils valued their teacher’s input in class discussion.

The team made two recommendations for the next lesson. One was to display paintings prior to lessons so pupils had the opportunity to look at them and think about them for longer. The other was to change the Speech bubble activity in Lesson Four to include an opportunity to role play interpretations instead of writing them on the worksheets (Appendix 17 worksheet #1).
5.2.4 Lesson Four: Learning the ISEE (Step Three)

Table 19
Selected painting: Fig. 5.5 Courtyard of a House in Delft, Pieter de Hooch
Participants
Teachers B, C and D; three TAs (R, Y1, Y2); researcher and pupils.

Preparation and resources
Reception and Year One teachers arranged the classroom in the usual way. The Year Two teacher altered the setting and taught the first part in the school library with pupils sitting informally on bean bags on the floor. The speech bubble worksheet #1 was used (see Appendix 17).

Activity
Teachers acted as informers in teacher-led action. They transmitted art information. Then they asked pupils to look at the painting and consider what the woman and little girl might be talking about. On a Speech bubble worksheet (#1), Years One and Two pupils wrote a dialogue between the two central figures. In pairs, Reception pupils were meant to role play a conversation between the two figures and present it to the class.

5.2.4.1 Description

Miscommunication meant that Teacher B was not informed of changes to the lesson plan and therefore Reception pupils did not role play a conversation between the figures. Instead, like Year One and Two teachers, she asked them to collaborate with a partner to work out a conversation between the woman and child in the painting. Later, in pairs, they re-told their answers to the class. One pair after another copied previous responses. No discussion or feedback took place after their comments.

The Year One lesson began with a boy exclaiming in response to seeing the poster reproduction: ‘We saw this in London!’ (Tape: 4.38). He later explained his father had taken him and his sister (a pupil in Reception) to London to ‘find the painting’ (LW fieldnotes, 30/1/07).

The three teachers began by telling the class about the artist and painting. Reception pupils did not speak at all for 12 minutes. In the other two classes the art information led to discussion and interrupted comments about the artist painting in detail, perspective, photography and photographic detail. Considering de Hooch’s detailed perspective, a Year Two boy said, ‘I do that too. I paint like him’ (Tape: 8.45). Afterwards, teachers asked them to think about the information and what they had talked about in previous lessons. Teacher B gave a brief summary as Reception pupils sat and listened. Teacher C asked Year One pupils to remember what they had noticed over the last two weeks and what they
felt about the painting (Tape: 8.41). Teacher D asked Year Two pupils, *What has the artist done or included in the painting to make you feel as you do?* (Tape: 4.25). Two pupils replied:

He hasn’t put any disaster or any tough things going on in it. (Boy: 4.31)

It’s all in a quiet room. There aren’t any cars or machines. (Boy: 4.56)

Year One and Two pupils were asked to complete the Speech bubble worksheets #1 and one boy said, ‘it’s like a comic book’ (Tape: 9:40). Teacher C told them to ‘look at her face [woman’s], at both of their faces [little girl and woman] and said, ‘that should help you and give you clues about what they might be saying to each other’ (Tape: 9.28). Afterwards, Year One pupils read out their speech bubbles and Teacher C questioned them about what they had written, in one case encouraging a discussion about whether school children played ‘it’ in Holland 400 years ago and other games they might have played (Tape:16.53).

The Year Two teacher asked pupils not to talk together or ‘poach ideas’ (Tape: 14:49) when completing their speech bubbles. Moving back to the classroom, one pupil called out, ‘she loves her’ as a possible solution and this influenced eight out of 21 speech bubble responses. Because of this, Teacher D changed the question when they sat down to feedback their answers and asked them instead *How was the woman speaking to the little girl?* and *What kind of voice did she use?* (Tape: 23.01). This opened up a different kind of class discussion.

**5.2.4.2 Team reflection and evaluation**

Teachers were pleased with Lesson Four having completed all three steps. They were relieved to able to give pupils information about the artist and painting and surprised by their interest. Teacher D said she ‘experienced the potential of visual literacy and enjoyed it’ (20/2/07). The teachers reported Year One pupils were ‘attentive’; Year Two ‘focused’ and ‘reflective about what they heard’ and Reception ‘interested throughout’. All the teachers were buoyed by their response. Teacher C mentioned linking de Hooch’s interest in architectural perspective to an earlier investigation in the school grounds with her Year One class. The two other teachers said they communicated the information like a story about the artist. The team concluded Teacher D’s question *What kind of voice did the lady use* had been effective in expanding the pupils’ interpretations. They judged this question resulted in pupils thinking more deeply about the relationship between the two figures.
The team found it difficult to evaluate the impact of the information on pupils’ interpretations. None of the Year One and Two speech bubble worksheets or Reception pupils’ dialogue reflected the information although several Year Two pupils mentioned the artist when they gave oral feedback in class afterwards. Two of them connected de Hooch’s interest in painting buildings with their father’s profession as a bricklayer and a boy mentioned ‘that’s why he knows how to paint bricks’ (Tape: 7:24). I questioned whether the speech bubbles had been an appropriate way to assess pupils’ use of art information and the team members felt they needed more time to absorb it before synthesising it. I mentioned Eisner’s (2002) claim that interpreting is often invisible.

The team judged that the majority of pupils were able to construct literal meanings about the painting. They found most of them had assumed the figures represented a mother and child. Because of this assumption, some of them talked about going to school, coming home from nursery, waiting for siblings and helping with chores at home. We concluded that some pupils were making symbolic and affective associations.

Each teacher found their own way to inform pupils about the art information, either by telling a story or relating it to previous learning, for example in a science lesson. Some pupils were able to relate to de Hooch as a person by identifying similarities and differences between their lives and his. A team recommendation particularly for Years One and Two was to encourage pupils to research information about the artist and painting through the internet, videos and books in the school library collection and at home.
5.2.5 Lesson Five: Multiple interpretations

Table 20
Selected painting:
Fig. 5.6 Le Domaine d’Arnheim, Rêne Magritte

Participants: Teachers B, C, D; three TAs (R, Y1, Y2); researcher and pupils.

Preparation: Teachers prepared whiteboard or flipcharts for the quiz game. Reception and Year One classrooms were arranged as usual; the Year Two teacher arranged the class to sit facing the whiteboard set up in a new area of the classroom. Resources: Poster reproduction and two A5 sized colour copies for display; whiteboard; Magritte worksheet #2

Activities: Several days before the lesson, teachers displayed the painting and asked pupils to complete the Magritte worksheet #2. In the lesson, teachers played a game I created for them with a series of pre-determined questions and answers (see below) for pupils to choose from. Afterwards, teachers led a whole class discussion to discuss different interpretations that emerged.

Pre-determined questions and answers about the subject matter: eagle, nest with eggs, moon, mountain, setting, sky (Appendix 20).
A) (Eagle) Does the rock-shaped eagle make you feel frightened or protected/safe?
B) (Nest with eggs) Do you think these eggs are abandoned – that the mother or father bird has left them or are they coming back?
C) (Moon) Do you think the moon is rising in the sky and it will soon be nightfall? Or do you think it is daytime and the moon is in the wrong place?
D) (Mountain) Would you describe this mountain as ‘majestic’- rising up to the sky: or ‘threatening’ with its sharp craggy rocks?
E) (Setting) Is the nest sitting on a window ledge, sheltered from the wind and air? Or is it sitting on a stone wall – out in the open wind and air?
F) (Sky) Does the clear blue sky remind you of a cold and frosty winter’s day? Or does it make you think the sun is shining on the nest and warming it up?

5.2.5.1 Description

Both Reception and Year One classrooms displayed poster reproductions of Magritte’s painting, Le Domaine d’Arnheim for several days leading up to the lesson. They asked pupils to study the painting in their own time and answer the three questions on Worksheet #2 (Appendix 17). The questions were What do you see? ; What is the painting about? ; Why do you think this? Despite asking for this change in format, Teacher D did not display the poster reproduction in Year Two until the day of the lesson. She told me pupils were too busy and didn’t have time to look at things on the classroom wall (Journal, 10/02/07).

Over a third of Reception pupils took worksheets and asked the TA to scribe answers for them during the week. Nearly a third of Year One pupils also completed it and five had assistance scribing them from the TA. (Three of these answers had exactly the same
wording). In Year Two, all 27 pupils were given time in class to answer the worksheet on their own.

The Reception and Year One teachers began the lesson by reminding pupils about the three ISEE questions and asking them to look again at the painting and think about it. Teacher C told Year One pupils to ‘use the [ISEE] to help you understand what’s happening in the painting?’ (Tape:0:59). In Year Two the teacher asked pupils to remind her of the ISEE questions. Nearly all of them remembered one or more questions correctly.

