DOCTORAL THESIS

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

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CHAPTER SEVEN: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

7.0 Introduction

Chapter Seven reports my interpretations and analysis of the three themes identified in the previous chapter. The coded patterns and categories shown in Appendix 18 provided the framework for my approach to the thematic analysis of data. The chapter is divided into three sections related to the following themes:

i)   The impact of the teacher variable on the ISEE and interpreting art

ii)   Pupils' affective responses to paintings using the ISEE

iii)   The role of imagination in art interpretation

7.0.1 Aims

The aim of the thematic analysis was for me to reflect on and theorise data that arose from the descriptions of empirical research so as to gain a deeper, more informed understanding of it to answer research questions three and four and to inform my reflective analysis for question five. In addition, findings from the thematic analyses were intended to feed into the overarching reflective analysis undertaken to answer the remaining research questions.

7.0.2 Method

My background as an art historian meant that I had no formal training in educational learning theories or experience applying them in practice. Because of this, I was aware my perspective on art education and teaching in particular was that of a novice at times. This meant that I had to revisit literature and studies about teaching practice, related issues and classroom research to better understand the teacher variable. In this I recognised a problem many art historians face when moving from art history to art education.

For the analysis it was necessary to carry out additional reading in two areas I had not anticipated at the start of the research so as to extend my understanding of theory. This reading formed a part of my method for thematic analysis. The first review of literature related to affective responses to art and the second to imagination in art interpretation. In the first, I explored literature about affect and affective responses in psychology and art education. In the second, I reviewed literature about imagination in various disciplines including philosophy, theology, art and general education to broaden my knowledge.

Next, I revisited and reflected on data from colour/number coded transcripts of research lessons and team meetings, findings from team reflections and evaluations and my overall reflections, teacher and observer record forms, triangulated findings and my fieldnotes and reflective journal that related to each of the themes. After this I examined and analysed them alongside the relevant theory and literature. This analysis is reported in the next three sections.

7.1 THEME ONE: THE IMPACT OF THE TEACHER VARIABLE

7.1.0 Introduction

In an effort to determine which variable most affected the implementation of the ISEE strategy and art interpretation, I had considered the teachers, pupils, researcher, environment, settings, delivery, timing and pace of lessons, selection of paintings and classroom resources. Each of these factors impacted on it in some way, but in the end, the teacher variable, understood as differences between the teachers, was identified as the most significant. According to Van Dalen (1983:176), human characteristics of the teacher variable often affect the outcomes of classroom-based research and he lists attitudes, interests, abilities and teaching styles as contributing factors. Individuals are unique and have diverse cultural backgrounds and experience which add to their personal and professional lives (Pollard, 2008). Recurrences in coding patterns found in the data provided evidence of the impact individual teachers had on the delivery and implementation of the ISEE and on the lessons. I compared the above-mentioned characteristics between the teachers and looked at other studies that discussed the teacher variable to better understand them (Blatherwick, 1998; Chapman, 2003; Liu, 2005; Moura, 2000)

7.1.1 Impact of teacher variable and its ripple effect

Although the focus of the research was on the ISEE strategy and underlying framework, inevitably there were moments when pedagogy played a noticeable and defining part in what was examined. The teachers' varied teaching styles, ability and willingness to risk take, work in open ended environments, participate with, and support pupils in child-oriented discussion and extend their ideas through teacher-led questioning conspired to differentiate one teacher's lessons from another. Their attitudes, personalities, confidence,

interest in, and experience of art before and during the action research impacted on how the lessons were taught as well as pupils' perception of the ISEE and paintings. According to Schön (1983), teachers working in reflective environments frequently engage in reflection *in* and *on practice* which suggests they exist in a relatively high state of awareness of their teaching style and performance (Austerlitz, 2008). In this research, the participating teachers were aware of their imprint on the teaching and learning through the continuous reflection that was carried out.

7.1.2 Researcher presence

My presence as the designer of the ISEE and research lessons must have had an effect on how the teachers implemented the strategy and delivered the lessons and their sense of ownership and autonomy and I tried to interpret the data bearing this in mind. Without question, I had preconceived expectations about how they should test out the ISEE in lessons although I did not want to impose my views. Over all, my genuine aspiration was for them to assert themselves in any way they felt was necessary to implement the ISEE and to make changes accordingly. My underlying objective was to see how they applied the strategy and delivered the art information. Despite this, they may have assumed I had preconceived ideas they had to match. They may also have remained wary of my presence as an art expert or a school governor and this might have impacted on their roles and sense of power and agency in the action research.

7.1.3 Teaching in observed settings

According to Nias (1989), teachers' strengths and weaknesses are quickly revealed in the classroom environment and this puts pressure on them particularly when their lessons are observed. Watkins, Carnell and Lodge (2007:63) suggest they feel a tension because of a sense of responsibility for their performance when they teach. From the beginning, these teachers were aware the classroom TAs and I would be observing and commenting on lessons. While they were willing to be observed, I was concerned about the impact this might have on their self esteem (Pollard, 2008). Hargreaves (1994), Pollard (2008), Sachs (2003) and Wood (1998) all remind researchers that classroom teaching is deeply personal and it sometimes places teachers in challenging situations. These teachers admitted finding some research lessons stressful, especially when there was a higher than usual adult presence in their classroom or when they felt uneasy or stretched by a lesson plan or

painting and this is typical in literature on observed teaching (Nias, 1989). The teachers handled the pressure in different ways. For example, one teacher described the questions about *Le Domaine d'Arnheim* (fig. 5.6) as 'taxing' because the descriptive words I included for the voting game, such as 'majestic', were too difficult for her pupils to understand. Instead of changing them, she became anxious as she tried to follow my lesson plan *verbatim* and this negatively impacted on the learning and undermined her confidence in teaching the lesson. On another occasion, three headteachers from other schools in the locality joined a lesson to observe good practice. Although one teacher felt stimulated by their presence and keen to show them the art project in action, others experienced this as stressful. Under pressure and teaching new and unfamiliar material from someone else's lesson plans the teachers reacted by shortening lessons and tightening control over whole class discussions which limited the learning potential.

7.1.4 Attitudes, interest and beliefs about art

Educational researchers cite teachers' attitudes as playing a significant part in the formation of pupils' attitudes (Sullivan, 2005; Tella, 2008).The summary of findings from the staff questionnaire in Cycle One (reported on page 99) confirmed these teachers were generalists, with no specialist art teacher training. However, they were keen to take part in the action research and saw it as professional development. Each of the teachers expressed personal aspirations for the research ranging from increasing confidence working with visual material to developing their own skills for interpreting art. From this, I gathered they had positive attitudes towards engaging with paintings in the research.

Oreck (2004) agrees that art teachers' attitudes and beliefs have more influence over their teaching than any other personal characteristic. From the literature on teacher effectiveness, there is evidence that teachers' interest in particular subject areas has a 'profound' effect on learners' performance and outlook (Tella, 2008:22). According to Claxton (1990: 152) 'much of teachers' influence on the development of young people's learning is achieved through their information, unguarded language and the implicit theories they hold'. Therefore, pupils' perceptions of the teachers' attitudes towards art were important in this research.

Body language in the form of gestures and expressions, as well as words in dialogue communicate messages either consciously or subconsciously to the onlooker and in the action research, the way teachers engaged with the artworks affected pupils' reception of the lessons and paintings. For example, the fuss they made over the paintings gave pupils the impression that art is special and this positively affected their view of them.

In his study of pre-service teachers, Parajes (1992: 328) established that a 'strong relationship between teachers 'educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions and classroom practice leaves a clear imprint on their pupils' learning. Efland (1995) acknowledges this when he argues that teachers' beliefs and the value they place on engaging with art affects whether it is taught or not. I suggest their beliefs also affect what and how it is taught. For example, in Cycles Two and Three, the teachers' delivery of art information was inconsistent. By way of explanation, one teacher said she could not see the relevance of some of it. This raised questions for me about whether the teachers were genuinely interested in teaching about art and artists and if they really valued it. If teachers are not motivated to include art information in their teaching they may not use it and if this occurs, the ISEE strategy is incomplete.

The teachers' interest and confidence in talking about paintings affected their delivery in lessons. As discussed on page 114, the teachers expressed preferences for the paintings they wanted to work with from the start. Their expectations were that they would be talking about exemplars of traditional fine art. Two of the five teachers were adamant they did not want to use *modern* artworks in the lessons, although later the team did test the ISEE on a contemporary, non-figurative painting. Two of the three teachers who taught this lesson admitted finding the painting, ***Untitled, Grey and Brown*** (fig. 5.13) challenging. One of them said she was 'lost for what to talk about' (LWfieldnotes, 27/03/07) and moved pupils quickly through the steps of the ISEE because it made her 'uncomfortable' (LWfieldnotes, 27/03/07).

There was no evidence teachers' commitment to the action research played a role in how they taught the research lessons or implemented the ISEE. They were committed to it and worked particularly hard to timetable lessons effectively and plan and carry them out over two school terms. They were professional in every aspect of their teaching.

