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**An inquiry into pupil voice in five Iranian
and two English primary schools**

Multiple-case study

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Centre for Education Studies

University of Warwick
December 2014

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	vii
Abstract	viii
List of Abbreviations	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Purpose of the Research.....	1
1.2 Personal Motivation	5
1.3 Research questions and Objectives	7
1.4 Overview of the thesis	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Concept of Childhood	11
2.2.1 Historical perspective of childhood	11
2.2.2 Contemporary concept of childhood.....	14
2.3 UNCRC: an International framework towards children’s rights	18
2.4 What is ‘voice’?	20
2.5 Concept of pupil voice	23
2.5.1 Benefits of promoting ‘Pupil Voice’	26
2.5.2 Examples of strategies applied to promote pupil voice in England.....	29
2.5.3 Reflection on barriers restricting pupil voice.....	31
2.6 Pupil Voice in this research	35
2.6.1 The ignorance of one’s own voice: Poor thinking	39
2.6.2 Community of enquiry	41
2.6.3 The stories of ‘One Thousand and One Nights’	43
2.6.4 Why use the stories of the <i>Nights</i> ?.....	44
2.6.5 The role of the stories and storytelling	47
2.6.7 Why tell stories?	49
2.7 The benefits and challenges of adopted pedagogical method.....	50
2.7.1 Reflective thinking.....	50
2.7.2 Classroom Talk	52
2.7.3 Rebalance the hierarchy relationship	55
2.7.4 Challenges involved when employing ‘stories’ within the community of enquiry	57
2.8 Summary	61

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	63
3.1 Research Methodology	63
3.1.1 Theoretical framework.....	64
3.1.2 Paradigms, Ontology, and Epistemology.....	65
3.2 My research project: Qualitative Case Study.....	68
3.2.1 The Case Study Approach	69
3.2.2 Multiple-case study	69
3.2.3 Selection Procedure	71
3.2.4 Potential Limitations.....	72
3.2.5 Multiple case-studies rather than a comparative study	74
3.3 Data Collection Methods	76
3.3.1 Sources of data collected during the fieldwork.....	79
3.3.2 Research Timescale	79
3.4 Observation: Why participant observation?.....	82
3.4.1 Advantages of being a participant observer.....	82
3.5 Putting theory into practice	84
3.5.1 Planning for community of enquiry sessions.....	85
Challenges during observation.....	91
3.6 Interview: Why interviews?.....	92
3.6.1 Interviewing children	95
3.6.2 Interviewing Teachers and Head Teachers	96
3.6.3 Potential Drawbacks	97
3.7 Credibility of findings.....	98
3.8 Data Analysis	101
3.9 Ethical Considerations	109
3.10 Summary	112
CHAPTER 4: VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOMS	114
4.1 Classroom's Episodes	115
4.2 Frame story of the 'Nights' (S1).....	116
4.2.1 Episode 1(S1) - Boys Primary classroom in Tehran.....	116
4.2.2 Episode 2(S1) Girls Primary classroom in Tehran	118
4.2.3 Episode 3(S1) English Primary classroom in Coventry	121
4.3 Aladdin and his magical lamp (S2).....	123
4.3.1 Episode 1(S2) Boys Primary classroom in Tehran	124

4.3.2 Episode 2(S2) Girls Primary classroom in Tehran	126
4.3.3 Episode 3(S2) English Primary classroom in Coventry	127
4.4 Story of ‘Three sisters’ (S3).....	129
4.4.1 Episode 1 (S3) Boys Primary classroom in Tehran	132
4.4.2 Episode 2 (S3) Girls Primary classroom in Tehran	133
4.4.3 Episode 3 (S3) English Primary classroom in Coventry	135
4.5 Reflection on the emergent themes	136
4.5.1 Unmasking the existing needs	137
4.5.2 ‘Go Visiting’	146
4.5.3 The role of Enchantment in the ‘Nights’	148
4.5.4 Developing ‘moral reasoning’	152
CHAPTER 5:	155
INDIVIDUAL VOICES ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF WORKSHOPS	155
5.1 Voices from Iranian Pupils	155
5.1.1 Overall Feedback	155
5.1.2 Enjoyable Elements	156
5.1.3 Non-enjoyable elements.....	161
5.1.4 Distinctive elements.....	163
5.1.5 Challenging Elements	164
5.2 Voices from English Pupils	171
5.2.1 Overall Feedback	171
5.2.2 Enjoyable Elements	171
5.2.3 Non- enjoyable element	175
5.2.4 Distinctive element	175
5.2.5 Challenging elements.....	177
5.3 Summary	180
CHAPTER 6:	182
PUPILS’ VIEWS ON MORE GENERAL ASPECTS OF SCHOOL LIFE.....	182
6.1 Voices from Iranian Pupils	182
6.1.1 What kind of people do these pupils want teachers to be?	182
6.1.2 Relationships with classroom teacher(s):.....	185
6.1.3 What if children swap places with teachers?	190
6.1.4 How teachers’ can help pupils learn better?	191
6.1.5 What do pupils think about ‘Punishment’ in general?.....	192

6.1.6 School councils	195
6.1.7 Transformations that pupils would like to see in their school	196
6.2 English pupils' perspectives	201
6.2.1 What kind of people do these pupils want teachers to be?	201
6.2.2 Relationships with classroom teacher(s):.....	202
6.2.3 What if children swap places with teachers?	204
6.2.4 How teachers' can help pupils learn better?	204
6.2.5 What do pupils think about 'Punishment' in general?	205
6.2.6 School councils	207
6.2.7 Transformations that pupils would like to see in their school	207
6.3 Summary	209
CHAPTER 7:	213
IRANIAN TEACHERS VOICES.....	213
7.1 Iranian Teachers' perspectives.....	214
7.1.1 T1	214
7.1.2 T2	218
7.1.3 T3	220
7.1.4 T4	223
7.1.5 T5	225
7.2 Summary	227
CHAPTER 8: REFLECTION ON FINDINGS	229
8.1 Current 'Pupil Voice' practices in these case studies	229
8.1.1 School councils	229
8.2 Existing obstacles to restrict 'pupil voice'	232
8.2.1 Classroom settings	232
8.2.2 Community (WE) versus Identity (I)	235
8.2.3 Current epistemology of knowledge	236
8.2.4 Power relationships	239
8.2.5 Absence of Childlike adults?	243
8.3 Challenges experienced in this research by children	245
8.3.1 Talking about opinions and feelings publically	245
8.4 Summary	250
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION	252
9.1 Summary of the key findings	252