After giving instructions for the game, teachers asked pupils not to influence each other’s selections when they played it. Nevertheless, some pupils copied each other. In the game, the teachers asked pupils to select answers from a prepared list. Teacher C had difficulty explaining the word ‘majestic’ (Question D) and in the end changed it to ‘regal’, but not all the Year One pupils understood what she meant.

After the lesson activity, Teacher B told Reception pupils:

Viewers can have different ideas about a painting. No one is right or wrong when they interpret a painting (Tape: 10.20).

Teacher C summarised the Year One results by saying:

You see, there were lots of different opinions and feelings looking at the same painting. (Tape: 14.26)

Teacher D told Year Two pupils the results showed how the ‘majority’ of them understood the painting (Tape: 16:31). One boy would not accept the group consensus and argued instead for his own idea so Teacher D used this example to reinforce the idea that different interpretations can exist about the same painting. She concluded ‘it’s what you think and how you explain it that matters’ (Tape: 19.11).

Fig. 5.7: Year Two voting game results
After playing the game, Reception and Year One teachers talked to pupils about the painting. Neither teacher gave the artist’s name, the title or timeframe but chose instead to talk about dreams. One explained the painting was like a dream where things are sometimes ‘changed around’, ‘mixed up’ or ‘not the way they really are’ (Tape: 12.49). Teacher C said ‘art critics’ had suggested Magritte was interested in dreams and tried to capture them in his paintings. A Year One pupil agreed it looked like a dream because it ‘didn’t altogether make sense’ (Tape: 14.19). Then the teacher explained that Magritte used a ‘hyper real painting style’, using information she had researched from the Tate Modern Collection notes (Journal, 9/02/07).

At the end, Teacher B read out Reception pupils’ previously completed worksheets #3 while Year Two handed them in to me, without discussion. In contrast, Year One pupils talked about their answers with the teacher. During this discussion, they continuously approached, stood beside and pointed things out in the poster reproduction at the front of the class. Once more, pupils in Year One and Two raised the issue of whether subject matter was ‘real’ (Tape: 14:19), for example one boy said:

It’s not real, the mountain is moving. It can’t be real. The mountains are like wings and the ….wings are landing. No, it’s not real. The nest is a little bit downwards. I can see shadows under the nest. (Tape: 23.43)

5.2.5.2 Team reflection and evaluation

Lesson Five occurred midway through the action research when teachers said they were under pressure to participate in other continuous professional development opportunities going on in, and outside of school. This had resulted in an abnormally high number of adult ‘observers’ passing through classrooms during Lesson Five. The demands of several projects running concurrently and the strain of completing evaluation forms after lessons and attending regular team meetings put the teachers under further pressure. After reviewing record form comments we concluded they were becoming simplistic and therefore less effective.

Reactions to Lesson Five were mixed. Teacher C did not like it because the game I had devised included too many questions for Year One pupils to think about. Teacher D disagreed and said her Year Two pupils had become more interested in the painting as

---

[3] The teachers were involved in a new initiative for the Surrey County Council (Leaders of Learning)
different possibilities were presented and had developed ‘stories’ about it through the questions she posed to them. Examining lesson transcripts, the team noticed some Reception pupils were becoming more articulate about what they observed in a painting than previously. Reflecting on pupils’ responses to the ISEE questions, the team found some of them used their prior knowledge to help them interpret the painting. They linked it with knowledge about snow and ‘ice mountains’ in the ‘Antarctic’ and ‘North Pole’ (Tape: 14:34). They also attached emotion to the idea of the eggs in the nest being left by the mother or father bird. Some pupils contrasted the cold colours of the snow and ice with feelings of coldness in their worksheet answers, for example ‘there is a nest with shivery eggs’ (15:11).

The team judged the lesson had achieved its aim in each class, particularly in Year Two when Teacher D used a boy’s argument to reinforce the idea of a plurality of meanings. The Reception and Year One teachers were delighted by the discussion that followed their talk about the artist’s interest in dreams. In particular, Teacher C was pleased because she had researched further information about Magritte’s interest and been able to use it. Teacher D did not give any art information in this lesson. On reflection, the team mentioned again that pupils were given little time to consider information before they were asked to interpret the paintings. This made it difficult to evaluate their use of the art information.

I questioned the teachers’ levels of confidence in introducing art information into discussion and offered to help them find ways to disseminate it but each of them reassured me it was all ‘coming together’ (Teacher C).

There was conflicting data on the TAs’ observation and teachers’ record forms. While all the teachers considered pupils had lost interest in the painting after the first day it was displayed, two classroom TAs (Reception and Year One) mentioned pupils’ enthusiasm for looking at and talking about it with friends several days later. I raised a question about whether pupils were enjoying the research lessons and the team reflected on this. Some of us were unsure. In the end, a recommendation was made to give them more freedom to explore a painting in the next lesson by changing the classroom setting and pupils’ physical access to it.
5.2.6 Lesson Six: Learning about the past from a painting

![Image of The Graham Children, William Hogarth](image)

**Table 21**

**Selected painting**

**Fig. 5.8: The Graham Children**, William Hogarth

**Participants**: Teachers B, C, D; three TAs (R,Y1,Y2); researcher and in Year One, the headteacher as observer in the lesson.

**Preparation**: All three teachers changed the usual classroom setting by displaying copies of the painting in different sizes and forms including posters to postcards on classroom tables and walls. They used large poster sized reproductions set out on three easels around the room. Art books with a reproduction of the painting were placed on tables. Classroom computers and an interactive whiteboard projected images of the painting on classroom walls or a screen. **Resources**: Three poster reproductions; 10 postcard copies; 30 Past and present worksheets #3; two computers; whiteboard and projector; art books.

**Activity**: Teachers guided pupils through ISEE steps in whole class discussion and provided art information. They asked pupils to complete the Past and present worksheet #3, in pairs or individually, to compare and contrast contemporary objects with those found in the painting. Whole class discussion followed.

---

### 5.2.6.1 Description

Each teacher made a point of timetabling the lesson after break or lunch so they could arrange the classroom without pupils seeing it. When they entered the room, a Year One boy exclaimed: ‘It’s everywhere!’ (LWfieldnotes, 22/2/07). Teacher D explained to Year Two pupils:

> We are not in a classroom. We’re in a special place, a gallery where we can look at pictures. Would you like to walk around my gallery? (Tape: 1.36)

Pupils were encouraged to roam around tables looking at different sized images of the painting and to talk amongst themselves. In each classroom, several pupils grouped around the computer screens displaying the image. Teachers reminded them to think about the key questions: **What do you see?**; **Why is it in the painting?**; **Is it familiar?**; **Does it look similar/different?**; **What’s happening/what’s going on in it?** and **How do you feel about it?** Teacher D suggested Year Two pupils make mental lists in their heads (Tape: 7.12).

All three teachers asked two further questions: **Why do you think the artist painted these children together?** and **What are the children doing in this painting?** Discussion took place with pupils standing around classroom tables. Afterwards Teacher B moved Reception pupils back onto the carpet to listen to a ‘story’. Teachers C and D did the same but said they had ‘information’ for them about the artist ‘William Hogarth and his friend,
Dr Graham’ (Y2, Tape: 16:43). When the teacher spoke to Year Two pupils about ‘special’ paintings created to celebrate occasions or events, one girl commented on ‘a special photograph of her [now dead] dog’ (Tape: 17:11). This prompted Teacher D to tell her pupils ‘a very sad story’ (Tape: 19.15) about the death of the baby, Thomas in the painting. An extended discussion followed between the teacher and her pupils.

After this, the teachers asked whether the setting was in the past or present and if the children in the painting looked like pupils’ brothers and sisters. Reception pupils discussed subject matter noting ‘old fashioned clothes’ (Tape: 11:08), ‘prams’ and ‘pull along toys’ (Tape: 10.33). On their own initiative, Year One pupils discussed the ‘darkness’ (Tape: 13:24) of the room in the painting and commented there was no electricity ‘back then’ (Tape: 14:35). All the teachers asked pupils to consider present day equivalents for some of the objects in the painting. Year One and Two teachers gave out the prepared Past and Present worksheets #3 (Appendix 17) showing contemporary images of subject matter found in Hogarth’s painting and asked them to collaborate with partners to match them up.