7.1.4.1 Confidence

The teachers expressed many different emotions in the lead up to the start of Cycle Two, ranging from excitement and curiosity to nervous apprehension. Their anxiety or worries centred mainly on their own lack of confidence. Tella (2008) calls these 'affective variables'. In the early stage of Cycle Two, one teacher continually asked for my reassurance during lessons. Pupils must have questioned the legitimacy of their learning when she repeatedly asked me, 'Is this what you want?' and 'Should I do more?' By the end of the cycle, each teacher claimed to be confident about talking about paintings with pupils. To gain confidence, two teachers developed coping strategies for example practicising lesson plans with her child at home or reading around the subject (Journal 29/11/06) and watching art programmes on television to broaden her knowledge about paintings. The teachers' growing confidence affected their tone and manner and the ease with which they involved pupils in whole class discussion. As their confidence levels increased, they used the ISEE strategy more flexibly and pupils began to mirror this confidence in the way they too talked about paintings.

When teachers felt confident they altered the classroom settings; for example, in Lesson Four, one teacher shifted the class to the school library and allowed pupils to sit informally on cushions as they discussed a painting. In these cases, input from teachers and pupils were most often equal and non-hierarchical. Confident teachers also used animation and acted out scenarios in the paintings or used dramatic voices to tell stories about them; turned lessons into detective games, unveiled 'hidden' paintings, or pretended to struggle to find the right way to set them on an easel. A few times they added sub-questions to those in the ISEE, or talked about aspects of painting, technique, colours and form they were already familiar with. At times, they allowed class discussions to take a natural course without rushing to complete a schedule. All of these actions made the learning environment more cohesive, stimulating and effective and ultimately this supported the implementation of the ISEE.

When they lacked confidence, teachers sped through delivery, interpreted what they thought pupils meant rather than listening to what they said or how they reacted or responded to the artworks. This negatively affected pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards the learning and prompted confusion about what their teachers expected them to do.

Overall, I recognised teachers relied on operating within their comfort zones and this had positive and negative consequences for the implementation of the ISEE and pupils' learning. It was positive when they were confident enough to step back and allow pupils to lead discussions or take time to think about the paintings and negative when their lack of confidence meant they were rigid in the questions they posed or ignored opportunities to pursue pupils' unexpected ideas or tight in their control of class discussions.

7.1.4.2 Control

Control, or being in control, was an issue most teachers faced or were concerned about. This refers not only to class behaviour but to their personal sense of being in control of learning, lessons and the direction of class discussions. At the beginning of the action research, the teachers faced some discipline problems. In the lesson about *The Graham Children* (fig. 5.8), pupils were allowed to wander around the classroom looking at multiple copies of it on whiteboard screens, computers and in books and this caused disruption. Following this experiment, all the teachers wanted to revert to a traditional classroom setting. It was clear this enabled the kind of control over lesson activities and environment they preferred although it was counter to the risk taking that the team had envisaged at the start. Pollard (2008:104) provides an explanation for this when he suggests that tactical realism must always remain even when ideological thinking is being carried out in classrooms. In the end, the classroom setting was dependent on the balance each individual teacher struck between pupil freedom and teacher control.

The lack of control the teachers' experienced in the classroom was caused, in part by the different pace of the lessons. By allowing pupils time to reflect on and think about the paintings, teachers needed to timetable thinking time. Lessons became less assessment or product-driven and consequently less target-oriented. Most teachers found it difficult to adapt straightaway to the slower pace and this, combined with the teachers' lessened control bewildered the pupils who also took time to adjust. The teachers recognised it was time-consuming waiting for the 'light bulb' to come on (Headteacher's comment, 08/05/07, see Appendix 36) as pupils gathered and reflected on ideas and information. In some cases, teachers asked pupils to look quietly at a painting for a few minutes but gave them less than one minute to do so. Their tendency was to keep lessons moving so as to keep control. In a team meeting (08/05/07), the teachers acknowledged that interpreting art involved deep

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learning (Biggs and Tang, 2007; Du, Havard and Li, 2005) or slow, unhurried learning as the headteacher described it at first, and this had implications for timing, delivery and teaching style. When the teachers were able to step back, accept and feel comfortable with the slower rhythm of the research lessons pupils' reflections were appreciably richer.

On several occasions, the teachers expressed unease about how to handle class discussion when pupils fantasised subject matter they claimed to observe in paintings or spoke of imaginary events taking place. Only one teacher was comfortable venturing into this realm of make believe, while the others generally disliked it and found this kind of thinking unpredictable and difficult to control, support or extend in the class discussion.

7.1.5 Ownership

I discovered some teachers found it problematic to teach lessons designed by someone else on a continual basis and this is reported in teacher-training literature (Paek, 2006). This impacted negatively on their sense of ownership and responsibility for lessons and it may have led to them accepting rather than questioning what I was expecting them to do. In hindsight, this probably exacerbated the difficulties they all experienced with Step Two because no one challenged me or questioned the intended purpose of asking the question, ***Why is this subject matter in the painting?*** As a result, misunderstandings continued throughout most of Cycle Two. Although the teachers practiced each step of the ISEE in Cycle One and were able to use it to interpret a painting, this did not necessarily mean they took ownership of it. Only one of them seemed to feel it was their role to make changes to adapt or improve it which meant the others did not make it their own.

I witnessed the impact of teachers' different personalities from the first lesson when one of them dispensed with an opening introduction to the art project and replaced it with a bold challenge, 'I'm going to ask you a tricky question'(Tape: 1:34). In another lesson, the same teacher created a new classroom setting for the pupils and asked them to walk around her 'gallery' while the others continued to copy my lesson plans. These examples are evidence of her intention to own and direct the lessons and they showed me how teachers adapt lesson plans so as to gain ownership. Furthermore, they captured pupils' attention.

Some teachers claimed the difficulties they experienced in Cycle Two were due, in part, to a lack of input in the selection of paintings. This may have furthered their sense of dependency and lack of control over their teaching. When the teachers chose their own painting and designed lesson plans around class topic work for the final lesson, they were judged to be most successful. Clearly the teachers gained confidence for teaching art interpretation when they controlled all aspects of it. Therefore, it was unsurprising to find that confidence gave them ownership and vice versa.

7.1.6 Risk-taking and flexibility

In Cycle One, the action team discussed and agreed on the kind of learning environment that would facilitate art interpretation. The team valued a classroom environment in which pupils are actively engaged in learning, free to question, reflect, collaborate with others or work independently in an atmosphere where their opinions and contributions are appreciated. This view was tested in the research. According to Pollard (2008), most pupils thrive in learning environments where they feel 'safe' and Cox and Watts (2007:23) concur that effective art teachers provide a secure environment in which to learn. Other educators advocate learning environments that nurture risk-taking and innovative thinking (Craft *et al.*, 2001) or where there is freedom to use imagination (Egan, 1992). By the end of the research, all three classroom environments were understood to be conducive to interpreting paintings. But teachers' varying degrees of ability or inability to work within them, impacted on the delivery of the ISEE and how it was used in lessons. The teachers appreciated that risk taking was easier for some team members than others and this was most evident when pupil-led dialogue led them away from planned lessons and toward the unknown. Watkins *et al.* (2007:64) suggest teachers 'like' and 'need' support when they go 'against the grain' and following the Inuit lesson, the headteacher gave her support to the teachers when she told them she had faith in their professional judgements. Her intention was to bolster teacher confidence to take risks in their teaching. This had a positive effect on the teachers' sense of autonomy and was a clear endorsement for them to experiment.

It was necessary for the teachers to accommodate new directions in whole class discussions when they changed unpredictably. This required them to seize on learning opportunities as they presented themselves and this flexibility was a strength of their teaching. Watkins *et al*. (2007:177) remind teachers that 'rich forms of learning do not necessarily proceed in a

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linear way' but not all of them felt comfortable to teach in this way. The ISEE was most effective in lessons where the teachers recognised that risk taking is a part of the interpretive process.

7.1.7 Teachers' diverse roles

7.1.7.1 Scaffolding and guiding

Paek's (2006) practitioner study of pre-service teachers highlights the significance of multiple roles played by teachers in art lessons. Stankiewicz (2001) claims that non specialist teachers may find these multiple roles challenging. These generalist teachers accommodated the many roles they were given. All of them judged the role of guide or facilitator leading pupils through the steps of the ISEE to be an effective way to enable their interpreting art. I also understood the way they scaffolded art information was guided learning.

The pupils controlled their own learning to a large extent and to facilitate this, the teachers posed questions that supported and guided them to think about and interpret paintings. They understood they were *scaffolding* learning in the way Vygotsky (1978) recommended. Team evaluations found that lessons worked best when the teachers adopted this role and used probing questions in class discussion that challenged and extended pupils' thinking. All the teachers felt comfortable in this role. The pupils were most animated and engaged when teachers posed many and varied questions, such as the discussion that took place about the painting, ***The Graham Children*** (fig.5.8). In this case, one teacher's questions, intended to facilitate discussion about a music box included ***Who is that boy? What is he doing? Why is he holding that thing on his lap?*** and ***What is he doing with it?*** This challenged them to think about how it worked and provoked speculation about differences between the music box and radios and ipods. The questions shaped pupil discussion, reinforced associations between traditional and contemporary musical equipment and were important in extending their thinking about what they observed and objects from the past. Ultimately, it strengthened their interpretations of the painting. Teachers' effectiveness in this role was an important factor that contributed to the successful implementation of the ISEE strategy.