9.2 Limitations of my research	259
9.2.1 The pressure of time.....	259
9.2.2 Risks involved.....	259
9.2.3 Classroom teacher’s intervention.....	260
9.3 Contribution of the thesis.....	261
9.4 Recommendations for further research.....	262
9.5 Last note: grouping of Article 12, 3 and 31 of UNCRC	263
REFERENCES	265
APPENDICES	285
Appendix 1: Ground Rules Poster	285
Appendix 2: Question Quadrant Poster	286
Appendix 3: Lesson Plans.....	287
Appendix 4.....	295
Semi-structured interview questions with pupils	295
Appendix 5.....	297
Semi-structured interview questions with Iranian classroom teachers	297
Appendix 6.....	298
Letter of Consent.....	298

List of Tables and Figures

<i>Figure 1: Image of a primary school Iranian textbook.....</i>	17
<i>Figure 2: PV: The relationship between participation and consultation.....</i>	25
<i>Figure 3: Consulting pupils: what's in it for pupils?.....</i>	27
<i>Figure 4: Hierarchical relationships in the classroom.....</i>	56
<i>Figure 5: The cycle of design for this study.....</i>	65
<i>Figure 6: Philosophical assumptions of the study.....</i>	69
<i>Figure 7: 10 steps.....</i>	89
<i>Figure 8: Socratic questioning.....</i>	90
<i>Figure 9: Painted black board by children for me.....</i>	222
<i>Figure 10: the dynamics in an Iranian classroom.....</i>	234
<i>Figure 11: Iranian primary school classroom 1.....</i>	235
<i>Figure 12: Iranian primary school classroom 2.....</i>	235
<i>Table 1: Research timeline.....</i>	83
<i>Table 2: Ground rules.....</i>	88

Acknowledgements

First I wish to thank my beautiful mum, Mrs Maryam Ansarian (Partovi). I lost her when I was in my 2nd year of my PhD. Her loss was the most painful incident in my life. After this, there were a number of moments when I did not feel strong enough to continue and complete my doctoral journey. All those critical moments I could hear her telling me 'don't give up'. I listened to my mum, and today I know she feels happy and proud.

I am also deeply grateful for my supervisors Dr Michael Wyness, Prof Joe Winston and Dr Peter Lang for their invaluable intellectual feedback, tremendous courage and their fruitful guidance throughout this doctoral journey. Thank you Michael for the excellent opportunities you gave to extend my knowledge and to grow and develop my teaching skills with the UG students. Thank you Joe for your endless support, your wonderful sense of humour, also for the opportunity you gave to attend your brilliant drama workshops. Thank you Peter for making me realize how the affective aspect of education is important for human flourishing. You all opened new windows in my life and taught me to look at this life with wiser eyes.

My deep gratitude and love to my father, Mr Mohammad Ali Partovi. He is my first and forever teacher in life and my ever amazing baba. Without his unconditional love, continued support, and kindness I would not be able to complete this journey.

My special thanks go to my life partner, Thanos Athanasopoulos. He is my inspiration, my love and my smile.

I would also like to thank my best friend Natia Sopromadze for her friendship and emotional support. I also thank the Warwick Centre for Education Studies, my friends and colleagues especially Naima Qureshi from the University of Warwick.

Finally, I am so grateful to all the children who participated in this research, also the teachers and head teachers. Thank you for making this research journey happen. Together, we created this thesis.

Monireh Partovi

June 2014

Abstract

This thesis reflects the voices of 9 to 10 year-old primary school children in Iran and England. The findings were collected from 81 Iranian pupils within five single-sex primary classrooms and 41 English pupils in two primary classrooms. The study is mainly focused on Iranian pupils and their views. However, since all the terms used in this study originated within the Western education system, it was prudent to undertake the study in England too. It aimed to deepen understanding of the concepts as well as to have a better reflection on my findings in Iran.

In order to listen to the voices of pupils, two methods of data collection were applied: participant observation and individual semi-structured interviews. As a participant observer, I facilitated six hours of workshops with each classroom adopting the community of enquiry as my pedagogical method. The selected stories of ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ were used as a ‘springboard or trigger’ to facilitate the classroom inquiry.

The findings suggest that the stories of ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ may enable children’s voice in four ways. First, stories engaged children in discussion on topical issues that matter to them. Second, they open up space for imaginative journeys and help children to ‘*go visiting*’ different views of story characters. Third, these stories contain astonishment which may foster children’s imagination. Finally, they nurture moral reasoning by picturing moral dilemmas. The findings also revealed that building of a reciprocal relationship between teacher/pupils and pupils/pupils is required when giving voice. In addition to this, it was recommended to transform a classroom into a shared space where all the children can be seen and heard.

List of Abbreviations

DCSF	Department for Children, Society and Family
Nights	One Thousand and One Nights
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PV	Pupil Voice
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Children talk and they have always talked, though their words are rarely listened to and leave no trace. The words of children may at times seem strangely similar to our own, but they recall faraway and unknown worlds and meanings to which we as adults too often remain deaf and insensitive. Giving a voice to childhood thus means recognizing children's right to be the primary authors of their lives.

Sergio Spaggiari, 1995

1.1 Purpose of the Research

In this research I will inquire into the voices of pupils 9 to 10 years old in five primary classrooms in Iran and two primary classrooms in England. Traditionally the study of childhood was situated within the domain of developmental psychology, so that children were passively studied as 'human becomings' who become rational human beings while they complete the process of growing up. Consequently, childhood is characterized as a 'transitional phase' from 'human becoming' to 'human beings' (Kehily, 2004, p.1, Prout 2005, Hallett & Prout, 2003). Therefore, children's views have been neglected by adults. One example can be seen in social policies for children that have not considered 'children as persons with a voice' (Hallett & Prout, 2003, p.1).

Nevertheless, social constructivists in the West have recently, argued that children should be seen as 'social actors' and not 'adults-in-training' who need adults to talk and think on their behalf (Wyness, 2001 & 2006, p.194-196). This is why the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) set up a legally-binding international agreement to support children's rights politically, socially, culturally and economically. The protocol was ratified by 193 countries including Iran and England. One aspect of this protocol reflected in Article 12 offers children 'the right to express their opinions and have these listened to and,

where appropriate, acted upon' (savethechildren, online). Educators have placed increasing emphasis on the importance of listening to the voices of children while seeing them as unique individuals. Therefore, over the past decade, there has been a growth and diversity of interest in pupil's views and some education systems have focused more on exploring pupils' views intending to gain greater insights into understanding the life in classrooms and schools (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007, p.3 Flutter, 2007).