Reception pupils did not use worksheets. Instead Teacher B used the whiteboard to display The Graham Children and point out subject matter. Year One pupils handed in their worksheets without comment, although an informal discussion occurred after the lesson when some of them chatted about how a music box worked. One boy explained that ‘turning the handle round’ (LW fieldnotes, 9/02/07) made music come out. Another boy said the clock looked similar to one at his grandparents’ house and another said he had seen one in an ‘old shop’ (Tape: 14:32). In Reception, a girl told other pupils the painting made her feel cold because of the ‘black and white tiles, like in your kitchen’ (Tape: 23:10). She said, ‘You know, the ones that are really cold and hard so if you fell over you’d be dead’ (Tape: 23:14). Another Year One girl likened the oldest girl in the painting to the ‘Snow Queen from Narnia’ (HT observation record form, 22/02/07).

Near the end of lesson, Teacher D asked Year Two pupils a new question, What have you learned from looking at this particular painting? After considering this, some pupils replied:

I’ve learned about the olden days, what they wore and what they did.
(Tape: 33:26)

---

4 Lewis, C. (1950) Chronicles of Narnia. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
You wore a dress if you were a [little] boy. (Tape: 33:31)
Not to keep a bird in a cage. (Tape: 33:53)
About special pictures, what they mean to us and why. (Tape: 34:02)
The teacher told them they could bring their worksheets home to show parents and return them to her the next day.

Pupils were given unrestricted freedom to look at, walk around and talk about the painting. In each classroom there were some problems such as pupils disrupting the whiteboard screen, fiddling with computer keyboards to play with the image and changing the pages of the art books. Both Reception and Year One teachers shortened the time given to pupils to walk around the tables. One boy in Reception was seen licking his finger and tracing it over the surface of different reproduction copies. He explained he wanted ‘to see if they were real’ (Journal, 21/2/07). There were other examples of confusion about what was ‘real’ or not in the painting. A girl explained the painting was ‘old fashioned’ because ‘the people are not real. She said they are made of metal. They have tiny lines in their skin [cracks in the oil paint] so I know they aren’t real’ (Tape: 13:42). A boy said, ‘I think (the children in the painting) are just models, like statues. They’re weird, not real. They’re like models, like my Nan showed me once’ (Tape: 3.45).

5.2.6.2 Team reflection and evaluation

The headteacher mentioned she had been approached by parents saying their children were coming home talking about ‘paintings at school’ (Journal 24/2/07). Teacher D also reported Year Two pupils bringing in art books and copies of paintings from home (Journal 23/2/07). We concluded their interest in the paintings was growing. On six occasions over previous weeks, I was also approached by pupils in the playground to tell me their parents had taken them to London to ‘see the paintings’ (Journal 26/2/07). We felt the art project was impacting not only on pupils but on their families outside the school setting.

In the team meeting, every teacher said they disliked the organisation of Lesson Six. One said it ‘undermined the good work of previous lessons where pupils had looked quietly and reflectively at the artwork’ (TM, 27/2/07). In stark contrast, the three TAs, the headteacher (who observed the Year One lesson) and I all recorded pupil enthusiasm was higher than usual. Evaluating how the ISEE helped pupils to achieve the lesson aims, the team judged
that pupils in all three classes were able to understand differences and similarities between the past and present through the detailed observations and analysis of subject matter. We agreed the pupils had understood the concept of ‘then and now’ from studying the painting. Despite the differences in clothing and setting, pupils likened themselves to the children in the paintings and empathised with them.

Teacher D told of subsequent conversations she had with Year Two pupils the day after Lesson Six. She reported their delight in being able to show their families the worksheets and tell them about the painting. In the meeting, three teachers mentioned that pupils’ confidence in talking about paintings had risen appreciably. When they reflected on the conceptual framework behind the ISEE, the teachers said it was the first time pupils had combined all three sources of knowledge (personal, shared and given) to interpret a painting.

The team concluded the pupils were interested in the artist and his relationship to the children from comments they made after listening to the art information. The team reflected on some pupils’ views about the children being ‘real’. They wondered if pupils were confused between reproductions and original artworks or if pupils were concerned about mimesis (exact rendering) of subject matter. These reflections resulted in two recommendations for the next lesson; one that the teachers should initiate discussion about reproduction and original artworks and another, that pupils be given the opportunity to work with an original artwork.
5.2.7 Lesson Seven: The more we see and know, the more we understand

Table 22
Selected painting:
Fig. 5.9: The Fall of Icarus, Pieter Brueghel, the Elder

Participants: Teachers B, C, D; three classroom TAs; a special needs assistant (SEN); researcher and pupils.

Preparation: I cut a large-scale reproduction of Brueghel’s painting into six pieces so each piece showed a detail of the painting, glued them onto a cork board and laminated them for pupils to handle (see Fig. 5.10). ISEE questions were written on the whiteboard and pupils were given an Icarus worksheet #4 with three questions to answer. For the lesson, all the teachers arranged the classroom with an empty easel at the front of the class. Teacher B prepared a separate script of the story of Icarus and Teacher D rehearsed the story to tell pupils rather than reading it. The Year One teacher asked me, the SEN and the TA to work with pupils at separate tables to guide them through the ISEE steps.

Activity: This lesson was pupil-led in Years One and Two. Teachers organised them into small groups of five or six. Each group was given a piece of a jigsaw showing a part of the Brueghel painting. (When completed the pieces show the entire painting). Using the ISEE questions (written on a whiteboard and reminded by the teachers) pupils talked together about their piece of the puzzle. A worksheet with three questions (#4) was given to them. In Years One and Two, all groups gave feedback in whole class discussion. Reception began as a pupil-led exercise but ended as teacher-led. Afterwards, all the teachers discussed the artist and read or told the story/‘legend’ of the fall of Icarus. Pupils would then be asked to talk about their interpretations of the painting.

Resources: Six jigsaw cut out pieces (Appendix 21); oversized copy of Brueghel’s painting for classroom display; photocopied story of fall of Icarus; Icarus worksheet (Appendix 17: #4).

5.2.7.1 Description

All three teachers began by dividing pupils into small groups of approximately six. Teacher D asked Year Two pupils to recall ‘the questions you use to figure out a painting’ and most pupils put their hands up to tell her.

In Years One and Two, teachers gave out the Icarus’ worksheet #4 and asked pupils to discuss them in their groups. The worksheet questions were:

1. What do you see in your piece of the puzzle?
2. What is your piece all about?
3. What do you think the bigger picture is all about?

Fig. 5.10: Cut out jigsaw puzzle pieces
Reception pupils were given the questions orally by the teacher who repeated them throughout the activity. Shortly into it they lost concentration, got up, played with jigsaw pieces and tried to grab other ones. Teacher B asked Reception pupils to rejoin her in a whole class discussion where she repeated the questions and controlled the discussion. After each response she asked pupils *How do you know that?*

The Year One and Two groups of pupils discussed their jigsaw pieces for approximately 15 minutes before returning to the carpet for a whole class discussion. The teachers asked them the questions on the Icarus worksheet #4. Teacher D explained that the task was, ‘like the nest painting [Magritte] and you’re trying to figure out the story being told’ (Tape: 19.35). Year Two pupils began to chant ‘next one, what’s the next one?’ after each group gave their answers. Teacher D repeatedly asked them, *Do we have enough information to know what’s happening?* (Tape: 21.52) and *Are you changing your story a little bit now you’ve seen the next piece of the picture?* (Tape: 24.51). When the last piece of the puzzle was discussed a girl, who is an elective mute, actually spoke and said that a man was drowning in the water but her suggestion was overridden by the group. A short while later a boy told the class about a friend’s swimming accident and the discussion became animated.

All the teachers told pupils the artist’s name and timeframe when the painting was created, (for example ‘a long, long ago’). They explained that some artists ‘tell stories in their paintings, just like books’ (LWfieldnotes, 1/3/07). Several pupils were confused about how the sun shown in the painting could have melted Icarus’s wings, for example, a Year Two girl said:

> There’s a beautiful reflection on the water but it’s in the background. It’s just not where Icarus is falling. How did his wings melt? (Tape: 41.02)

Responding to this, another girl said:

> Perhaps he’s there because the wind has come and blown him over, so far, that way, after his wings melted. (Tape: 42.10)

Teacher C explained to Year One pupils that an ‘art critic’ (Tape: 38:02) had suggested the artist had repainted the painting and changed the position of the sun from its original place. She used most of the art information I had attached to the lesson plan. For the last ten minutes, teachers read out or told pupils the story of Icarus. Some pupils knew it already
but for others it was the first time. In Reception, Teacher B compared the story book illustration of Icarus she was reading to Brueghel’s painting and her class discussed the differences between them. She ended the discussion by saying, ‘The same story is told here by two different artists in different ways - just like stories are sometimes different’ (LWfieldnotes, 2/03/07). From time to time, Teacher C stopped to ask Year One pupils **What do you think will happen next?** and ended by saying, ‘It’s just like the jigsaw puzzle painting isn’t it, we want to know what happens next’ (Tape: 43:16). Teacher D acted out the story of Icarus in the Year Two class, using different voices and hand gestures.