7.1.7.2 Participant in whole class discussion

This research found teachers' input was highly valued by the pupils when it was on an equal footing. It changed the classroom atmosphere positively. This finding is consistent with the principles of 'sustained shared thinking' (EPPE, 2003) where teacher and pupils work together 'in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity or extend a narrative' (Pascal, 2011:2). In sustained shared thinking, teachers typically use open-ended questions and modelling to extend or deepen pupils' understanding in a setting where teachers and pupils 'learn and work together' as partners. This notion resonates with the idea of 're-positioning' where 'subtle shifts' characterise a changing relationship between teacher and pupils in learning (Chappell and Craft, 2011:8). This kind of social interaction between teachers and pupils, referred to as 'flat-hierarchy learning' by Chappell and Craft (2011:9) is sometimes practiced in the creative learning conversations of Creative Partnership programmes. In this research, the teachers' contribution to shared discussion was understood to be important to pupils.

At times pupils agreed, considered and rejected teachers' interpretations in favour of their own or others. Although teachers often led discussion or delivered art information, their awareness and sensitivity to know when and not to dominate shared discussion was a distinguishing factor. When they did strike this balance it helped pupils to consider and develop their own ideas. This was evidenced by the rich discussion that followed when one teacher talked about her favourite colours or experiences going to a gallery in Paris and another described her memories of a day at the beach.

Weininger (1988:138) argued that young children need adult interaction sometimes, rather than control. This was evident in the lessons as pupils enjoyed arguing against teachers' ideas. In education, there is a view, first mooted by Piaget (1969) that pupil-to-pupil debates demand resolution whereas adult-to-pupil debates often result in compliance. Surprisingly, this was not the case in these lessons, as midway through Cycle Two, pupils showed they were confident to listen, debate and contest teachers' suggestions when they interpreted paintings such as *Le Domaine d'Arnheim* (fig.5.6) and *Untitled: Grey and Brown* (fig.5.13).

7.1.7.3 Providers of art information

The teachers' early concerns about the research lessons stemmed from worries about inadequate knowledge of art and artists and how to provide art information. In the final cycle, all the teachers claimed to have gained confidence in disseminating this information but this was not always borne out by their actions. Watkins *et al.* (2007) talk about teachers experiencing feelings of tension because of lack of subject knowledge and training and I concluded that some teachers felt this way. It turned out that pupils' engagement with art information relied heavily on the teachers' ability or motivation to disseminate it and their level of confidence about communicating it. For example, one teacher explained, 'I didn't use it because there was already a lot of discussion going on, so I decided not to' (LWfieldnotes, 1/03/07). Other examples showed teachers made selective choices of what to tell pupils, as seen in the lesson about *The Graham Children* (fig. 5.8) when two teachers decided not to tell pupils about the death of the baby.

Teachers' dissemination of art information was a critical factor in the teacher variable. Examining data about this showed there was no consistent pattern of transmission. When I searched for explanations, I questioned whether the teachers found the idea of art history and factual art information difficult, in the sense that Merrill, Tennyson and Posey (1992) write about *difficult concepts*. They suggest these kinds of concepts involve complex ideas that are too difficult for teachers to explain in simple terms to pupils and therefore cause them to view them negatively.

I questioned whether disseminating art information challenged the teachers' perceptions of art education and if teaching hard facts while asking pupils to interpret in an open environment were incompatible. I recognised the conceptual framework juxtaposed two very different educational philosophies namely child- and teacher-led teaching and learning and this may have undermined the teachers' beliefs and confused teaching styles.

When teachers proffered art information, they first informed pupils about the artist and/or painting and then questioned them directly, adopting a traditional Socratic role. The success and effectiveness of Step Three was entirely dependent on the teachers' dissemination of information. Although the teachers continually voiced their assurance that disseminating art information was not a problem, I concluded that this was their most difficult role.

7.1.8. Conclusion

Interpreting art was more effective when teachers' confidence using the ISEE and their knowledge of how pupils responded to paintings had increased. As this grew, it enabled them to shift some responsibility for learning to the pupils. Teachers' roles alternated between behaviour manager, guide, informer and participant in class discussions. This final role, which they created themselves, had a considerable impact on pupils' learning to interpret paintings. In the end, I concluded that the teachers' personal, as well as professional attitudes, beliefs, values, qualifications and practice were important in the research but their motivation and confidence to work with artworks were most critical for successful teaching and learning.

7.2 THEME TWO: PUPILS' AFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO PAINTINGS
7.2.0 Introduction

My reflections at the end of Cycle Three led me to appreciate that pupils' responses to paintings were important because they affected their interpretations. They also influenced what they found interesting and memorable in the art information. I understood response to mean 'reaction' or 'feeling caused by a stimulus' as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2009).

I had included the question *How do you feel about this painting?* in the ISEE, to test it out and was surprised by what I found. Pupils' responses were not to the artist's expressed feelings or emotion but were guided by their own. Intriguingly, they talked about feelings or emotions in relation to the paintings in three ways: i) how they felt for, ii) about and iii) on behalf of the subject matter. This led me to review communication theories of reception, affect and affective response primarily in music, art and general education in more depth to better understand this motivation. I also examined literature in humanistic psychology and theories of *felt* meaning because of the deeply felt and intense emotion that characterised some pupils' interpretations. Eugene Gendlin's (1981:83) work was particularly useful when explaining it.

7.2.1 Changing theoretical assumptions
In the initial stages of designing the ISEE, I was strongly influenced by Panofsky's theory of iconography which understands the construction of meaning in art through symbolic

associations drawn from the analysis of subject matter. Scholars like Panofsky theorised cognitive rather than affective or expressive connections between viewers and artworks. Therefore, my conceptual framework centred on cognition as the process for constructing informed responses. It was underpinned by the expectation that pupils would combine factual knowledge about art and artists with personally grounded knowledge and experience of the subject matter and events viewed in the paintings as they interpreted them. During the actions however, I became aware of a growing tension between my perceived starting point and the pupils' affect-driven responses. I had to reconsider my position when I discovered the extent to which the latter characterised their interpretations and stimulated cognitive reasoning. While I found examples where pupils exercised cognitive or affective thinking separately, more often they combined them together. They rationalised their immediate feelings towards a painting using cognitive constructs such as memory, prior knowledge and art information transmitted by teachers. Moreover, there was evidence to suggest that affective thinking supported them in thinking deeper in their interpretations and this led me to examine the relationship between cognition and affect in more depth.

7.2.2 Expression theories

The literature review in Chapter One included discussion of expression theories and my reasons for rejecting them. I had dismissed them as underpinning theories when I designed the conceptual framework because they appeared to focus largely on the communication and/or experience of the artist's emotions or emotional state. Bearing in mind theories of egocentrism, first mooted by Piaget (1969), I was wary about whether pupils would be able to consider or be interested in an artist's expressed emotions. In this research, pupils talked about the artists but they did seldom referred to the artist's feelings or emotions shown in the artworks. Moreover, at the beginning of the research, I did not understand how emotion or feelings towards, or for artworks could be used to solicit pupils' cognitive thinking about artists and artworks.

Despite these misgivings, the fact that most art education models included a response question, led me to think it might be important. For this reason and because I was curious, I included the question: *How do you feel about the painting?* in the ISEE in order to test out its impact on pupils' interpretations. In doing so, the research moved away from a typical

art history perspective. Ultimately, the finding that affective responses played a key role in some pupils' interpretations forced me to think again about reception theory, and affective response, in particular.

7.2.3. Reader reception and response

Writing about education, Egan and Ling (2003:97) describe young children's thinking as 'powerfully' affective. According to Karolides (1997), emotions and feelings rekindle memories and experiences and provide a strong sense of connectedness with them. Robinson (2005), writing about music education explains that individuals interacting with musical stimuli or situations experience reactions which trigger feelings and emotions within them. She (2007:495) calls these 'affective responses to given stimuli'. In the research lessons, pupils talked about emotions and feelings, for example being scared and frightened when they looked at the painting, *The Tropical Storm: Surprised!* (fig. 5.2).One girl explained she felt scared because she saw 'lightning' in the dark sky of the jungle (Tape: 12:37). I recognised the lightning bolt was a symbol or trigger that awakened memories and associations with past experiences. Another girl said she felt 'scared and muddled up' because she could not understand why the tiger was baring its teeth (Tape: 14:12). In reader reception in literary theory, Fish (1980) argued that affective response *is* the meaning or interpretation an individual gives to an artwork whereas Iser (2006) claims it is the intersection of two poles: the text and the reader and this virtual pole (response) contributes to the way readers' construct meaning.