It is suggested that pupils' voice enables greater dialogue to take place between teachers, pupils and learning, reducing the bureaucracy that often stifles current education systems (Prieto, 2000, p.86). Rudduck and Flutter described pupils as 'expert witnesses' in that they help teachers to see from the perspective of the pupil and 'the world of school can look very different from this angle' (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p. 82). In addition to this, even though eliciting pupils' perspectives on different aspects of schooling seems provocative in terms of time, space, resources and relationships within school regimes, the findings from research with pupils have suggested that children are insightful and generous commentators (MacBeath, 1999). Therefore, it is suggested that the 'pupil voice' approach can be a starting point from which educators and teachers can begin to see the wisdom in pupils' experiences of schooling (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, p.86).

However, the question raised here is whether children have given any space to put forward their own ideas in schools today, especially where education is increasingly formalised (Haynes, 2002, p.15). In fact, 'power dynamics are complex' (Bragg, 2007, p.509) and children do not enjoy the equal rights or responsibilities in schools (Haynes, 2002, p.2). Teachers are often sceptical about young people's knowledge or intentions and they may think that allowing freedom of expression of views and thought gives a platform to the 'wrong' students who if given rights to have a say would normally come up with superficial

or unconstructive responses (Bragg, 2007, p.513). Haynes explains the fact that our values and beliefs are culturally and socially constructed, so that adults views of how children contribute to knowledge are conditioned by legal frameworks, political and social systems and the structure of society itself (Haynes, 2002, p.13). This is to say that current pedagogies in many societies have developed in the context of outdated views of childhood, which undermines children's capacities to be positive-active contributors in their schools.

Arnot and Reay (2007, p.317) argue that:

student voices heard in process of consultation are not in fact independently constructed "voices" rather they are "the messages" created by particular pedagogic contexts. Teachers cannot by definition separate out pupil voice from message since "voice" is always announced or realised in message.

So reflecting on this view would suggest that particular pedagogic contexts promote their own version of voice. For instance, education in Iran seems mainly focused on imparting information so that pupils can accomplish their routine skills of learning subjects and memorizing facts without helping pupils to learn to be reflective and think beyond routines to explore possibilities to apply the knowledge in their lives (Mirhadi, 1998). Moreover, the significant effect of religion may shape an ideological system of teaching and learning in schools which may result in an absolutist way of thinking in which issues are seen in black and white terms with no shades of grey. Therefore the current pedagogy may not only nurture uncritical voices, but also dogmatic and inflexible thinkers. Consequently, in countries such as Iran the term 'pupil voice' which challenges the traditional view of seeing school children as passive receivers of knowledge is not only innovative but also controversial.

However, listening to the voices of pupils requires a more participative form of education, and new structures, activities, and a rethinking of the internal workings of each institution

may be required. Therefore, in order to realise its potential it is suggested that educators revisit their belief about children and the importance of listening to their students' voices (Fullan, 1993).

Accepting a more democratic education and letting pupils have a say cannot be taught but has to be practiced regularly (Hodgkin, 1998 cited in Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). Therefore, my aim is to facilitate a platform for children to vocalize their opinions publically inside the classroom and privately over the individual interviews. This decision has been made for two reasons. First, the nature of the study is to gain pupils views, and therefore to achieve this aim, building mature trust relationships with pupils to limit self-censorship is unavoidable. In particular within Iranian schools, the presence of fear and insecurity can be felt not only by pupils, but even staff while being asked to express their views. Second, it is said that certain pedagogy produces its own version of voice. Therefore to limit submissive voices and to nurture more critical and creative voices, classroom discussion seems beneficial in this study. As Fielding (2007, p.305) pertinently writes voice 'is created, both deliberately and unconsciously, in dialogue with other voices'. In addition, Haynes (2002, p.14) states that providing children with a public voice in which they can speak their mind is beneficial since when children are thoughtfully vocal, their thinking and talking this can change classrooms from merely a place of instruction into a place where education is possible.

Hence, before undertaking individual interviews, I decided to start collecting children's views by taking an organic, patient approach, starting from using stories of the 'one thousand and one nights' with its emphasis on the female voice of the its storyteller-Scheherazade- within the adopted pedagogical method called community of enquiry inside the classroom. Community of enquiry was developed by Matthew Lipman in the 1970s and aimed to provide a safe and non-judgmental environment where children can explore not only those questions

and concepts they are interested in discovering, but also their views are open to question (Lipman, 2003). I used the selected stories of ‘one thousand and one nights’ as a ‘springboard or trigger’ for classroom inquiry to invite children for reflection as the storyteller Scheherazade did (Splitter and Sharp, 2005, p.101). Scheherazade uses the most human of devices, that of storytelling not only to forge her destiny and delay her death, but also to ‘invite reflection- to give the [listeners’] of her stories pause’ (Warner, 2011, p.436).

It is important to note that, although this pedagogic method has been used to teach philosophy to children, in this research the main stress is not to empower philosophical voice of children and evaluate whether children are actually philosophizing and having philosophical dialogue or not. The stress to adopt this pedagogy is to stimulate the child’s critical and creative voice through stories and open a new window for pupils to begin wondering and speculating about the world around them and issues which matter to them. During this process, although my role is guiding the discussion, the content of the discussion will be shaped by children’s interest and experiences. Hence, within this paradigm the child’s voice is placed in the centre to bring new knowledge, and their personal experiences and interests, inside the classroom so there is also ontological and epistemological shift between teachers and children. Accordingly this may result in rebalancing the power relationships between teachers and pupils and make the voices heard (Murris, 2008, p.667).

1.2 Personal Motivation

I have decided to undertake this research on account of my personal experience; during my schooling in Iran as a child my ideas and beliefs were disregarded. As far as I remember the education system in my home country, Iran, promotes silence rather than voice, while at the same time it promotes rote learning and the memorizing of material, with little or no reasoning attached to it and without thinking critically. In other words, the underlying

objective of the education system during my schooling was to discourage children from thinking for themselves, leading to situations where children do not voice their thoughts and opinions, but are dictated to about what to think and believe, without analysing and thinking about alternative choices. This reflects Nussbaum's (2010, p.7-10) view when she described education as a tool for the kind of learning that produces profit-making skills rather than generating learning models to help pupils to become critical imaginative people. She describes this model of education as a 'silent crisis', while the education system seems to facilitate 'a culture of yes-people' (Nussbaum, 2010, p.7-10).

An example is when I was eight years old, we were asked to write a sentence starting with a 'Muslim soldiers'. I wrote 'Muslim soldiers will not conquer the war; they will be defeated by enemies at the end'. The next day the school principle asked my parents to go to school and explain why their child did not think in a positive way about Muslim soldiers and told my parents that what their child had written was a sin. From that time, even though I was only eight I understood that school is a place where you are not allowed to think aloud and differently, as if you do you and your family will be in trouble.