**5.2.7.2 Team reflection and evaluation**

Teacher D asked if the team would consider adding a question about storytelling, for example: **What story can we tell us about this painting?** to the ISEE. As Literacy co-ordinator, she told us she was particularly interested in how looking at paintings affected pupils’ story writing abilities. She reported her pupils, particularly the boys, were keen to create narratives about the jigsaw pieces after the lesson and this was confirmed by comments on the TA’s observer record form. The teacher also raised the question whether boys and girls were responding differently to paintings as she had noticed girls were more inclined to explore personal feelings whereas boys preferred to discuss literal subject matter. Examining lesson transcripts the three other teachers were not convinced pupils’ responses were gendered, as boys in their classes referred to feelings just as readily.

The team discussed whether pupils worked collaboratively in the lesson and judged Year Two pupils were the only class able to work in collaboration and feedback as a group. The team concluded that some Year One and most Two pupils were able to understand that gathering information from the different groups had helped them to understand the painting as a whole. Teacher D said this was possibly because she drew their attention to the sequencing of information by asking them, **Do you have enough information to know what’s happening?**

The team noted that pupils in Years One and Two had frequently referred to Brueghel’s painting as ‘old fashioned’ and from ‘another time’. We reflected on whether these comments were because of the art information or in response to the dark varnished oil painting reproduction or to the way the figures were represented. The teachers recognised
that focusing pupils’ attention on only one piece of art information, for example the critics claim that the sun was re-positioned in Brueghel’s painting had worked best for her pupils.

5.2.8 Lesson Eight: Which animal suits the context?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selected painting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fig. 5.11: Portrait of Mr and Mrs Andrews, Thomas Gainsborough</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Plus cut-out details of animals taken from 26 paintings, prints, engravings, sculpture. Sourced from national art collections in London (Fig. 5.12).*

**Participants**
Teachers B, C, D; three classroom TAs (R,Y1,Y2); researcher and pupils; parent governor on monitoring visit to Reception.

**Preparation**
I selected details of animals taken from 26 paintings, prints and engravings found in London art collections, cut them out and laminated them for pupils to handle (see Fig. 5.12). Teachers arranged classrooms with three poster reproductions on display on easels and a whiteboard image projecting the painting on the classroom wall. Three sets of cut-outs were spread out on tables for pupils to walk around, handle and test out by placing them on the large poster reproduction. **Resources:** three poster reproductions of Gainsborough painting; three sets of 26 cut-out animal details.

**Activity**
All the teachers guided pupils through the ISEE steps and gave them art information in a whole class discussion. They explained about the context of the painting and asked them (individually or in pairs) to select an animal from a pre-selected group of 26 cut-out details of animals (see Fig. 5.12). Teachers gave them the task of choosing an animal to ‘suit the context of the painting’. Whole class discussion followed and pupils explained why they made their selection.

5.2.8.1 Description

Each teacher began by reminding pupils of the ISEE questions. Teacher B also asked Reception pupils *What do artists do?* before she talked about Gainsborough, but did not give his name. She explained who the people were in the painting and spoke about the artist’s love of painting trees and hills and forests and landscapes. She told them he sketched in the countryside and finished his paintings in his studio. She asked them if the setting of fields and trees looked familiar and they compared the landscape to where they lived.

Teacher C asked Year One pupils to describe the subject matter carefully and guess who the figures were. Then she told them they were ‘newlyweds’ and reminded them about marriage portraits and wedding videos used nowadays. She asked pupils why they thought
they were painted in a field. Teacher D asked each of the 28 pupils in Year Two to name one ‘object, person or thing’ (Tape: 1:23) in the painting. Afterwards, she told them the artist’s name and the title, his relationship to the couple in the painting and interest in landscape painting and the purpose of the portrait as a wedding memento. She asked pupils to find ‘clues’ (Tape: 4:01) to indicate whether the couple were rich or poor and how they spent their days (e.g. hunting, farming, dressing up). In each class, the teachers pointed to an ‘unfinished’ (LWfieldnotes, 7/03/07) section of the painting on the woman’s lap and asked pupils why the artist left it that way. One boy in Reception had already questioned this when he asked why the artist had made a ‘blurry bit’ on her dress (LW fieldnotes, 7/03/07). Next the teachers asked pupils to work in pairs to choose an animal cutout (shown in Fig. 5.12) that suited the ‘context of the picture or setting of the painting’ (Yr2 Tape: 19:50)

A few pupils in Reception noticed one animal cut-out was the tiger from Rousseau’s *The Tropical Storm: Surprised!* and scrambled for it. Several Reception and Year One pupils had difficulty working together and instead worked on their own. Most Reception pupils selected things they liked and said things like, ‘I chose it because I like cats’. Only a handful made choices related to context, for example one boy said: ‘I chose this dog (Hoogstraten, *Detail of Peep Show*) because it’s like the other one [in Gainsborough’s painting] and it looks like it might belong to the man’ (LWfieldnotes, 7/03/07, 13:00). One girl chose a cat (Turner, *Sleeping Cat*, detail c.1706, Tate) for its sensual qualities, saying: ‘it could lie on the lady’s lap and it would feel comfortable’ (LWfieldnotes, 7/03/07, 13:30). Several pupils, in each class, mentioned the artist in their responses; for example, one boy asked, ‘Did [the artist] know the lady and the man? Was it his sister and brother? Another pupil who was curious about the ‘empty space’ in the painting asked:
Did he [the artist] make a mistake? I think he did. He’s left it without anything in it. (LWfieldnotes, 8/03/07)

In contrast to Reception, the majority of Year One and Two pupils selected an animal-detail based on the context of the painting, for example:

The deer has been looking for a resting place and found it here, in this field (deer in detail from *The Wilton Diptych*) (LWfieldnotes, 8/03/07)

The two beagles, they look like the same background [as Gainsborough’s painting]. There could have been more. He could have had three hunting dogs, not one, in the painting. (detail of two dogs in Stubbs’ *A Couple of Foxhounds*) (LW fieldnotes, 8/03/07)

You wouldn’t find [one] here. That just wouldn’t be in England. (detail of rhinoceros in Durer’s *Rhinoceros*). (LWfieldnotes, 8/03/07)

Some pupils created narratives to explain their selections, for example one boy said:

Well, they’re trying to get those sheep, the ones in the back there…with this gun. They’re going to shoot them and then eat them or get some wool off them. They are using dogs to help them. That’s why I chose him. (Tape: 5.29) (detail of sheep in Gossaert’s *Adoration of the Kings*)

One pupil, having recognised there was something special about a bronze Egyptian cat speculated that:

I’d put the black cat here. (Bronze statuary of a cat) It’s a special place for a cat to go….A dead cat would have been buried underneath this one. (Tape: 28:15), detail of cat in Egyptian, *The Gayer-Anderson Cat*)

The majority of Year One and Two pupils were able to give rational explanations for their choice of animal cutout, although a handful made inappropriate selections such as an elephant, hippopotamus or parrot and gave silly reasons.

A fortnight later two siblings in Reception and Year Two brought in five postcards of watercolour, pen and ink, colour lithograph and woodblock print artworks of different ‘animals’ they had collected on a family trip to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London,\(^5\) to show their classmates.

---

5.2.8.2 Team reflection and evaluation

The team reflected on the art information and how teachers used it in the lesson. They concluded that some kinds of art information was easier to work into discussion than others, for example anecdotal stories that could serve as ‘titbits to catch pupils’ attention’ (Journal 12/3/07). Teacher A reiterated her belief that knowing about a painting was important and conversely not knowing had a negative effect on the learning opportunities she could provide.

The team concluded that Year One and Two pupils had understood the concepts of setting and context. Reviewing lesson transcripts, they agreed most of them understood the painting as a portrait of a rich couple from a long time ago, pictured sitting in a field near their house and surrounded by their dogs. In the lesson activity, some pupils made selections of animals to include in the landscape based on emotive reasons and others used prior knowledge to inform and explain their choices, for example one pupil suggested that the Egyptian cat might serve as a tomb marker for a dead pet.