When I re-examined the data it was clear that pupils used emotions or feelings as a springboard for describing and interpreting what they saw in paintings. According to the developmental psychologist, Donaldson (1979) and Early Years educator, Walsh (2002:106) young children develop and learn by making sense of the world around them and they do this through their experiences and emotions. In a handful of examples, I discuss later in this section, pupils experienced intense emotion relating to the people or events they observed in the paintings. They all mentioned or were moved by emotional feelings they attached to subject matter in them. For example, in the lesson about *The Whole World* (fig.6.2) when a girl explained she would choose to include her sister in a picture of her 'world', her choice was guided by an emotional attachment to her sister. From her

explanation, the class gained a deeper understanding of the impulse behind artists' choices of subject matter and this resulted in them looking closer at the Inuit print.

7.2.4 Demonstrating affective response

Affective responses were demonstrated in a range of languages, for example, via oral comments, facial expressions and body gestures and through the behaviours pupils displayed as they reacted to them. At times, pupils called out, laughed, giggled and became overexcited when they viewed the paintings. They displayed feelings of excitement, happiness, puzzlement, interest and curiosity and sometimes boredom, disinterest and silliness. As mentioned, on several occasions classroom discipline became an issue and the team concluded this was a reaction to the less structured format and pace of the art lessons but they also recognised it was in reaction or response to the artworks themselves.

According to literary theorist, Tompkins (1980:54), readers feel a greater sense of involvement when they actively 'fill in the gaps' of their understanding of a text (or painting). She claims that direct participation or personal input helps them experience a greater connection with them. Furthermore, she suggests (1980:54) that affective thinking makes interpretations seem 'more real' and lends more impact to meaning making. In this research, the teachers and I realised the question *How do you feel about the painting?* encouraged a new pathway for constructing interpretations as it targeted personal and affective responses. During Cycle Two, the action and observation teams noticed pupils were increasingly comfortable discussing their feelings about paintings (Observer/teacher record forms).

Iser (2006) counsels readers to reword the question *What does this text [painting] mean*? to ask instead, *What does this text [painting] do to me?* to provoke an affective response. The teachers made a conscious point of not asking pupils *What does this painting mean?* because they considered the question inappropriate as it suggests there is a single, right answer. I asked the teachers not to ask *What does this painting do to you?* because I considered it was a leading question. Instead they asked pupils, *How do you feel about this painting?* TAs, teachers and my observations recorded many pupils raised their hands to answer this question. Sometimes more than in response to the question *What is this painting about?* It seemed to capture their attention better and provide a sense of

ownership of their opinions. The team judged pupils' confidence to talk about paintings increased over time and concluded this was mainly because they had personalised their interpretations.

7.2.4.1 Empathy and affect

Data analysis showed pupils were affected by empathic feelings towards the subject matter in paintings. I dispute Piaget's (1969) view of egocentricity because all the pupils in Reception, Year One and Year Two were able and inclined to respond to the paintings by considering the feelings and emotions of the people and animals they depicted, although typically they did not consider the artist's intended emotion. When they looked at ***Tropical Storm, Surprised!*** (fig.5.2) some pupils said they felt scared because the ***tiger was scared*** while others explained they felt scared because the ***tiger was scary;*** for example, when they looked at his fierce-looking teeth and facial expression and remembered that tigers kill people. So, some were afraid ***for*** the tiger or ***on behalf*** of it, while others were scared ***by*** the tiger, lightning, thunder or the whole picture, because of previous knowledge or experience of thunderstorms, wild tigers and jungle scenes.

Overall, I determined pupils were affected by:

i) Feelings and emotions for (or on behalf of) the subject matter in a painting (see above);

ii) Feelings and emotions evoked by a painting in a general, holistic way. (For example, in response to the painting, ***Courtyard of a House in Delft*** (fig.5.3)***,*** of a 'mother and child' walking together, pupils used the words 'calm', 'sleepy' and 'gentle' to explain it. In contrast, ***Untitled, Grey and Brown*** (fig.5.13) made pupils feel 'crazy', 'wild', 'silly' and 'messed up')

iii) Personal or group memories and experiences they associated with the subject matter. (For example, one girl recalled the floor in ***The Graham Children*** (fig. 5.8) as similar to a cold marble floor she remembered in a kitchen)

iv) Cognitive understanding or recognition of prior and/or given knowledge. (For example, when a boy selected a cut out detail of sheep[1] to include with the painting of ***Mr and Mrs Andrews*** (fig. 5.11) because he said farmers shoot and eat them and use their wool.)

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[1] Detail from Holman Hunt's painting titled ***On English Coasts,*** NGL.

In some cases, pupils appeared to recognise subject matter and attribute, attach or associate certain emotions with it. For example, in class discussion about the relationship of the two figures in *The Courtyard of a House in Delft* (fig.5.3) most pupils assumed the woman was the girl's mother. To the question *Why do you think this?* their replies included 'because she's holding her hand' or 'she's looking at her in a nice way' (Reception, Tape: 15:02); 'she's walking with her and talking to her' (Year One, Tape: 25:42), showing they were making assumptions based on associations they attached to the subject matter in real life. When one teacher asked, *How is she talking to the little girl?* some pupils replied 'in a soft voice'; 'a sweet voice'; 'a friendly voice'; 'a loving voice' which I interpreted as affective and associative responses linked to their own personal experiences. In this example, I concluded the older woman triggered an emotion in the pupils although I did not recognise this was a 'conditioned, biological reflex' as Tompkins (1980) suggests in affect theory. In another example, a girl chose a cut-out detail of a cat to include in the painting of *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (fig. 5.11) because she thought it was 'gentle and would be comfortable' on the lady's lap. Although it was not clear whether she was suggesting the cat would be comfortable on the lady's lap or the lady would find it comfortable having a cat on her lap, this comment demonstrates affective thinking. In the end, I interpreted in both these examples that pupils were using their memory 'libraries' of feelings that Lynch (2007:68) talks about, in order to associate with and understand or interpret the situation.

7.2.4.2 Placing oneself in a painting and conjectured feelings

Sometimes pupils placed themselves in an event or situation portrayed in a painting and then described how they would feel in the circumstance. For example, when one pupil suggested the girl in the painting, *Courtyard of a House in Delft* (fig.5.3) was talking to the woman in a 'small voice' and she explained it was because she was lost and about to cry (Tape: 25.00). This suggests the pupil was considering her own emotional response in such a situation. In the same lesson, another pupil explained 'you can't see her [the second woman's] face. I think she's trying to see the view. She's looking out. She's seeing if someone's coming to visit her at home. I'm home! Come and see me!' (Tape: 23.54). After describing what he observed, this boy then acted out the subject in the painting calling out to a would-be visitor to come and visit him. Another example of conjectured feelings occurred when a boy said he felt crowded looking at *The Approaching Storm* (fig.6.8)

because there were so many people painted in the beach scene. His overall feeling about the painting was a sense of over-crowdedness or overwhelming people (LWfieldnotes, 13/10/07) and this affected his interpretation of it.

7.2.5 Intense emotion and felt meaning

On several occasions pupils demonstrated an unusually intense feeling or emotion. My attention was drawn to these occasions for several reasons. First, they occurred during whole class discussion and second, the emotion experienced was collectively shared by classmates. According to art and general educators and philosophers such as Broudy (1981); Csikszentmihalyi (1990); and Dewey (1934), individuals do experience moments of intense feelings when they engage with artworks. In art education, Taylor (1992:7) also claims 'long term meaningful memories' can be evoked by artworks and some pupils experience 'illuminating moments'; understood as a 'sense of revelation' or an 'eye-opener' in these encounters.

During the data analysis stage, I struggled to find a way to understand and explain the intense emotion some pupils experienced. It did not fit Osborne's (1991) explanation of emotional response in his work about aesthetic experience and did not resemble the potential '***Wow!*** factor' impact Bamford (2005) described in encounters with artworks. Nor did it match Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) or Trafi's (2004) idea of *hooks* that artists use to grab viewers' attention. I likened the examples to moments of dawning realisation sensed through an emotional trigger. In the end, the best explanation was found in theories of humanistic psychology and in particular, Gendlin's (1981) notion of bodily sensed or ***felt*** meaning.

Gendlin (1981) defined ***felt*** meaning as an internally understood emotional experience. He described these experiences as an overall ***felt sense*** (1981:36) of a situation, problem or understanding and called it a 'body sense of meaning'; something that is vague but feels meaningful. He claimed it is understood through an individual's personal psyche and experience (1981:44) and he argued (1981: ix) 'our brains and bodies know far more than is normally available to us' when we deal with complex feelings and emotions. In physical terms, the central nervous system acts to perceive and process information and he claims we may, or may not be aware of it. Gendlin employed a psychological technique called

focusing to explore an individual's problems. He used it to tap into their unconscious knowledge to draw them towards a sense of awareness of their feelings and the meanings they attached to them. Through this awareness, he suggested they experience a bodily shift which involves deep brain structures. To understand these emotions, people use past experiences and personal knowledge to identify and conceptualise meaning. This implies individuals apprehend meaning uniquely through personal constructs. Furthermore, it recognises there is a relationship between affect (how we feel) and cognition (how we know) in the exploration of deeply rooted meanings.