When I came to England to pursue my study in education, during my MA I realized that writing more critically, not descriptively was actually rewarded in UK universities and this was a new experience for me. For the first time I felt free and safe to think critically and to analyse others views and myself publically without having the fear of expecting threatening consequences. In addition to this, I came across new terms in education such as 'pupil voice', 'children's rights' and 'philosophy for children'. This inspired me to believe that-'children are people too'- and that education is not just a case of imparting knowledge but is about understating, enjoyment and human flourishing as well. I have thus decided to undertake this

research into how to listen to the voices of children from my home country, whose voices have been ignored for many years.

1.3 Research questions and Objectives

As mentioned previously, my aim in this study is to develop a platform for children to vocalize their opinions publically inside the classroom and privately through individual interviews. The main objective of this study was twofold: first to develop a platform for 9 to 10 years old pupils to be heard collectively. To explore the views inside the classroom, as mentioned, I used stories of the *Nights* within the community of enquiry pedagogy. Secondly, individual interviews with all of the participants helped to listen to their individual voices, so as to gain an understanding of their views on the workshops as well as their opinion about more general aspects of schooling.

The topic has been researched through a multiple-case study design. The study is localized within Iranian pupils and their views. However, since all the terms used in this study, such as ‘pupil voice’, and proposed pedagogical approach all originated within the Western education system, it was prudent to undertake the study in England in order to gain better understanding of the concepts in relation to ‘pupil voice’ within Western literature used for this study. Also findings gathered in English classrooms provide fruitful reflection on my findings in Iran. There is no aim to generalize the findings but highlighting similarities among the findings may contribute to a broader understanding of children’s interests and experiences, and also existing obstacles that restrict the child’s voice from being heard in their school community.

The research questions are as follows:

1. In what ways might the selected stories of the ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ in Iranian and English classes enable pupil voice?
2. What are the Iranian and English pupils’ experiences of the practical workshops?
3. With particular reference to teachers, school regulations and pupil voice, what are Iranian and English pupils’ insights into their experiences in school?

The main focus of the study stressed on Iranian children so as to get a clearer picture of the existing obstacles preventing children’s voices from being heard in Iranian primary schools it was also resolved to explore Iranian teachers’ perspectives about the elements of workshops and whether they would apply any of the activities in their own practice. Their views on the importance of enabling children to be heard and to think for themselves within the current pedagogy and what challenges involve restricting children’s voice in the classrooms.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the definitions and concepts explored throughout my thesis. Chapter 2 is divided into four sections; in section one I begin my chapter with a brief explanation of the concept of childhood historically and contemporarily following with reflection on non-Western societies. Following this, I explain the effect of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Children (1989) in relation to the concept of pupil voice with reflection on it. In section two, I provide a theoretical underpinning of the concept of voice and in particular the concept of ‘pupil voice’ with its benefits for pupils, teachers and school improvement. Examples of applying the pupil voice approach are provided as well as reflection on barriers to highlight the potential obstacles could restrict the voices of children at school or classroom level. In section three, I explained the concept of pupil voice defined

in this study and the relation between poor level of thinking and ignorance of voice will be critically examined. In section four, I explain the process and pedagogy I used in this study to empower the voices of children and encourage them to express their ideas and thoughts publically. I conclude the chapter with the potential challenges of the proposed pedagogy namely stories of the *Nights* within the ‘community of enquiry’.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research paradigm for the current study, the methodologies adopted and the data collection methods that I employed in this research, and I outline the process of the pedagogy I used in this study in order to empower voices of children. The methodological drawbacks and ethical considerations in relation to undertaking research with children will be discussed. I will also offer my data analysis strategies in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 deals with the presentation and analysis of the evidence I have gathered during my classroom observation. I will present selected classroom observations in episode format. Three stories are used in total and for each story three examples of classroom discussions are provided to give my reader the experience of discussion in different classrooms. I also argue here in favour of the potential of stories of the ‘thousand and one nights’ to contribute in enabling pupil voice inside the classrooms. Thus, I conclude this chapter with a reflection on emergent themes.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings gathered during individual interviews in all my case studies concerning their views of the different aspects of practical workshops.

Chapter 6, I present the findings from individual interviews with pupils regarding their views on specific aspects of schooling in order to gain an understanding on their relationship with their teacher, their definition of a ‘good teacher’ and what they think about the usefulness of

‘school councils’. Pupils’ views on the concept of punishment and any transformation they would like to see in their school will also be presented.

Chapter 7 deals with the voices of Iranian teachers to explore their views on different aspect of the approach I used and whether they think that as educators they should provide a platform for children to have a say and to think for themselves. This chapter will help to draw attention to those obstacles that restrict the voices of children to be heard in-depth.

In Chapter 8, I engage in a discussion of the findings presented in chapter 5, 6 and 7. It is divided into three sections. The first section concentrates on the existing strategies for practicing having a voice in the schools such as ‘School Councils’ and the reflection on the usefulness of ‘school councils’ for children in this study. School councils are based in schools to consult pupils’ views about different decisions relating to their school life. They aim to help them to participate in making decisions in their schools to encourage self-assured individuals and responsible citizens (Knight, 2004, p.3). Section two relates to existing obstacles restricting pupils’ voices. Section three deals with the kinds of challenges children experienced in this study.

In Chapter 9, I summarise the findings of my research project and its limitations. In addition, the implication of this research for further research will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

I begin my literature review chapter by discussing the concept of the child. Questions about children and the concept of childhood are central to the term ‘pupil voice’. Educators’ underlying beliefs and understandings about the concept of the child have a significant impact on the way they conceptualize their relationships with children and also on their pedagogies and thus how they listen to pupil’s views and take their views into account. Stables (2011, p.1) suggests that ‘how we think about children is not the same as how we deal with them, though how we think about them does affect how we deal with them’. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the dominant view of seeing children, the concept of childhood from historical and contemporary perspectives will be discussed based on the existing literature in the West followed by my reflection on the concept of childhood in Iran. Afterwards I will refer to the globalized policy of the UNCRC to discuss its relevance to the concept of ‘pupil voice’ with reflection on its ambiguity in different cultural settings. Then in section two, I will define the concept of ‘voice’ and what is meant by the term pupil voice concerning benefits and strategies as well as constraints applied to listen to the voices of the child. In section three, I will explain what pupil voice means in this research and my adopted pedagogy, using the stories of *Nights* within the discipline of the ‘community of enquiry’ approach. I will then outline its benefits in terms of empowering pupils views in this study and also the challenges involved in section four.