I questioned the teachers as to whether or not they were using the ISEE as a framework for discussion. Two teachers said they deviated from it when it suited their purpose. All of them agreed their perception of it was changing as they found it less restrictive. All four teachers said they felt more comfortable about adding their own sub-question although there was little evidence that they did.

Reflecting on confidence levels, two team members said they felt more confident to assert their opinions in reflection meetings and this was evidenced by increased participation. Several others said they felt more confident in their teaching because they experienced fewer problems with class control than at the beginning.

At the end of the meeting, three teachers asked to test out the ISEE with an abstract painting in the next lesson. The headteacher, who had expressed an interest in teaching this lesson to the Year Two class, was particularly excited about this.
5.2.9 Lesson Nine: Interpreting a non figurative painting

Table 24
Selected painting
Fig. 5.13: *Untitled, Grey and Brown*, Fiona Rae

Participants
Teachers B, C, headteacher; three classroom assistants (R,Y1,Y2)

Preparation
The classroom was arranged in the usual way with an easel at the front of the class displaying an A3 sized reproduction copy of the painting. 30 postcards were given to pupils. I made title and caption cards (Rae Title card worksheet #5) (see Appendix 17) and Year One and Two teachers gave them out to pupils. Reception pupils did not use them. **Resources:** Display copy of painting/30 postcards/Rae Title Card worksheet #5.

Activity
Teachers guided the lesson using the ISEE questions to encourage interpretations. At the end, the teachers asked pupils to work in pairs to think of a title for the painting and then give feedback in whole class discussion. Year One and Two pupils were given a task to write a caption for the painting that showed their interpretation of it.

5.2.9.1 Description

Lesson Nine differed in several ways from the others. First, it revolved around a non-figurative, semi-abstract, contemporary painting and second, in Year Two, the headteacher taught a lesson for the first time.

In this lesson, both the Reception and Year One teachers chose not to display the A3 sized copy of the painting at the beginning. Instead they began by telling pupils about the artist ‘Fiona Rae’ (her sex, age, where she was born and where she lived and when the painting was done). Teacher C told Year One pupils that ‘art critics’ had described her work as humorous (‘funny’) and said she painted in an ‘abstract’ way. While Year One pupils remained silent throughout, pupils in Reception put their hands up to ask questions but were asked to sit still and listen by the teacher.

In contrast, the headteacher began with an impromptu discussion and asked Year Two pupils for their ‘initial reactions’ (Tape: 0:31) to the painting. Next, she asked them what they might tell someone about it. She ended by informing them about the artist as they talked about the painting. She asked them what the artist ‘intended to paint in this picture?’ (Tape: 13:36) and whether artists had the final say in how their artwork was understood.

The following discussion took place between two boys and a girl:
It’s crazy because it’s like the artist has just put down different things. (Boy, Tape: 14:05)
Yes, it’s really mad. It’s like she put things down, just randomly. (Boy, Tape: 14:11)
Not all the pieces go together in this painting. So, like some pieces are different
colours and they don’t all attach to each other. (Girl, Tape: 15:07)

Mad – she’s cut up pieces and really, no one knows what it is, only the artist knows.
Sometimes that happens, but that’s all right. (Boy, Tape: 15:23)
Yes! That’s right. The artist likes painting pictures you don’t understand.
(Boy, Tape: 15:32)

In each classroom, teachers played a game in which they tried to set the painting the ‘right
way up’ (LW fieldnotes, 20/3/07) on the easel while pupils shouted out directions to help
them. Teacher C told pupils: ‘it doesn’t really matter which way you put it when you look
at it’ (LW fieldnotes, 20/3/07). Both Reception and Year One teachers asked them about the
colours and shapes in the painting. Teacher C asked How do you feel about this painting?
and a Year One girl replied ‘it makes me want to laugh’. When Teacher C asked why, she
responded ‘because it reminds me of my sister’s pictures’. Some others replied, for
example they felt ‘all messed up’, ‘silly’ and ‘scrambled’. One boy said, ‘I just can’t
believe it.’ (LW fieldnotes, 20/3/07).

For the first time, all three teachers asked pupils if they liked the painting. Pupils’ reactions
to it were mixed in each class. Some laughed, smiled, nodded and shouted out ‘yes’ and
‘no’, while others looked puzzled and shook their heads. Teacher B and Teacher C told
them it was called ‘Untitled’ and gave pupils the task of finding a new title for it. As an
extension activity, pupils in Years One and Two were asked to write captions and give
reasons for them. The headteachers asked pupils to ‘help someone else understand the
painting the way you do’ (Tape: 47.22).

During discussion, Reception pupils misbehaved so Teacher B cut the lesson short. In Year
One pupils’ titles predominantly referred to things they observed in the painting such as
‘Spoonbill’ and ‘Marrow’ and ‘Weird shapes’. A boy approached the painting and
changed the way it was placed on the easel and then sat back down. In Year Two, pupils
completed the Rae Title card worksheet #5 with title and caption and handed them in
without discussion as time ran out. Some captions read, ‘This artist has cut up collages
from magazines’ (Rae worksheet #5: Boy) and ‘She has put random colours together’ (Rae
title card worksheet #5 Girl). Nearly a third of the class wrote about imaginary monsters they suggested were in the painting.

The next day, the headteacher told me she had continued the lesson in the afternoon and showed pupils paintings by Jackson Pollock on various world wide web sites before letting them research for other examples of his work. She asked them to consider whether Pollock ‘randomly chose different coloured paints and put them on his canvas?’ (Tape: 49:01). Then she asked them to compare Pollock’s work to Rae’s painting, *Untitled, Grey and Brown.*

**5.2.9.2 Team reflection and evaluation**

The aim of the lesson was to test out the ISEE on a non-figurative painting. From the start teachers thought it would be a challenge but wanted to see if it worked. In the team meeting, two teachers expressed disappointment. While they said it was a ‘nice change’ to work with this painting they had cut the lesson short (Reception, 16 minutes and Year One, 20 minutes) because of poor behaviour. By comparison, the headteacher, spent approximately 68 minutes in the lesson.

Reviewing lesson transcripts, the team realised the teachers had made more subjective comments about this painting than about any others. Teacher B was disappointed her Reception pupils ‘acted silly’ and chose childish titles. In contrast, the headteacher felt ‘inspired’ by what had happened in the Year Two lesson.

Teachers in Reception and Year One reported pupils acted *differently* in the lesson and commented there had been much laughter. I questioned whether pupils’ poor behaviour was a reaction to the painting itself or just a coincidence. The teachers felt it was in response to the painting. The headteacher’s comments after the lesson and my fieldnotes suggested Year Two pupils were focused and curious about the painting as they tried to work it out. Pupils asked a few questions and voiced strong opinions about it. The headteacher judged that pupils were involved in an ‘extended’ reflection of the painting and told us they were ‘totally comfortable’ taking time to look again and again at it (Journal, 27/03/07).

Two teachers said they were at a ‘loss’ about what to talk about, without recognisable subject matter. Instead they had asked questions that enquired into pupils’ judgement and
personal preferences. They said they struggled to develop a discussion and two had referred to the formal qualities of art like colour and shape to initiate one. I questioned two teachers’ comments that ‘it doesn’t matter which way you looked at this painting’ and this prompted laughter as one teacher replied ‘Well, it doesn’t, does it?’ (Journal 27/3/07).

The team concluded that the selection of artwork directly affected pupils’ and teachers’ behaviour and responses and their use of the ISEE. Two teachers concluded it was more difficult to use the ISEE with a non-figurative painting and said it had knocked their confidence.

5.3 EVALUATION OF CYCLE

In this section, I report on the observation team’s evaluative comments on the research lessons, the action team’s reflections and evaluations of the cycle and my own. The focus was on the ISEE strategy, teaching and learning, action research methodology and selection of artworks.

5.3.1 Summary of observers’ evaluative comments

The action team used the observer record forms to confirm, add to or raise issues about pupils’ behaviour, classroom settings, resources and incidents occurring in lessons. A triangulation of the data showed that pupils in all three classes were generally positive about all the lessons. The TAs’ frequently reported the words ‘keen’; ‘enthusiastic’; ‘interested’ and ‘excited’ about the pupils’ behaviour. That withstanding, they also noted Reception pupils sometimes grew restless and lost concentration after approximately 10 minutes, as seen in Lessons One, Seven and Nine. TAs in both Reception and Year One reported that pupils had ‘lots to say’ about the paintings but some of them found listening to each others’ ideas more challenging. The Year Two TA recorded higher levels of pupil participation after the second lesson.