7.2.5.1 Pupils' experience of felt meaning

According to Gendlin (1981:10), counsellors and therapists and even 'close friends' use this *focusing* technique to guide or help people to 'focus' on a given problem or situation. Although the circumstances differed, teachers in this research sometimes acted as guides and prompted pupils with questions such as ***How do you feel looking at this painting?*** and ***What are your feelings when you look at this painting?*** The example of ***The Fall of Icarus*** (fig.5.9) shows the ***felt*** realisation experienced by the pupils in one class. Up to a point, they were engaged in playing a jigsaw puzzle game, talking about sections of the painting and fantasising about pirates, ships, treasures and storms at sea. When one girl mentioned a man drowning in the water, pupils ignored her at first. Then a boy described a friend's accident in water and their response to the painting changed and their interpretations became more dramatic and emotive. The teacher focused their attention on the painting by asking them about their feelings. A boy began to talk about tsunamis and his fear of 'dangerous water'. As a group they appeared to experience Gendlin's 'bodily shift' and this resulted in a new, more acute understanding of what they were looking at. Realisation and recognition produced shock. Significantly, this recognition produced not only an emotive or affective reaction but also a cognitive response as pupils exchanged information about water safety and discussed aspects of the Icarus story their teacher had read to them previously. Three months later, the impact appeared long lasting as the group interview pupils had instant recall and continued to express shock about this painting and incident. Gendlin (1981) suggests ***felt*** meaning can make powerful, long lasting, even lifelong connections for individuals.

7.2.5.2 Differences between felt and perceived meaning

Typically, the pupils constructed *perceived* meanings as they looked at and recognised subject matter and events in paintings. In these instances, I understood perceived meaning as 'realising' or 'taking in' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009) and pupils acted as interpreters as they apprehended it (Gabrielsson and Juslin, 2003; Harré, 1997). Their *perceived* meanings, like in iconographic theory, were derived directly from their interpretations of observed phenomena and frequently demonstrated cognitive appraisal, thinking or reasoning in the way they understood subject matter or events as referring to or representing something. For example, the *perceived* meaning initially attributed to *The Fall of Icarus* (fig.5.9) was a narrative about marauding pirates, treasures, ships, islands and seascapes. Pupils constructed this meaning from a cultural repertoire of storytelling, fairytales, pirates, movies and TV which contributed to their overall understanding of it. In contrast, the *felt* meaning experienced by pupils when they realised what was depicted in the painting was sensory and centred on bodily feelings of shock, fear and danger.

Reader reception theory understands the final act in the construction of meaning as the convergence of different aspects or mental schema assembled together in an individual's mind. In this final act, individuals synthesise their cultural knowledge and personal experience through a filter of emotion and feelings as they draw together various information (Ingarden, 1973; Iser, 2006; Tompkins, 1980). In constructing individual interpretations, Gendlin (1981) and Iser (2006) suggest that both *perceived* and *felt* meaning play a role. In most cases, when these pupils experienced *felt* meaning it was a secondary response to an initial interpretation of *perceived* meaning.

In a few cases, pupils experienced emotions they could not explain. On these occasions, their interpretation rested solely on an immediate affective response. For example, when one boy looked at *Le Domaine d'Arnheim* (fig.5.6), he told the class, 'I feel worried. I just feel worried' (Tape: 22:24). When the teacher tried to encourage him to explain this feeling he could not. Perhaps, at age six he was unable to find words to articulate his feelings or reason why. Or he couldn't connect his feelings with anything. Perhaps he was worried about providing a response for the teacher or about something that had happened to him previously. Or possibly, his reaction to the painting was caused by an affect that triggered memories of another event or an experience within his psyche for which this painting

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evoked a *felt* meaning, as yet unnamed or acknowledged. Further still, it may have been evidence of Fish's (1980) claim that an affective response *is* the interpretation.

7.2.6 Relationship between cognitive and affective thinking and response

The education scholars, Bruner (1960) and Dewey (1934), art educators, Eisner (2001) and Efland (2002) and educational psychologist, Gardner (1993) all recognise a connection between cognition and affect in learning. Tsal (1985), writing about consumer relations research identifies a dominant or traditional view that the generation [production] of affect towards a given object is always mediated by a cognitive evaluation of it, inferring a co-existence and interdependence between these two ways of thinking. Efland (2002:10) refutes Parsons' (1987) claim that education should distinguish between cognitive and non-cognitive subjects and proposes instead that all school subjects, including the arts, should combine cognitive and affective components (Efland, 2002) and this lends support to including art interpretation in the curriculum.

Writing about affect in art theory, Catherall (2006) suggests emotions are composed of an assemblage of affect and cognition. This was demonstrated by many of these pupils. Their verbal responses to the question *How do you feel about this painting?* tended to begin with a stated emotion although they frequently ended with a personal rationale such as 'because it reminds me of my grandfather's garden shed' (Year One boy, *Courtyard of a House in Delft*, fig.5.3). The associations pupils made with the events and subject matter the paintings depicted were noticeably dependent upon constructs derived from their personal knowledge, learning and life experiences. These associations resembled the reader-response notion of personal 'horizons' (Gadamer, 1983; Iser, 1987) that Ingaarden (1973) wrote about. He theorised that meaning is derived from a cross-section of two horizons, for example the text and the reader [artwork and viewer]. Some pupils in this research were able to combine their interpretation [personal horizon] with another one created from given information about an artist or artwork. For example, in a lesson about the *Courtyard of a House in Delft* (fig.5.3), a boy equated the bricks at a stone patio warehouse near his home with the brickwork on the outbuildings in de Hooch's painting; others drew comparisons between them and WW2 air raid shelters they had visited on a class fieldtrip recently.

Osborne (1991:184) distinguished between cognition and subjective recognition and suggested the former is tied up to emotional responses to artworks. The pupils' interpretations supported this view that cognition plays a key role in meaning making; however, there was considerable evidence to show it was cloaked in affective thinking. In one example, a girl in Reception spoke about her concern for the farmer because of the hard work he was doing by hand in *The Fall of Icarus* (fig.5.9) before comparing his labours to a combine harvester. This parallels Dewey's (1934) assertion that cognitive and emotional knowledge co-exist simultaneously in an individual's experience of artworks.

Just as cognition included elements of affective thinking, it also worked in reverse. For example, in a lesson about *The Approaching Storm* (fig.6.8), pupils and teacher in Reception were involved in a discussion about what they observed. They chatted excitedly about the fun of spending days at the beach with their family and this led one boy to notice a flag on a flagpole flapping hard in the wind after which he reminisced about a storm he had witnessed at the seaside with cloudy skies, chilly seas and sand blowing in people's eyes (Tape: 6:12). Iser (2008:173) claims that texts (or paintings) are never completely arbitrary or subjective but function as signs and guidelines to steer readers in their meaning making. In the same lesson, another pupil's discovery of numbered 'bathing machines' in the painting (page 202) reminded him of pool lockers where he went swimming with his family. These numbers evoked a recollection of past memories and experiences. From these and other examples, I concluded that cognition was often present in the pupils' affective responses to paintings, and so was the reverse.

7.2.7 Artist's place in affective response

Pupils were affected by what their teachers told them about the artists (Step Three) and finding out personal things about them contributed to what they felt about the paintings and subsequently how they interpreted them. Some pupils were curious about the children in the painting, *The Graham Children* (fig.5.8) and this stimulated their questions about the artist's relationship to them. It prompted them to talk about their own relationships. Pupils' interest in William Hogarth and his association with the Graham children meant they became more involved in looking at and talking about the painting.

It was evident from what some pupils said that they negotiated a triangular relationship between artist, artwork and themselves. Sometimes pupils positioned themselves as viewers or spectators of paintings while at others they recognised the artist as a peer or person, for example when a boy claimed 'I'm just like him' (Tape: 8:32) about the artist, Pieter de Hooch and said he worked in a similar way, producing accurate drawings and realistic perspective ('that's me, I do that too' Tape: 8.45).

The summative evaluation found that understanding an emotional connection between artist, artwork and viewer helped the pupils to absorb the art information. Pupils' references to the artists became more frequent. They were naturally curious about them on a personal level. I considered the finding that pupils' feelings towards artists made them interested and aware of them was important for primary classroom teachers as it offers a way to talk about artists and their role in designing and making art in the art and design curriculum.

7.2.8 Supporting pupils' affective response

At the beginning of Cycle Two, the teacher and TA for Year Two cautioned me that pupils, particularly boys, would find the question *How do you feel about this painting?* personally challenging and be reluctant to answer (Journal, 18/01/07). However, this was not true. On the contrary, all the pupils appeared happy to answer the question. The team examined pupils' affective responses for gender differences but found boys responded just as readily as girls to the question. However, in keeping with Parsons (1978), girls (particularly younger ones), were more inclined to express *likes* and *dislikes* in terms of subject matter and to make affective associations with them. For example, the dogs in the painting, *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (fig.5.11) and the baby in the painting, *The Graham Children* (fig.5.8) were favourites and their 'love' of them featured strongly in their interpretations.