2.2 Concept of Childhood

2.2.1 Historical perspective of childhood

What is a child, or to be a child? This question seems easy to answer for many people but in fact for so many years since late seventeenth century till the current time mostly adults and

not children themselves have tried to understand what it is to be a child (Friquegnon, 1997, p.44). They tried to answer this question in different ways to solve the puzzle of childhood myth (Cuningham, 2006, p.12). In Western culture studying childhood in its historical context, illustrates several viewpoints about the concept of childhood. In fact, the work of Philippe Aries (1914-1984) had a significant impact on shaping the contemporary understating of the concept of the child as his work was the first general historical account of childhood. Aries (1962) in his book, *Centuries of Childhood*, argued that there was no such thing as the concept of childhood until the 16th century onwards (Archard, 2004, p.19 and Wyness, 2006, p.12). In the Middle Ages, young children 'were rushed from infancy to adulthood without going through the intervening stage of childhood' (Friquegnon, 1997, p.44). Accordingly a child was an infant for a period until the age of seven and until they became a 'miniature' adult. Children were treated like servants and they wore the same style clothes as adults. This deficiency of sentiment led to the neglect of children as a distinct segment of the population (Wyness, 2006, p.12).

Friquegnon, (1997, p.45) suggests that in the Middle Ages the lack of differentiation between children and adults resulted in a 'childish society'. Therefore, adults like children 'owed obedience to a master' and also they believed in magic and fairy tales, as well as playing childish games such as hide-and-seek. When the industrial revolution occurred, the life of adults became more complicated as adults began to grow up (*ibid*, 1997, p.45). Consequently, profound changes happened in the way adults perceived and treated children. The position of children changed in the society, and thus the institution of childhood began to occur in the eighteenth century.

Aries bases his idea on the lack of representations of children in medieval art which portrayed infants, rather than children and children were portrayed as miniature adults. However, his

idea has led to some disagreements between social scientists who believe that Aries simply referred to the artwork to support his idea and not texts or written documents. Hence, although the images are powerful they are ultimately made by somebody and they are therefore material products that do not represent broader social trends. Scholars such as Pollock (1983 cited in James and Prout, 1997, p.17 Prout, 2005, p.10) criticized Aries's claim when she proposes that even if children were regarded differently in past times, this does not mean that they were not regarded as children. Despite some disagreements with Aries's philosophy, historians agree that the late seventeenth century was a starting point of new attitudes and profound changes concerning the conception of childhood and family life in the West (Kehily, 2004, p.31 & Hendrick, 2005, p.36).

In the 18th century, the work of two great philosophers John Locke and John Jacques Rousseau had insightful impacts on ways of seeing children, and these views had a significant impact of how educators perceive children while developing policies. John Locke described a child as a 'Tabula Rasa' or a 'blank slate' proposing that children come into the world in an empty slate and with help of adults and training they become rational human beings once they reach adulthood. In his view 'experience fills the child's minds; maturation is a cumulative aggregation of facts, abilities and dispositions' (Archard, 2004, p.43).

For Rousseau, Locke's theory which saw children always in need of being supervised by adults was problematic, so he espoused a romantic view of human nature (Guttek, 2004, p.63). Rousseau was perhaps the first proponent of the child-centred approach in his book called *Emile*, inspired the 'noble savage' model and in his view a childhood is an 'age of nature', therefore children should be in contact with nature to protect their natural innocence and free to play and learn from nature not adults. He writes: 'Children embody a state of innocence, purity and natural goodness that is only contaminated on contact with the corrupt world',

demonstrating that for him the childhood period is a time when a child should be protected from the adult world and adult work; a time when children only should play and be cared for (Kehily, 2004, p.5 and Cunningham, 2006). This way of seeing children as 'natural' and vulnerable creatures dominated during the nineteenth century. In 1837, Froebel introduced Kindergarten for young children in which school is like an ideal garden where children can be protected and nurtured to become adults as childhood became idealized, protected in the same way as a garden sheltered by hedges or walls (Cunningham, 2006). At this time, childhood became an important and privileged time of life in Western societies, where it was recognized that the future of any nation is reliant on its children.

2.2.2 Contemporary concept of childhood

The twentieth century was called 'the century of the child' in which the health and welfare of children become an essential consideration along with their schooling; and probably at no other time have children been so greatly profiled than the twentieth century (Prout, 2005, p.1). From the twentieth century to recent times the immature biological state of children and their physical smallness had a great influence on the ideology of child-centred societies. Thus, 'growing up' or knowledge of the natural growth of children has been the dominant context of studying children by developmental psychologists such as Piaget (Jenks, 1982). In Piaget's theory, child development includes 'age-graded' phases of development which once completed the child becomes a rational competent being (Prout, 2005, p.11).

Studying children scientifically and focusing more on the biological aspects of their development, therefore categorizes them as passive, natural and incompetent creatures as it seems that each individual child is merely seen as a consumer, an invisible citizen with the least authority over their lives in the society. This position of children in society has been challenged recently by social constructionists and as Prout (2005, p.8), who believe that

‘childhood is understood as a social construction’. Therefore, the lack of children’s social status and considering them as dependent until they have reached adulthood draws attention from the field of sociology, causing a rethink regarding childhood and children’s position in society (Wyness, 2006, p.66).

Social constructionists critique developmental psychologists’ illustration of childhood as the natural and universal fixed phase of life as a meaningless oversimplification. According to this school of thoughts, developmental psychologists disregard the dominant discourses ruling children’s lives within the culture they live in and also neglect the relationship of each individual child with their society and the demands of the society on children (Jenks 2004, p.78). In other words as Jenks (2004, p.81) states: ‘The ‘fact’ of natural process overcomes the ‘value’ of real social worlds’. This is not to reject the biological immaturity of being a child, but to simultaneously take into account that elements of time, place and culture can affect this period dramatically. Moreover, variables such as gender, class and ethnicity affect this period of life indicating ‘plurality of childhoods’ rather than a structured conditional term. Therefore different societies may define the child differently (Prout, 2005).

Consequently as opposed to the common-sense vision of treating children as both natural and universal creatures, children are not always similar all around the world (Jenks, 2004, p.78). An example is seen with the International Year of the Child, which was introduced in 1979, and concerned children’s welfare and protection. Hence, the media portrayed the image of starving children living in absolute poverty gazing at the camera to show rest of the world and mainly developed countries how childhood can differ from the Westernized dominant image of a happy and concern free period of one’s life (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p.78, Franklin and Franklin, 1996, p.96). The differences in terms of how the child is perceived within different cultures leads to the argument of cultural relativism. It emphasizes that the

aspects of time, location and culture play a role in constructing the concepts of childhood (White, 1999, p.133). To see a child as a full human being whose views are important to be heard not only challenges the traditional image of seeing children as ‘human becomings’, but also raises the question of which children we mean- all children around the world or only children in developed societies?