In summarising behaviour, the TAs noted pupils became more relaxed over time and spoke more confidently about paintings. TAs’ comments indicated pupils enjoyed telling others their ideas in whole class discussions. All the TAs mentioned that pupils were keen to contribute ideas when teachers entered the discussion. Initial concerns about pupils ‘not taking any time to look quietly at pictures they were given’ (TA/1 observer record form)
were dismissed later by the same TA who reported pupils were ‘looking more carefully and noticing small details of paintings’.

All three TAs mentioned pupils took several lessons to become acclimatised to the slower pace of the research lessons. They also mentioned that pupils took awhile to appreciate what they were expected to do and were surprised they ‘only’ had to talk about paintings. The following Table 25 summarises comments from the TAs observation record forms on pupils’ behaviour, the ISEE strategy, classroom setting and resources.

Table 25 Summary of TAs observation comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TA FEEDBACK FROM OBSERVER RECORD FORMS</th>
<th>Triangulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources and activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1. Using games such as the jigsaw puzzle, voting game and ‘pick an animal’ as learning activities captured all pupils’ attention.</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2. Reception pupils liked small group activities but continued to need adult supervision</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3. Problems with variations of colour in reproductions</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4. Postcards less useful for Reception and Year One pupils who frequently played with them, disrupting lessons</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pupil behaviour</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5. Pupils appeared to like acting out what they saw in the paintings (Two TAs: YrR and Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6. Year Two pupils seemed reluctant to discuss their feelings about the painting (Lesson One) in earlier lessons</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7. Pupils appreciated teachers’ input in discussion (YrR, Yr1 and Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8. Over time pupils showed greater confidence when sharing ideas (YrR, Yr1 and Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T9. Pupils who don’t usually contribute to discussion began to join in (YrR, Yr1 and Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T10. Pupils in lower ability sets or with special educational needs also joined into both group and paired discussion (made relevant contributions Yr1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T11. Some pupils asked questions (Yr1 and Yr2) but not many</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T12. Pupils wanted to ‘know something’ about painting (Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T13. Pupils lost focus in Lesson Nine; they acted up and misbehaved (YrR and Yr1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atmosphere and setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14. Lessons Six and Nine was mentioned in particular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T15. The atmosphere was ‘different’ in Lesson Six and Lesson Nine (YrR, Yr1, Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T16. Pupils ‘appreciated’ opportunities to walk around and talk about the painting with friends (Lesson Six)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T17. Pupils seemed ‘more relaxed’; ‘more involved’ and participated more in discussion (Yr1 and Yr2 by end of art project. They listened to art information and sometimes argued about it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T18. ‘great atmosphere’ (Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEE STRATEGY:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T19. Pupils are aware of and use steps (Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T20. Reception can use steps but need constant supervision (YrR)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T21. Year One pupils know they should begin by describing what they see</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T22. Year One pupils increasingly use the phrase ‘I think...and ‘because' independently(Yr1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T23. Year Two pupils frequently use Steps One and Two without guidance (Yr2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step One:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T24. Pupils in Reception class liked this step (‘they seemed to feel at home’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T25. After Lesson Five, most Yr1 and Yr2 pupils stopped describing what they saw and jumped to step 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T26. Year Two pupils seem bored by this step</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step Two:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T27. Reception and Year One TAs said pupils could not use Step Two on their own</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T28. Majority of pupils in all three classes needed teacher’s input and guidance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

178
### Step Three: (using art information in interpretation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T29. YrR pupils were very attentive and listened well to stories about artist</th>
<th>✓</th>
<th>✓</th>
<th>✓</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T30. Majority of pupils interested primarily in personal stories about the artist</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T31. TAs were surprised that ‘so many’ pupils found the art information interesting</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T32. Year Two pupils used internet to research artists themselves</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T33. Hard to find evidence of pupils using art information in interpretations (Reception)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.2 Final team reflection and evaluation

In the last meeting on 27 March, 2010, the team carried out an overall reflection on and evaluation of actions in Cycle Two. In particular, the ISEE, its implementation and use by teachers and pupils and the use of art information and methodology were evaluated against the research and cycle aims. Unfortunately, this meeting was shortened because of teachers’ conflicting school commitments and a planned evaluation of selected paintings was postponed to the next cycle. As in Cycle One, evaluation was formative and mainly took the form of reflection and appraisal of key points that had been raised in previous team meetings. Recommendations or amendments were considered for the next cycle.

Prior to the meeting, I asked the teachers to prepare for discussion by reviewing their record forms and lesson transcripts and by collecting their thoughts or questions about issues or actions of relevance. I drew on my own fieldnotes and journal to identify points to discuss. During the meeting, I handed out copies of the TAs’ summary observation forms (see Table 25) and the team used their comments to triangulate what had happened in lessons. The following section summarises points made in this final meeting.

The team evaluated the pupils’ ability to use each step of the ISEE and there was general agreement, in line with TAs’ comments, that pupils were able to build their interpretations using the ISEE steps. The team found evidence that many pupils constructed these interpretations sequentially; recognising that looking carefully at a painting was a first step. In keeping with TAs’ observations, the action team judged that most pupils continued to require adult guidance to use the ISEE, although there was evidence from lesson transcripts that many Year One and Two pupils were able to move from Step One to Step Two on their own. Some Reception pupils were also capable of doing this but needed prompting.

Reflecting on data from the lessons and record forms, the team concluded there were increasing examples of pupils, from Reception to Year Two using the phrase ‘I think ...because’. The teachers were particularly pleased to see this had increased over time and
commented on its sophistication. They also expressed surprise at finding Reception pupils capable of reasoning in this way.

Throughout the cycle, the team had struggled to find clear evidence of pupils using art information although their interest in hearing about the artists and paintings was obvious from a growing number of references and comments they made about them (TA observer record forms). In the end, the team acknowledged difficulties in evaluating whether pupils had considered or synthesised art information in their final interpretations.

ISEE questions were evaluated and found to be supportive for pupils as they worked through their interpretations. Several teachers mentioned the question Why? was their most effective tool as it made pupils think about what they were saying. The recommendation was made to add it as a sub-question following each of the main ISEE questions.

The teachers’ use of the ISEE was continually monitored in team meetings in this cycle. When asked to comment individually on their experience of using it, two of them said they followed it closely while two others said they had adapted it to suit their teaching. When asked how she adapted it, one teacher said she changed the order of art information. A review of lesson transcripts showed teachers’ use of art information was generally inconsistent from one lesson to the next and one teacher to another. This made evaluating Step Three complicated as it relied on teachers’ dissemination of art information. The teachers concluded these were teething problems that would likely change with more practice. The teachers agreed they used art information when they could see a purpose for it or felt it would appeal to pupils’ interests. One teacher explained it was difficult to include the category of ‘timeframe’ in discussion at times. Despite this problem, none of the teachers, including the teacher who raised the issue, wanted to alter the art information categories.

The team reflected on the methodology. Data from team meeting transcripts and fieldnotes showed meetings had become more efficient, and therefore effective, in timing and discussion. Overall, a general consensus was that team meetings had a sharper focus and this had improved individual and group reflections.
5.4 RESEARCHER’S REFLECTION

To facilitate my own reflections on the cycle, I re-examined data from teacher and observer record forms and transcripts and fieldnotes from 27 lessons and seven team meetings. I re-checked coded patterns with the help of a social science researcher. I also discussed the process of undertaking reflection with colleagues at my university who were also engaged in action research or reflectivity in practice. My journal was helpful for recalling incidents, comments, understandings and perceptions of actions during the cycle.

Initially, in Cycle One, teachers told me they were ‘interested’, ‘excited’ and ‘curious’ (Journal 11/12/06) about the teaching in Cycle Two, although I also registered some apprehension. On reflection, I became critically aware of the journey undertaken over the past nine weeks and felt it had been characterised by shifts in responsibilities and ownership of the research. My reflections in this section are discussed in four groups: i) action research, including a section on what learned about the methodology (Research Question Six; ii) teaching and learning (Research Question Five; iii) modes of engagement (Research Question Four) and iv) selection of paintings.