Egan and Ling (2003:98) recommend teachers to seek out and 'embrace affective meaning' in learning situations so as to enhance the emotional quality of the content. They view this as important for pupils' personal development. In the research, some teachers, having invited pupils to comment on feelings and emotions, did little to pursue their affective responses with further questions. In the majority of cases, they nodded and accepted what pupils said without comment. Hjelde (2008: 144) highlights a perceived reluctance on the

part of some teachers to talk about emotion in the school context and suggests that they find discussion of emotion 'off-putting'. In hindsight, I wished I had explored this issue with the teachers who participated in this action research.

I concluded that including the question ***How do you feel about the painting***' in the ISEE had tapped into pupils' affective thinking and opened up other doors for them to construct meanings. During my analysis of the data, I became convinced of the importance of this question, not only because it offered teachers access to pupils' personally constructed interpretations but because of the opportunities it gave pupils to voice their thoughts and ideas.

The American art educators, Farley and Neperud (1990:170) criticise art curricula for systematically neglecting the role played by feelings and emotions in understanding art images. I recognised this was just as true of art historians. When I reviewed the literature on children's affective response to artworks I was disappointed to find few recent texts from art education[2]. There were more research studies into affect and emotion in general education, mainly from the USA. I was especially curious about the scarcity of art education literature in the UK given Spendlove's (2007:155) robust claim of a 'resurgence of interest in the powerful concept of emotion in current educational policy and practice'. At the time of writing, personal and social health and emotional welfare (known as PSHE) is gaining importance in UK schools and manifesting itself through teacher training and curriculum reform[3]. In April 2009, new education reforms targeted at primary schools revealed a strategic focus on pupils' personal development. Initiatives related to pupils' emotional wellbeing and the expansion of 'Circle Time' are to be implemented in the school curriculum by September, 2011.[4] When they introduced PSHE, all the teachers in the research school used Circle Time and a Six Thinking Hats strategy developed by de Bono (1982) as a way of eliciting emotional responses from pupils in lessons. In the research lessons, they reminded pupils to 'put your red hat on' (to refer to emotion) when

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[2] Efland (1976); Eisner (1972, 1994), Feldman (1985); Henley (1991), Parsons (1978, 1987) and Witkin (1976) represent a few examples of art educators who have written on this topic over the past forty years.
[3] At the time of the action research, one of the teachers in the school was an appointed link teacher for the local authority (FourS) project on Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) in 2005 and 2006. She and the headteacher were involved in SEAL and PSHE training in this school and with cluster schools in the locality.
[4] 30th April, 2009, public announcement by Sir Jim Rose.

they answered ISEE questions. The finding that interpreting paintings helped pupils express their emotions and feelings suggests this might feed into PSHE research.

7.2.9 Conclusion

Recent studies have concluded that emotions play a significant part in how pupils 'give meaning to and reconstruct' perceptions of self and the world around them (Austerlitz, 2008:17). As mentioned, there is a growing interest in the benefits of emotional learning and intelligence for pupils' personal development in the UK. Government-led research in education (Austerlitz, 2008; Primary Schools Reform, 2009; Spendlove, 2007) and the perception that 'creative' subjects such as the arts can cultivate emotional learning (Austerlitz, 2008:21, NACCCE, 1999) signal a potential new direction for art education.

I found reader response theory helpful for understanding how these pupils' affective responses contributed to their interpretations of paintings. Together with Gendlin and Iser, I appreciated that an individual's knowledge and background contribute to the way they construct meanings. I concluded that individuals experience varying levels of intensity in their affective response to artworks and *felt* meaning is one extreme.

There was evidence from the data that pupils combined affective and cognitive modes of thinking when they interpreted paintings. Most often it was an affective response, evoked by the subject matter in a painting that attracted them in the first instance. Some pupils, not necessarily the older ones, used this initial response as a basis for further discussion of a painting or artist. I concluded that affective responses and cognition inter-relate when pupils construct meanings and both play an important role in interpreting art.

7.3 THEME THREE: ROLE OF IMAGINATION IN INTERPRETATION

7.3.0 Introduction

A finding from this research was that pupils in all three classes used their imagination to help them construct interpretations. Sometimes this took the form of fantasy, silliness, speculation or supposing. Pupils described and discussed imaginary objects, events and scenarios when they talked about the paintings. The teachers' main concern was whether or not to encourage pupils to fabricate and embellish their observations because this was at odds with approaches to learning in most other school subjects. It was also a sharp contrast

to the notion of using factual art information to inform interpretations. In education literature, Egan (2007:11) admits that including imaginative thinking in general education often creates tensions between teaching conventional knowledge and encouraging capacities that enable 'mental freedom' from it. After deliberating in Cycle Two, the teachers and I decided to allow pupils to interpret paintings in this way but only if they were able to reason their thinking.

During the analysis, I systematically combed through lesson transcripts to locate examples when pupils imagined subject matter or scenarios as a way of interpreting paintings. Sometimes, their interpretations were pure fantasy as they made up subject matter and events. At others, they mixed fiction with subject matter that was visible. When this happened, pupils did not act differently, smile, giggle, or demonstrate any realisation that the subject matter was imagined. On only one occasion did a pupil challenge another and this occurred in response to the painting, *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (fig.5.11) when a Year Two girl mentioned seeing a squirrel and a boy argued it was log of wood.

More often, pupils colluded with each other to accept what each other said. For example in an incident with an imaginary 'bat' in *The Courtyard of a House in Delft* (fig.5.3) pupils joined in, imagining where it was and what it was 'doing'. In his writing about imagination in theology, Brown (2000: 336) points out that individuals who work in 'communities' (defined as a 'body of people acting collectively', OED, 2009) often 'forge a willingness' to enter imaginatively into what others think. The educational theorist, Wenger (1999: 77) reports similar behaviour in communities of shared practice and claims 'interpersonal allegiance, respect and support' for each others' opinions are commonplace in these relationships. I found pupils in all three classes frequently worked with shared intentions in group or whole class discussions and this was particularly true when they used imagination to interpret a painting. Wenger (1999: 280) suggests this is understandable because copying is typical in shared practice and a characteristic of social learning situations.

The team was curious about pupils' tendency to imagine things, particularly as they were direct responses to the questions, *What do you see*? and *What is happening*? not *What do you think you see*? or *What do you think is happening?* or *What do you think will happen next?* which might have led them to speculate or invent things. Because the finding

that pupils used imagination in their interpretations was unexpected, I decided to examine literature that might explain about it. I examined literature in several disciplines including philosophy, theology, education, geography, history and art and music education so as to widen my understanding.

7.3.1 Defining imagination

When I reviewed the literature, I found a range of definitions for *imagination*, for example, it has been understood as an action or a concept, state of mind, way of being, faculty, power, quality, disposition and flexibility of the mind. After deliberation, I adopted the Oxford English Dictionary (2008) definition that it is the 'forming of a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses' or 'happening here and now' (Barrows, 1990:81). I also accepted Sartre's (1988:138) view that imagination 'allows [people] to envision possibilities in and beyond the actualities in which [they] are immersed'. I understood these definitions as underpinning the writing of educational theorists such as Kieran Egan, Robin Barrow and Brian Sutton-Smith and the Imaginative Education Research Group (IERG) and found them most helpful.

Takaya (2007) notes that the literature on imagination in education differentiates between 'using imagination', 'being imaginative', imaginative thinking' and 'imagining'. When I analysed the data, I examined the pupils' use of imagination, as well as their imaginative thinking and imaginings in their interpretations. Joubert (2001:18) writes about 'creating a mental image, picture, sound or feeling in the mind' that is imaginary, in the sense of 'not real' or 'realistic' and I also explored contrasts between pupils' notions of *real* and *not real* in their interpretations. Because some pupils' imaginings involved speculating, supposing or thinking about 'maybe' or 'could be' scenarios in the paintings, I examined this aspect of *possibility thinking* in the writing of Craft (1997; 2000; 2005) in education literature on creativity.

7.3.2 Sidestepping creativity discourse

In the UK, educational writing about imaginative thinking in the twenty-first century has been subsumed largely into a wider discourse on *creativity* and *creative thinking*, an underpinning philosophy driving economics and education at the time of writing. The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, 1999:29),

for example, understood imaginative activity as one of five key concepts in creativity (Craft, Jeffrey and Leibling, 2001; Joubert, 2001:18). Craft *et al.* (2001:4) reports that economic and political agendas are fuelling a competitive environment that is keen to encourage creativity as a way to address economic, social and individual development. Developing imaginative thinking or the use of imagination is understood to play a significant part. In this research, I understand theories of creativity as interlinked with imagination but encompassing broader issues and a more comprehensive agenda (Craft, 2000; Craft *et al.*, 2001). The range of definitions and conceptions of creativity are vast and a thorough examination of the role of imagination in creativity research extends well beyond the remit of this study. Therefore, I have chosen not to engage with this dialogue but to focus instead on the role imagination played in these particular pupils' interpretations of paintings and this has led me to examine literature on theories of imagination. Notwithstanding this, in analysing the data I was influenced by theories of possibility thinking advocated by Craft *et al.* (2001) as they helped me to better understand and explain what was happening.