The Western symbolic image of children as happy, playing and being in schools as mentioned earlier has occasionally been challenged by those who see alternative views of childhood in non-Western societies. Consequently, looking at childhood and children’s status in non-Western societies such as Iran not only gives a very ambiguous picture to what it means to be a child but also raises the question of whether childhood is more about ‘boyhood’ and to what extent girls can position themselves as children in a very male dominated society where men write all the rules for women and consider them as a ‘muted group’ (1973 Hardman, James and Prout 1997, p.7). One example, which reflects this view, can be seen in primary school’s schoolbooks when girls’ characters inside the books are covered. In fact, imagery is useful insofar as it can direct the message to girls to define themselves with the image that they should cover their body as they are not children anymore (Holland, 1992).



Figure 1: Image of a primary school Iranian textbook

The unequal treatment of women in Iranian society has a long historical background and for many years gender discrimination has ruled the lives of women in Iran. This positions Iran as a backward country in terms of human rights and in particular women's rights. One example would be the position of women as judges in the courts after the Islamic revolution in 1979; according to Iranian laws, women are too emotional to be trained as judges; they are not considered as rational competent people who can decide on being fair-minded. Indeed, in Iran while women 'are allowed to listen to civil cases as judges, they are prohibited from becoming the verdict-speaking judge in civil courts and absolutely prevented from participating as judges in criminal courts' (Mohadjer, 2006). The passive position of girls and women in our society again raises the question of how the pupil voice approach can be developed regardless of a pupil's gender in our country where females are not used to being given the rights to 'have a say'. How can we encourage girls to challenge the dominant social climate and express their views? It seems that despite

cultural relativism official policies at international and national levels attempt to set up a universalized model of childhood. Therefore in 1989 the Convention on the Rights of Children seems to represent as White (1999, p.134) argued:

The antithesis of cultural relativism and of principles of recognizing and respecting differences; comprehensive global standards on children's rights to establish rights or norms valid for and to be adhered to by all the countries of the world – something therefore that is seen as really, intentionally, *literally* 'universal', in short: a relativist's nightmare.

2.3 UNCRC: an International framework towards children's rights

In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) was the first internationally legal framework to be produced, which according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) aimed 'to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights' (UNICEF, Online). This embodies, the concept of protection, provision and also participation in which children have the right to express views, be heard and also participate actively in decisions that affect their lives (Fielding and Bragg, 2003, p.4). Therefore, the Convention includes 54 articles which focus on not only welfare rights but also self-determination rights. According to the UN Convention (1989), children have the right to take part in decisions about personal and public matters which affect their lives although in the past children did not have the same rights (Wyness, 2001, p. 196).

This was the first time children all around the world were given the rights to 'have a say' in matters affecting their lives (Freeman, 1996, p.36). An example of this can be seen in Article 12, in which children are given the right to articulate their views in matters affecting them and these views being taken into account in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (Committee on the Rights of the Child, Online). Article 12 of UNCRC (1989) reminds us that 'children are people too'. They should not just be considered as heritage for their parents,

state or the communities they belong to, but also as social actors who have the right to participate actively and speak their mind freely about different matters in relation to their lives and education. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child has raised the profile of the act of giving rights to children not only in terms of their protection and provision but also their participation (Shier, 2001, p.107). However, the ambiguity in the formulation of the UNCRC's articles makes it difficult to stay faithful to UNCRC's aims in different cultural settings and although UNCRC was a starting point to set equal rights for children regardless of their gender, nevertheless national rules in some states such as Iran are very gender discriminated. Therefore, the conservative interpretation of articles in UNCRC can prejudice their application (Lundy, 2007, p.931).

An example can be seen in Article 12 where the words of 'age' and 'maturity' are open for interpretation. Therefore, although the Iranian government signed the UNCRC in 1991 under some religious conditions, unfortunately still many of the practices referenced in the Convention including Article 12 are not only unchanged but also the Articles are misinterpreted in Iran. A large proportion of the Iranian population is under 18 years old; however, the concept of childhood and their rights is still a mysterious phenomenon in Iranian culture. The child has been identified according to different dimensions by Iranian policy makers. According to the UNCRC people up to 18 years old are considered as children, but in Islamic rules, the step from being immature to mature is based on sexual maturity, so this age is considered nine years old for girls and fifteen years old for boys, therefore contravening the UNCRC categorization of children. These conflicts between UNCRC and Sharia (Islamic religious law) not only make it simple for the Iranian state to neglect the voices of children during their school life but even to justify the large numbers of child executions in Iran (Abiad, Zia Mansoor, 2011, p.354-355 and Tayefi, online).

It seems that emphasizing the importance of the rights of each individual child and giving them support to be heard as stipulated in the UN Convention cannot occur accurately in some societies while conservative traditions still control people's lives. In fact, as Na'im (1994 cited in Morrow, 1999, p.151) notes, children's rights are founded on the universal principles of human rights which do not discriminate human beings based on their ethnicity, their religion, gender and so on. However, such a view may be at odds with the ideals of collective societies such as Iran, China or Africa. Where family traditions are more central than an individual person's view it seems that Westernized thoughts may not be 'pragmatic within the culture and the society on the whole'. One of the participants in Burr's (2004, p.153) research said: 'in my own family I expect my children to do as they are told and not question or participate in decisions made on their behalf. Child rights do not exist in my household'. Considering UNCRC as a universal framework for rights of children may be unrealistic in particular in developing countries such as Iran where the concept of the child in Iranian society is very gender discriminated as well as provocative in a context where local culture often plays a more important role than the laws.

Finally, according to UNCRC legally children are given the rights to enjoy participation as well as protection however, the opportunities for children's voice to be heard either do not exist or are very limited. There are some questions which need to be addressed by educators. Do educators know that Article 12 exists? If so, do they take it into account when developing policies for children? The next section I will explore what it means by the concept of 'voice' and how I define voice in this study.

2.4 What is 'voice'?

Generally 'voice' is defined as 'having a say' (Thomson, 2008, p.4). For instance, according to the National Healthy School Standard (2004c), giving children a voice is a normal part of

school life, allowing as it does young people to *have a real say* and giving them opportunities to participate in the life of the school (Cheminais, 2008, p.5-6). However, the discourse of voice has become a broadly used term having more meaning than simply having a say.

Britzman defined voice is three terrains; literal, metaphorical and political. She feels that:

The concept of voice in its literal sense represents the speech and perspective of the speaker, that metaphorically the voice spans inflection, tone, accent, style and the qualities and feelings conveyed by the speaker's words; and finally that politically the construct of voice attests to the rights of speaking and being represented (cited in Thomson, 2008, p.4).