5.4.1 Action Research

5.4.1.1 Shifting balances and leadership

At times, the teachers and I admitted that taking part in an action research was physically as well as emotionally tiring (Journal, 27/3/07). Teacher-researcher literature recognises research in practice can be hard work (Cochrane-Smith and Lyttle, 1993; Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2009:60). For one teacher, she told me it was stressful at times working from someone else’s lesson plans and another reported negative feelings of a lack of control over her weekly teaching. In contrast, my concerns centred on issues of relinquishing control and passing on leadership. For example, one teacher repeatedly asked me for assurance about what she was doing in lessons, saying, ‘Do you want me to ask this question?’ (Lesson Two) and ‘Is that enough, Mrs W? Should I do more?’ (Lesson Three) and I found myself having to lead her along. I wondered whether these comments arose from a desire to shift responsibility or if they were an act of deference. Mostly, I worried whether they indicated real concern on her part about not knowing what to do as this would suggest the need for further training.
I reflected on one teacher’s passing comment, recorded in my journal, that it was difficult having me observe their teaching having designed the strategy and lesson plans (Journal, 5/3/07). I thought about the effect this may have had on the actions and also the teachers’ sense of ownership of the research. ‘Taking ownership’ was a theme discussed regularly in team meetings. I began to read more criticism in the action research literature about ‘insider/outsider’ researchers (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 2003: 12) and problems associated with them, for example emerging hierarchies in top-down situations such as Halsall (1998) and Nind (2003) talk about, and ownership and cultural differences in working communities.

My reflections led me to consider whether my multiple roles in the action research were preventing teachers from becoming more dominant or forthright about issues such as lesson organisation and teaching the ISEE. I reviewed my actions as co-ordinator and the conscious effort I made to step back from the role of leader but recognised I had not always succeeded. Stenhouse (1975) and McTaggart (1997) claim there is nothing problematic or unnatural about friction between a leader and team members in action research, but other researchers, for example Bognar (2006: 138) reported being uncomfortable about working in such an environment. She reported frustration when co-collaborators remained dependent on her and failed to ‘make their own professional decisions’ (Whitehead et al., 2006:138) and I acknowledged similar feelings in this research. Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (1992:207) comment on the importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities in action research. They also conclude that in participatory action research, a leader generally acts as facilitator by ‘encouraging and co-ordinating’ actions whereas in emancipatory action research, they more likely take on a ‘collaborative’ role. I wondered if I had confused the action research by believing I could play both roles of team leader and member, at the same time. As I became aware of ownership problems, I searched for other examples of action research conducted in schools and found similar concerns (Au, 2002; Blatherwick, 1998; Liu, 2005; Moura, 2000) about conflicting roles in group research.

5.4.1.2 Insider/Outsider Researcher

I reflected back to my initial expectations of team members sharing expertise and different sets of skills and was disappointed to find not all the teachers acted on this view. At times during team meetings, I questioned whether the teachers viewed me as an outsider or
dismissed me as an academic researcher (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 2003). In this cycle, I no longer played the role of art history specialist or subject trainer and became more aware of my lack of training as a primary educator as the teachers began the teaching segment.

I recalled Whitehead and McNiff’s (2006: 21) conviction that teachers should lead their own evaluations as well as theorising about practice and that outsider researchers should not act as interpreters for them. Reflecting on this, I realised I had inadvertently stepped into this role when part way through the cycle a teacher took me aside and asked me not to ‘comment on what worked or didn’t work in lessons’ or how different teachers taught lessons as it made her uncomfortable (Journal 9/2/07). As a consequence, I resolved to focus only on evaluation of the ISEE rather than pedagogical issues such as teaching styles. When I read about power struggles in group dynamics (Forsyth, 2006:391), I questioned whether this was an individual or collective problem.

5.4.1.3 Methodology for changing practice
My own reflection on events taking place and perceptions of teachers’ interpretations indicated that working in a new area of the curriculum, and not in full control of their teaching practice had been taxing for most of them. Some of them told me it was stressful implementing someone else’s lesson plans. Overall, the action team found that reflection and evaluation was more complicated than expected and judged that some teachers were more comfortable using this methodology than others. My impression was that overall it appeared to be getting easier for all team members to voice opinions, reflections and thoughts aloud. Talking about practical issues, such as timing, pace of lessons, behaviour management or pupils’ learning was more straightforward than reflecting on, for example, problems arising as a result of misunderstandings about the ISEE.

We learned that using action research methodology to delve deeper into one’s own practice collectively required our concerted efforts to overcome personal feelings of sensitivity and fear of criticism. As a team, we judged we had become more decisive and objective about our actions and this helped us to make changes that moved the research forward, for example when we recognised the pupils needed more access to the artworks. Stringer (2007) claims that reflective practitioners grow into their reflective roles and the team
discussed this and judged that practise was improving the way we worked together and how we understood our respective practices.

Overall, the team was satisfied that the methodology was helping to change thinking about their art teaching practice. I flagged up my concern, however, about whether the teachers had bought into the research in a way that would encourage them to take more responsibility for it in the final cycle when they designed their own lessons.

5.4.2 Teaching and learning

All the teachers professed to a growing confidence using the ISEE as time progressed. But I found this was not always demonstrated by their actions, particularly when I examined and reflected on the lack of deviation from lesson plans and their use of art information. I was surprised to find teachers sometimes omitted or ignored it. I considered their initial concerns about a lack of knowledge about paintings and fears of not knowing answers to pupils’ questions and realised these worries remained unresolved because some of them made no attempt to research or engage with the art information. I did find evidence that two teachers were attempting to gain confidence, one by practicing with her child at home and another by researching the various artists.

5.4.2.1 Teaching styles, modes and delivery

Despite the reported conversation with one teacher about commenting on teaching practice, team members were aware from the beginning that collective group reflection on the testing out of the ISEE would likely entail discussion of different teaching styles and approaches. In writing about classroom research, Hopkins suggests ‘fine teachers’ are recognised for their capacity for critical and systematic reflection on practice (Hopkins, 2002:163; Hopkins and Stern, 1996) and in this cycle, despite the earlier warning, I found most teachers increasingly offered examples from their own teaching practice for reflection and evaluation.

5.4.2.2 Problems encountered with the ISEE

Near the end of the cycle, as part of my ongoing researcher reflection, I became concerned that pupils had lost a sense of the big picture when they looked at a painting in detail. Part of my concern arose from reading Vygotsky’s (2003) views on meaning construction when he suggests learners should begin with a holistic understanding of something before
considering it in detail. I reflected on data from lessons and record forms and discussed it at a team meeting (13/3/07). The team recognised the question *What do you see?* required pupils to observe only details and so amended Step One to include the new, first question, *What is this of?* In this final reflection I judged this new question gave pupils a better starting point for their interpretations.

When I reviewed lesson transcripts during this period of reflection, I found inconsistencies in the way the teachers and I understood the question *Why?* in Step Two. This question was meant to be *Why is this subject matter/object included in the painting?* but some teachers had shortened it simply to *Why?* For example, when one teacher asked a pupil *What do you see?* about de Hooch’s *Courtyard in a House in Delft* (Fig. 5.3) and a pupil replied, ‘I see a broom on the floor’ the teacher’s next question was, *Why?* which confused him as he tried to answer *why* he saw a broom in the painting. In another example, when a Year Two pupil said she saw ‘a mother’ in the same painting, her teacher questioned *Why?* which led her to explain because she could ‘see’ her. My intention for the Step Two question, *Why is [it] in the painting?* was to encourage pupils to think about the subject matter and how it contributed to the overall meaning. Because all the teachers appeared to be confused I decided to write a letter to them explaining Step Two in further detail.

5.4.2.3 Pupils’ application of ISEE

On reflection, I was surprised that the age factor did not play a greater role in pupils’ ability to interpret paintings. Like the TAs and teachers, I too recognised that pupils’ age negatively influenced their ability to verbalise thoughts and their attention span. However, this did not affect their ability to look at, talk about and interpret paintings.

Pupils gained from sharing their ideas with others. The Year Two teacher actively encouraged her pupils to consider and pinch ideas. There were two occasions, however when it negatively affected pupils’ interpretations because they all copied the same idea. Pupils also valued sharing ideas with the teachers. Comments made by TAs, teachers and me confirmed this. I understood this as consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) emphasis on social exchange and the way he describes pupil/teacher interactions in learning.

I concluded pupils were eager to engage in research lessons when activities were presented as *investigations* or *games* as it encouraged their curiosity. The ISEE questions *What do*
you see? and Why is it there? encouraged the idea of searching for clues and playing detective and then justifying why subject matter was included. Pupils’ responses showed an increasing use of thinking skills such as reasoning, as evidenced by the following exchange in Reception:

Pupil: There’s a yellow thing blowing off the ship there.
Teacher A: What is it? Can you describe it? Why is it there?
Pupil: It’s a sail and there’s wind in it.
Teacher A: Why, what does this mean, do you think?
Pupil: It’s windy, there’s wind blowing it, it’s a windy day.
(Brueghel’s The Fall of Icarus, Fig.5.9) (LWfieldnotes, 2/3/07)

When I re-examined lesson transcripts I judged that pupils were becoming aware they could figure out what paintings were about and this appeared to empower them. I noticed more of them volunteering to speak in the lessons by the end of the cycle. When teachers prompted them to explain their ideas it reinforced their sense of ownership. Having their interpretations accepted by others gave them confidence and I was reminded of Bruner’s claim that learners develop a sense of agency when they see themselves as knowledgeable.