7.3.3 Imagination in young children

According to Egan (1997), young children's imagination is linked with cognitive developmental theories as they become less inclined to think imaginatively as they grow older. Tuan (1990:436) and Joubert (2001:18) agree there is a tendency for young children to lose imaginative impulses in art making and drawing on entering school and they understand this trend as progressive. This made sense to me given the emphasis placed on acquiring knowledge generally in education.

Tuan (1990) cites young children's preoccupation with copying and their pursuit of realism or optical fidelity (mimesis) in making as an explanation for their decreasing use of imagination in later years. In other words, their goal becomes verisimilitude rather than fabricating or creating from the *mind's eye*. When I examined pupils' imaginative responses in the lessons, I found the majority of them were aged six years and in Year One. There were fewer examples in the older age group so I concurred with Joubert (2001) and Tuan (1990) that these pupils were more concerned with rationalising their interpretations using concrete, visual evidence from observations of subject matter than describing or fabricating about them.

7.3.4 Using imagination in art interpretation

Egan (1992:43) and Tuan (1990:436) believe all humans have imagination and use it in varying degrees and different ways. It was clear that just as some pupils were more inclined to talk about the paintings; others used their imagination more to interpret them. Although imaginative responses were most evident in the Year One classroom, they were found in Reception and Year Two and often by the same pupils. Pupils used imagination for various reasons and the differences seemed important. Some used it to rationalise, problem-solve, fantasise or extend their ideas while others used it to be funny or provocative and gave outrageous interpretations. Sutton-Smith (1988: xi) writes about imagination as a 'unique form of intelligence' but points out that it is characterised by childishness, triviality and fantasy. Brown (2000:348) also suggests it provides people with opportunities for 'wild' thinking and claims that it offers freedom for thinking. Ryle (1988:49) calls imaginative thinking 'intellectual jay-walking'. Egan (1997; 2007:4) and White (1990) view using imagination as positive and claim it helps individuals to think 'outside the box' during their problem-solving because they can offer alternative ways to present circumstances or situations.

At first, the action team tried to determine whether pupils believed what they said was true or if they were making things up to amuse, shock or simply answer teacher's questions. In the end, we decided pupils added imagined ideas to their pool of knowledge, without conscious thought or intention.

Eisner (2002:112) refers to theories of **visual and intellectual realism**. In the former, he explains that young children draw what they see, not necessarily what they know and in the latter, they draw what they know about, not necessarily what they observe and in doing so, rely on personal knowledge and experience to guide them. In Eisner's view (2002:112) these two positions interconnect. I think both theories could explain what and how these pupils interpreted paintings. Sometimes they talked about what they saw but did not always know about in a painting (**visual realism**) and at other times they talked about what they knew, or assumed, from prior knowledge and experience but were not observable (**intellectual realism**). However, I identified a third position of **imagined realism** in which pupils talked about what they imagined was happening in a painting and in doing so

constructed a new form of knowledge which included envisioned and speculative possibilities.

7.3.5 Three ways of using imagination

I identified three different ways pupils used their imagination in interpreting paintings. First, they used visual observations and interpreted subject matter in an imagined scenario. For example, one boy described seeing the boy in the painting, *The Graham Children* (fig. 5.8) playing a music box on his lap (visible reality). He explained the boy was playing 'lovely music' (imagined) as he waited for 'his mum to come back' (imagined) and then suggested 'maybe' the boy's father was getting 'tea ready in the kitchen (imagined scenario). Having observed the boy playing with the music box, he conjured up a scenario that may have reflected a remembered or similar experience. Or perhaps he considered it a likely scenario.

Second, they used cognition to interpret visible subject matter in an imagined scenario. For example, one girl interpreted the painting, *The Graham Children* (fig. 5.8) by explaining 'the girl holding the berries (visible) has taken them away from the baby (imagined scenario) because, she 'doesn't want her to touch them. They aren't good for her and she shouldn't have them' (personal/general knowledge). From this, I understood she had looked closely at the subject matter and used imagination to help her explain what was happening. The visual event had stimulated her cognition and led her to make assumptions based on prior knowledge and experience of caring for babies, possibly her own siblings and knowledge about poisonous berries.

In another example, involving the painting, *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (fig.5.11), a girl in Reception suggested the dog sitting by the man's feet (visible) was his pet and 'walked around, smelling things by the tree' (imagined scenario). I understood this interpretation as guided by her own experience of dogs and their habits. The fact that the dog in the painting is shown in a sitting position did not interfere with her imagined scenario.

Third, they imagined subject matter in a painting first, then imagined a scenario also. For example, in a lesson about *The Tropical Storm, Surprised* (fig.5.2), a boy in Reception said that 'something has happened, like a hunter (imagined) and there's going to be an attack' (imagined). This interpretation showed he was responding to the setting and

speculating or weaving a possible scenario around it to provide explanation. Furthermore, he predicted an outcome. This example demonstrates that imagination has strong links with cognition. In another example, having studied *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (fig.5.11), a boy in Year Two suggested, 'There's an army man (imagining Mr Andrews to be in the army) and his enemies are coming for him' (imagined scenario). He used the visible subject matter of Mr Andrews, to construct an imagined character with a profession. It is likely his vision of a soldier reflected his preference for action men figures and his sense of adventure. Furthermore it may have infused an element of thrill, imminent action and danger into the boy's interpretation. In this particular interpretation, it seemed that imagination was linked to affective response which supports the claims of Egan (1988, 1991, 1997), Reichling (1990) and Warnock (1978:196), that emotion plays an important part in imaginative thinking.

7.3.5.1 Realism versus fantasy

According to Tuan (1990:435), *realism* and *fantasy* represent the two 'excess' sides of imagination. For this reason I have chosen to discuss pupils' concern for realism in this section. Throughout this research, the team were puzzled by the concern pupils expressed about subject matter being *real* and the ease with which they made things up and believed in them. Pupils seemed to be less concerned about whether subject matter was painted realistically (mimesis) and more about whether it represented something real, in the sense that the Graham children or the rock eagle in the painting, *Le Domaine d'Arnheim* (fig.5.6) were 'real live, living' objects. I was reminded of Joubert's (2001:18) distinction between something being imaginary (as in 'not real') and real. In the lessons about *The Graham Children* (fig.5.8) one boy asserted that the children were 'not real'. This led others to question the teacher about them and whether they were the artist's children. They wanted to identify and give names to them; presumably so as to prove they were real. On discovering the children were not Hogarth's they decided they were 'not real' (Tape: 13:14). Later when they heard they were his friends' children they became interested once again and reported they were 'real'. The team concluded that the pupils' dilemma rested on whether the children in the painting were real as in 'alive' or even 'still alive' but they did not question their own imaginings about what the figures were 'doing' in the painting.

Le Domaine d'Arnheim (fig.5.6) also elicited extended comments about 'real' subject matter. In this case, pupils shifted between intellectual and imagined realisms. In all three classes they talked about and agreed the eagle's head was not real but a 'rock shape' in the mountain. Pupils in Year One agreed it was 'carved' into the mountain. Having assimilated this 'fact' they continued to talk about the eagle as if it were a real live bird, for example, one girl explained: 'She's a rock, not real. But I see she has her wings out to fly' (Tape: 23.26). This girl understood the eagle was made of rock but at the same time believed it was a female bird capable of spreading and moving its wings. Another boy, who agreed the eagle was made of stone said, 'It's not real but you can see it's moving. I think the mountains are like wings and the wings are landing. Yes, there's the shadow there' (Tape: 23.48 min). According to Barrow (1988) and Egan (1992:43), imagination is a conscious, deliberate and intentional act but in these two examples and others, I was not convinced pupils recognised any difference between understanding intellectually that it was a painted image of an eagle-shaped rock and believing it was a real bird.

According to Trémoulet and Feldman (2006) viewers generally distinguish between animate and inanimate objects in paintings when the notion of movement is depicted. This explained what was happening when two pupils responded to the figures of a woman and girl in the painting, *Courtyard of a House in Delft* (fig.5.3) believing they were real. One boy reported, 'Their mouths are moving, they're open, they are talking' and another spoke about the lady's skirt, suggesting she had lifted it because she was walking down the steps. He said, 'She's had to move because she's stepping down on a step'. In both cases, they discussed subject matter that was visible. After looking closely, they detected open mouths and bent knees which suggested movement and activity and because of this they concluded the figures were real. While these examples show they used visual data to help them construct their interpretations, they also used cognitive reasoning to explain it. The mixture of visual and cognitive thinking provided information that helped them to imagine scenarios, such as coming home from preschool, going to feed chickens and walking in a garden.