Hadfield and Haw (2001) argue that each person does not hold only one voice and the voice we hold shifts 'as practices, perspectives, and communities shift'. According to Britzman (2003, p.34) voice and relationships are closely linked and that understating is a social process such that finding appropriate language and being heard by others become key areas of concern. However, not all voices hold the same power and relationships can create power imbalance between the dominant and marginalised voices (Moore & Muller, 1999, p.190). This view is also reflected in Arnot and Reay's (2007) comment about the complexity of researching voice. They point out that some research projects can prioritise certain voices at the expense of others, even if there is always a multiplicity of voices at play. Consequently, there is 'no single authentic voice of a single social category- they appreciate that voices, for example, are internally differentiated by space, time, relation and place' (Arnot and Reay, 2007, p.313).

Hence, five typologies for voice have been identified by researchers, including Authoritative, Critical and Therapeutic voices (Hadfield & Haw, 2001), in addition to this, Consumer voice (Braggs, 2007), and also Pedagogic voice (Arnot and Reay, 2007) are added to this list. Children like adults do not hold universal views for different matters in life and each

individual child has different experiences, opinions and modes of expression from others. Therefore, the voices of both adults and children are diverse from each other and also each individual child/adult may shift voice depending on the condition. Using this typology with young people gives direction to educators and policy makers about the kind of a voice intended to develop in children, while considering the kinds of obstacles involved when nurturing their voice, and also changes that might be achieved through directing the kinds of voice (Bragg, 2007,p.20). I will discuss different modes of voice in relation to the school context in more detail.

Authoritative: the re-presenting of the voice of others, a voice that speaks on behalf of child-group. This is the voice that holds authority and it is a *loud, clear and inclusive* voice (Hadfield & Haw, 2001, p.489). For instance, policy documents and curriculum at schools embody an authoritative voice, in terms of children an example can be their representative at school councils.

Critical: The voice that challenges the status quo. Critical voice questions common sense knowledge, so this kind of voice re-presents the voices of self and others with *narrating, considering, and evaluating* (Britzman, 2003, p.35). Critical voice develops through classroom dialogue and includes the child's voice in the classroom context. By listening to critical voices of children teachers can examine what it means to include the child's voice in their practice (Hadfield and Haw, 2007, p.490).

Consumer: This voice is more concerned about children's consumption as consumers rather than their participation. As a result, Bragg (2007, p.16) argues that to empower consumer voices of children, marketers are spending vast sums on finding out the interests and perspectives of children's in consumer culture to get information how to promote their

products better.

Therapeutic: this voice arises in safe places when adults/ children feel that they can share their difficult experiences. It brings actual experiences of participants and it is non-judgemental but supportive. This voice arises when working with vulnerable groups of children and it requires special training (Thomson, 2008, p.5).

Pedagogic: this voice is created by the power relations and employs voices created by the particular pedagogies, school regimes and curricula (Arnot & Reay, 2007, p.312). In other words, if pedagogic voice is linked to the notion of power, then ‘children and young people speak with a voice that is literally schooled’ (Hayfield & Haw, 2011, p.127). This type of voice reflects the theoretical work of Foucault where he suggests different forms of power, Juridical or law-like and also Normalizing or regulatory power *Juridical or law-like power* ‘uses the language of rights and obligations’. It means ‘obey me or you will be punished’. *Normalizing or regulatory power* ‘uses the language of health, self-fulfilment and normality’ and conveys the message that happiness and fulfilment will be the rewards for obeying the implicit rules is ‘obey this so that you can be happy, healthy and fulfilled’(1980, cited in Lawler 2008, p. 57).

The question that arises here is what types of voice, we (educators) empower in pupils within our proposed policy and pedagogy? In the next section I will explain the concept of pupil voice and how power relationship can affect the formation of voices of children in their school context.

2.5 Concept of pupil voice

As mentioned previously children before the twentieth century *-the century of child-* were mainly seen as passive, submissive and incompetent spectators who were to be seen but not

heard. Children all around the world have been seen as ‘objects of concern rather than as persons with voice’ (Hallet and Prout, 2003, p.1). Therefore, children were silenced by the existing prevailing societal conceptualization of the nature of children and childhood (Lewis, 2010 Wyness, 2006 Lee, 2001 Prout, 2005) This is why in recent decades there has been a growing sense of enthusiasm internationally for the concept and the essence of hearing pupils voice (Haynes, 2002 Hadfield & Haw, 2007 Lewis, 2010 Morrow, 1999). In fact, this was stimulated by new sociology of childhood and the Article 12 in the CRC was a starting points in many societies to draw policy makers, social scientists and educators to re-think children’s capacity not as passive innocent creatures or in need of correction but people who need to be given rights to express their views freely in matters affecting their life (Prout, 2002 Jenks, 2010). Hence, in schools the ‘pupil voice’ or ‘student voice’ approach is originated and developed in late twentieth century to address this issue (Cheminais, 2008, p.5). Researchers such as Flutter and Ruddock (2004) investigate how consulting pupils’ views can benefit school improvement, in addition to this other researchers tried to find out in more depth about pupils perspectives in term of school work, learning, and pedagogy (See Blatchfoed 1996 McCallum, Hargreaves & Gipps, 2000 Bragg, 2007).

In terms of the voices of young people, their views also link to the rights discourse, participation and empowerment of young people (Hadfield & Haw, 2007 Alderson, 2008 Lundy 2007). However, the concept of pupil voice is not fixed and absolute, and can be interpreted in different ways. As Rudduck et al (2007) demonstrated giving voice to children is not only about asking for their active participation but also consulting their views. In other words as Rudduck (QCA, Online) points out ‘pupil voice is the consultative wing of pupil participation’. Consultation involves eliciting pupils’ ideas regarding teaching and learning. It may not require their participation and involvement in making important decisions (Bragg,

2007, p.8). The two key terms ‘consultation’ and ‘participation’ have been used in relation to ‘pupil voice’, but there is a difference between them. Participation according to Boyden and Ennew (1997 cited in Morrow, 1999, p.149) is defined in two ways: ‘taking part in’ or at a deeper level ‘knowing that one’s actions are taken note of and may be acted upon’. So participation often considered to be more profound as it engages children to express their views, to discuss ideas and find solutions to the issues that are important to them (Bragg, 2007, p.8).