5.4.3 Modes of engagement

In a journal entry, I recorded that pupils’ initial encounters with artworks had a lasting effect on their interpretations of them and when I reflected on this I recognised it was important for the team to examine their responses to paintings. By this, I meant both their reactions or affective responses to artworks as well as what they said about them. My conceptual framework assumed that interpretation is a synthesis of various forms of knowledge. Reflecting on the data from lesson transcripts, I found pupils’ reactions or responses to paintings dictated which form of knowledge they used to interpret them. For example, when teachers posed questions such as Why is this included in the painting? pupils’ interpretations demonstrated cognitive reasoning that relied on prior or existing knowledge or experience or given factual knowledge. When teachers posed the question How do you feel about this painting? it called on their emotions as they used memories, events or incidents to explain their interpretations. An example of this was demonstrated by several pupils when they said they felt cold looking at the icy blue mountain in Le Domaine d’Arnheim (Fig. 5.6) and then suggested the eggs in the abandoned nest were also ‘cold’ without the mother bird.
I had not expected emotion or feelings to play such a role in pupils’ interpretations. I was reminded of Fish’s (1980) claim that affective response is the meaning and considered whether this applied to pupils’ interpretations. I returned to literature about reception theory and in particular Iser (2006); Johnson (2007) and Langer (1953). I reviewed examples of pupils’ responses and found they not only made emotional links with subject matter, for example, some were influenced by their feelings for animals they selected to accompany the painting of Mr and Mrs Andrews (Fig. 5.11) but some also appeared to put themselves into the frame of the painting. I judged that empathising with animate subject matter, such as the people or animals in paintings, was a demonstration of the pupils’ imagination and emotion.

I reflected on pupils’ inclination to make links between what they observed in paintings and familiar films, books and DVDs (LWfieldnotes, 12/1/07; 1/2/07; 9/2/07). One TA (observation form, 12/1/07) reported a Year One pupil became excited when he recognised the painting, The Tropical Storm: Surprised! (Fig.5.2) looked like a scene from The Jungle Book, a video film he watched at home. The headteacher also reported a girl’s comments that a child in The Graham Children (Fig. 5.8) reminded her of the Snow Queen from Narnia (HT observation form 18/1/07) and my fieldnotes recorded an example when a Year Two boy talked about the ‘smug smile’ of the woman in de Hooch’s Courtyard of a House in Delft (Fig. 5.3) with reference to the ‘smug smile’ of the character Sid from Six Dinners Sid (Tape: 29.01). In each case, I wondered if pupils were searching their visual memories for links between what they saw and what they knew about and this reminded me of Stephens and Watson’s (1994:32) suggestion that ‘texts are linked to others texts by reminiscences, similarities, re-workings, general affiliations, intellectual contexts and story patterns’. I reflected on Evans (1998) claim that readers identify sub-texts to help them make sense of an original text. I also reconsidered literature on intertextuality and the notion that meaning is constructed through the interrelationships between texts (Kristeva, 1980; Paatela-Nieminen, 1998, 2005, 2008).

I reflected on the teachers’ concerns about ‘imagined’ subject matter and how to react to it. I wondered why some pupils used it while others didn’t. In some cases I decided they were describing or inventing ‘scenarios’ to explain what was happening in a painting. For example in Year Two, when pupils were discussing de Hooch’s Courtyard of a House in
**Delft** (Fig. 5.3) a boy spoke of a network of roads ‘where cars go’ that was beyond the visible subject matter of outbuildings and a courtyard garden. This interested me because I realised pupils were using imagination to help them interpret paintings.

### 5.4.4 Selection of paintings

Reflecting on several incidents when pupils tried to touch, stand beside, hold, feel the surface of and in one case, lick them, I wondered whether they were confused about them. I realised most pupils must have thought the paintings were original artworks because of the special way the teachers, TAs and I treated them, for example by placing them on easels and asking pupils to be careful of them. Perhaps this confusion contributed to their concern about whether subject matter was ‘real’.

When I reflected on the selection of artworks I was pleased they had met the aims of all the lessons. Rousseau’s **Tropical Storm, Surprised!** (Fig. 5.2) with the tiger captured all the pupils’ attention in the diagnostic lesson and encouraged them to talk about subject matter. **Courtyard of a House in Delft** (Fig. 5.3) about which one teacher had expressed initial concerns, worked well spread over three lessons. Following Lesson Four, one TA recorded her surprise at the continued interest displayed by pupils (Yr1 Observer record form, 1/2/07). However, while it served its purpose over three lessons, in hindsight I concluded it was not the most vibrant or exciting painting I could have chosen because it needed to capture not only the pupils but teachers’ enthusiasm and I judged it had not. **Le Domaine D’Arnheim** (Fig. 5.6) met the aims of Lesson Five and provided the necessary ambiguity. It also gave two teachers the opportunity to discuss the influence dreams can have on art. There was a discrepancy between TAs’ observational comments and the teachers’ views of whether it sustained pupil interest over time.

The pupils’ very positive reception of Hogarth’s **The Graham Children** (Fig. 5.8) surprised all the team. Having considered it a traditional example of fine art portrait painting, I was pleased by pupils’ interest in the children in the painting and the similarities and differences they found between them. I was delighted by the impact it made and pleased that the teachers witnessed the potential of using traditional fine art paintings in art lessons.

Overall, Brueghel’s painting, **The Fall of Icarus** (Fig. 5.9) was disappointing, however because there was insufficient time to explore it properly in the lesson. Moreover, the
excitement of listening to the story of Icarus dominated pupils’ interpretations rather than an appreciation of the painting.

Gainsborough’s portrait of Mr and Mrs Andrews (Fig. 5.11) was a useful painting for discussing context, however, my journal recorded my concern that it was viewed mainly as ‘background scenery’ (Journal: 12/3/07) for the lesson activity. Although many Year One and Two pupils and some in Reception understood the context of an English landscape I suspected they engaged more with the game than the painting. On reflection, I felt I had inadvertently reduced its value by treating it as illustration or wallpaper for a learning exercise and I was disappointed by this.

The non-figurative painting, Untitled, Grey and Brown (Fig.5.13) was an eye-opener for several reasons. Although the teachers had unanimously said they wanted to test out the ISEE on an ‘abstract’ painting, only one teacher (headteacher) said she liked working with this one. When I reflected on lesson transcripts, I realised two teachers lost confidence teaching this lesson as a direct result of my selection of artwork. This finding confirmed my original assumption that non specialist classroom teachers need narrative subject matter to capture pupils’ interest to talk about paintings. For the first (and only) time in the research lessons, all three teachers posed the question, Do you like this painting? which drew out judgmental comments. My fieldnote comments matched teachers and TAs’ record forms and reported pupil behaviour was different in this lesson. I welcomed the controversy that surrounded this painting as it provoked a wide range of opinions and interpretations from pupils.

5.4.4.1 New technologies

On two occasions, I recorded (LWfieldnotes 2/2/07 and 22/2/07) that pupils were dissatisfied by the limited access they were given to touch, hold and manipulate the reproduction images. I concluded their frustration centred on their inability to interact with them. In the lesson on The Graham Children (Fig.5.8) when copies of the painting were displayed on classroom computers and the interactive whiteboard, some Reception and Year Two pupils tried to manipulate the computer mouse to change the ‘picture’ of the children. One boy concluded ‘it doesn’t work’ when he tried to move them about on the computer screen. This made most pupils lose interest in the picture. I guessed many pupils were used to a different kind of contact with visual images on computer screens. Displaying
the painting on the computer and whiteboard screens gave pupils the promise of interactivity such as they may have experienced in other lessons or playing on computer games, game consoles like gameboys, playstations, Xbox, etc. But they were denied access because it was not an animated cartoon or image to manipulate. I reflected on new, visual technologies and how they might enhance young children’s engagement with artworks. Chapman (1997:123) suggests computer art programmes are fast growing and maintains they are suitable technology for primary aged children. Bell (2000) and Steers (2009:148) highlight recent trends towards the use of computer technologies in art and design curriculum. From my observations of lessons in Reception, I realised even the youngest pupils were capable of, and interested in, working with visual images of paintings using new technologies.