In one lesson, pupils looked at different reproductions of *The Graham Children* (fig.5.8) in books, posters and on computers and became concerned about whether a computer screen image was real. When a boy in Reception found he could not manipulate the images of the

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children on the computer he declared, 'They are pretend'. Other pupils debated this. The team's initial explanation was that pupils were concerned about whether the painting was original, as opposed to a reproduction. Later I recognised pupils were referring to whether or not the painting was interactive and they could control the images like a computer game and subsequently, whether the children were 'real' (as in virtual reality). When they realised they could not change them by clicking the computer mouse all of them concluded the children were just 'pretend' and lost interest. I interpreted this may have been about virtual realities. In the end, I concluded that pupils' judgment of whether subject matter was 'real', 'alive' or 'not real' had an effect on their responses to paintings and subsequent interpretations.

7.3.5.2 Fantasy, make believe and silliness

When I analysed examples of pupils' imaginative responses, I was surprised to find only a handful of cases in which pupils displayed spontaneous, light hearted imagination or fanciful thinking in their interpretations. In one example, which occurred in a lesson about *Courtyard of a House in Delft* (fig.5.3), pupils in Reception mimicked each other and used baby talk when they were asked to consider the dialogue occurring between the two figures in the painting. One boy sang out 'dilly, dilly, billy, billy' throughout the activity. Year Two pupils also said silly things such as 'dumpty, dumpty, you're so stupid' in the same activity. The team was dismissive of this behaviour and on reflection, I realised we may have wrongly rejected these fanciful imaginings as meaningless and time-wasting (Ryle, 1963). Sutton-Smith (1988) for example, claimed silly responses are important manifestations of imagination and recommended nurturing them and Joubert (2001:18) sees them as having long term potential for developing imaginative abilities. Maybe they should have been recognised as a necessary way for some pupils to engage with the paintings instead of taking them at face value, as evidence of boredom, disinterest, or age-related.

The painting, *Untitled: Grey and Brown* (fig.5.13) clearly captured pupils' (as opposed to their teachers') imaginations and produced colourful interpretations. The majority of pupils fantasised about this painting and this had the effect of enveloping them in an imaginary world. In keeping with Sutton Smith (1988), Egan (1992: 98) explained 'flights of fantasy' as an important form of imagination that provided opportunities for spontaneous and unstructured thinking. Older pupils, in the Year One and Two classes showed a greater

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inclination towards whimsy and fanciful thought when they interpreted ***Untitled: Grey and Brown*** (fig.5.13) and they bordered on the outlandish and bizarre at times. For example, pupils in Year One talked about a 'Jumbo super melting man' and pupils in Year Two made up fantastic stories about robots, acrobats and circuses and monsters which they imagined were in the painting. I recognised the selection of artwork played a large part in these interpretations and this is discussed earlier on page 189.

7.3.5.3 Imagination as play

Given the age of these pupils, I had expected *play*, for example acting and role play to have a place in the research. According to Craft (2000), imaginative learning in early years settings, is centred on activities for play. Unfortunately, this was not properly explored in this research and therefore I recommend it for future lesson planning for all three classes. If social pretend play really does combine or recapitulate young pupils' experiences and knowledge as MacDonald (1993) claims then using it to demonstrate imaginative thinking about artworks could be more effective than dialogue with this age group, particularly the younger pupils of 4+ years. In the end, given the limited timescale of the research and the emphasis placed on implementing one particular questioning strategy, activities like playing and acting out were not investigated.

7.3.5.4 Supposing, speculating and thinking about possibilities

There were examples of pupils interpreting paintings by creating 'maybe', 'might be' and 'could be' scenarios. I recognised them as thinking about possibilities. These cases were self-initiated and involved speculation and supposition about circumstances or figures in the paintings. They reminded me of Sartre's definition that imagination empowers people to conceive of possibilities 'in and beyond' what they see around themselves. By framing their interpretations in this way, they were able to make sense of, and understand a painting and to offer a personally constructed interpretation. This was consistent with Egan's (1992) argument that imaginative behaviour begins by generating different possibilities while coming to terms with a situation or phenomenon and then evaluating them. When pupils used their imagination in this way, they could supply their own suggestions or explanations about what was happening in the paintings. In other words, they created new possibilities for themselves using the 'flexibility of the mind' that Egan (2007) theorises about imagination. Golomb (2011:139) talks about young children using imagination to create

self-sufficient structures to help them to negotiate complex representational issues in their mark making and she refers to them as 'intelligent solutions'. This reminded me of the notion of possibility thinking (Craft, 1997).

Craft (1997:7) explains the term *possibility thinking* in two ways. First, it involves 'using imagination to find a way around a problem' or blockage that impedes understanding; and second, it about 'asking questions' (Craft, 1997:7) in a probing way to open up possibilities. In her view, possibility thinking centres on **What if?** type questions or **What happens next?** (Craft, Jeffrey and Leibling, 2001:54). In this research, some pupils constructed imagined interpretations that were prefaced by 'it could or might be'. I understood them to be answers to internal questions the pupils posed for themselves such as **What can this be?** or **What could this be about?** rather than **What if?** The latter type of question was not part of the ISEE strategy and therefore teachers did not pose it in class discussion. Triangulated data from observers' and teachers' record forms recorded in Cycle Two showed all the teachers were reticent about encouraging pupils to use imagination when they interpreted the paintings. From this, I understood that using imagination created tensions for them, perhaps because it conflicted with the notion of implementing a strategy using factual information about the art and artist. However, I recognised that when pupils framed their imaginings in this way they could work independently, opening up ideas on their own and offering individual explanations.

Craft (2002:8) advocates possibility thinking and suggests it can be beneficial for problem finding and solving in education. She (1997: 8) links possibility thinking with divergent thinking where learners 'entertain' possible solutions for a problem, as they come to terms with it. I was not convinced the pupils used their imagination resolutely for the purpose of finding *the* solution, although it did result in them having an answer for the teacher's questions. When teachers posed the question '**What's this painting about?**' some pupils may not have known what to say and perhaps this led them, unconsciously or otherwise, to invent possible explanations or ideas. Being able to create their own individually constructed interpretation was an empowering alternative to *not knowing* and it appeared to give them satisfaction. Using their imagination to create an imaginary scenario meant they were also able to come up with, and test out new ideas. Furthermore, conjuring up possible circumstances or events gave them a way to negotiate the factual information they were

given about the artist and artworks and to situate it within a framework of knowledge they had created for themselves. This echoes Craft's (2000:3; 2001:50-51) notion that possibility thinking is a way for children to cope with challenges and avoid being 'stumped by circumstances'(Craft, 1997: 7). I found this explanation helpful for understanding some pupils' motivation to create or invent scenarios about the paintings.

In the end, I concluded that when the pupils used their imagination to think of possible explanations about the paintings they found it a liberating way to interpret them. Furthermore, it helped them to frame and thereby accommodate both the factual and shared information they were given. Therefore, I agreed with Craft (1997:7; 2002) that using imagination to think of possibilities can help pupils to negotiate or find a way 'around' a problem, in this case, determining an explanation or interpretation of a painting. I also understood that the teachers found it acceptable to use imagination for the purpose of problem solving about art when they understood it in this way. This influenced my thinking about the benefits of using imagination in interpretation. For this research, I concluded that encouraging pupils to imagine or think about possibilities could help them to contextualise the information they were learning about the art and artist.

7.3.6 Conclusion

Stage and cognitive theories distinguish differences in the ways in which people use imagination at different ages and with different life experiences, for example, the imagination of a five year old differs from that of an older person (Egan, 1992:25). But individual motivation, personal backgrounds and predisposition to use imagination differs, regardless of age (Barrows, 1988; Egan 1996; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Some pupils in this research individualised their meaning making when they used imagination to interpret paintings. It allowed them to entertain or invent possibilities to help them explain and interpret them. This gave them a sense of ownership and agency and built up their confidence for engaging with them.

The various examples of imaginative behaviour discussed above convinced me that imagination and visual thinking are linked to cognition and often used together in interpretation. When pupils used imagination it created a form of knowledge that facilitated

their construction of meaning and enabled them to frame and add to the factual information they were given, in a way they could understand and manage.

The tensions some of the teachers experienced when they negotiated fact and fiction and real and pretend in pupils' interpretations is not surprising given the stated purposes of general education. As Calderwood (2005: 143) points out 'classrooms may be touted as the space for experience and expression but this often contradicts the reality of everyday practice'. In this research, the teachers accepted pupils' imagined interpretations only if they gave rational explanations for them or if they enhanced or enabled their art making or storytelling. This suggests they valued imaginative thinking for specific purposes in some areas of learning.

The primary National Curriculum for England (2005:116) posits that art and design stimulates imagination amongst other things and this happened in the research. Providing an opportunity for pupils to construct ideas using their imagination gave them a chance to broaden their interpretations. Moreover, it freed them from having to supply the 'right' answer. The richness of pupils' interpretations and the added pathways imagination offered them to think of alternate or possible solutions suggests it has potential for learning in art and general education.