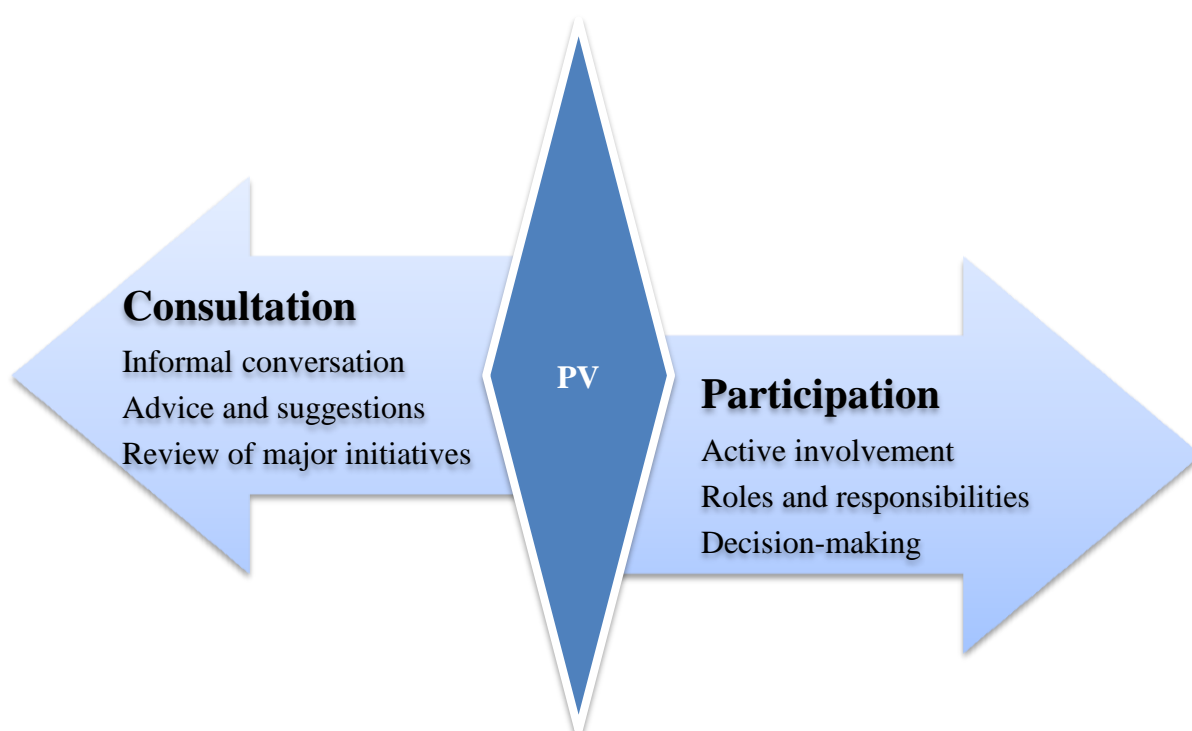


Figure 2: PV: The relationship between participation and consultation (Rudduck, 2006, p.137)

Participation and consultation are related however, in a real world scenario such as classroom activities while pupils participate, they may not be asked to comment verbally on issues; therefore they can participate in activities without being consulted beforehand or afterwards. Moreover, children are provided with few opportunities to engage in discussions in their classroom in **authoritative** education. This is to say as Matthews et al (1998 cited in Morrow,

1999, p.150) state, participation is often seen as an activity mainly engaged in by adults.

2.5.1 Benefits of promoting ‘Pupil Voice’

Despite the dominant image of children as passive dependent creatures in their family and schools, the ‘pupil voice’ approach still survives as a result of the positive benefits it offers not only for pupils but also for teachers and schools. However, research focusing on student voice is relatively new and limited (Nieto, 1994, p.396). Pupil voice with its inherent notion of justice not only nurtures the right of pupils’ to say their thoughts as human beings, but also according to the findings of research undertaken by Fielding, Rudduck and Flutter highlights how important it is to elicit pupils’ views on different aspects of schooling (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p.81). Soo Hoo (1993) emphasized the need to listen to views of pupils arguing that the connection between students and teachers is often forgotten, with teachers preferring to pay heed to experts from outside their institutions to give them advice, and, accordingly ‘overlook the treasure on our very own backyards, the students’ (1993, p.389).

Consulting all pupils gives them the opportunity to have a say regardless of their academic abilities, gender, ethnicity and social class. Less successful pupils can talk about the elements that hinder their learning, and more importantly, develop a listening culture in the classroom (Rudduck et al, 2006, p.139). Findings from six mini-projects undertaken by Rudduck et al. (2006, p.140) indicate that consulting pupils can yield positive outcomes for pupils in different dimensions as shown in Figure 2 below.

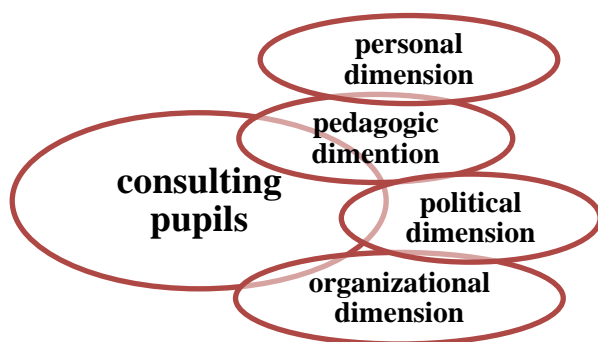


Figure 3: Consulting pupils: what's in it for pupils?

The above diagram shows how consultations affect pupils in different dimensions. And this concept can be explained as follows:

- Pupils' self-esteem and self-image can develop positively when they are asked to give their views on different aspects of teaching and learning (personal dimension)
- Pupils feel some control over their learning as they will be able to reflect critically on their own learning and teaching process (pedagogic dimension)
- Pupils feel more included in their school or class community (organizational dimension)
- Pupils feel valued and heard, viewing themselves as considered in decision making and believing their voice can make a difference (political dimension)

It is suggested that promoting pupil voice also has advantages for practitioners as feedback resulting from pupil consultation can help teachers to develop their own teaching practice as well as constructing a positive relationship between teachers and pupils. Historically the relationship between pupils and teachers has been considered a more 'top-down' approach which means that teachers are expert and superior to pupils, so traditional pedagogy sends the message to teachers that in order to teach teachers need to impart knowledge directly to pupils until they become masters in it (Flutter, 2007, p.345). However, the findings of a study

by Rudduck et.al suggest that pupils did not wish to experience a high level of control (cited in McCallum et al., 2000, p.278).

The pupil voice approach can create mutual trust and respect between practitioners and pupils as it may rebalance the power differential between teachers and pupils. Findings from Alison Peacock's research (cited in Bragg, 2007, p.514) also support this idea as the majority of pupils, in response to a question about the main characteristic of a decent teacher mentioned that a decent teacher is one who they can trust, and that the teacher can also trust pupils. Therefore, a positive learning environment characterized by trust helps pupils feel more confident in speaking their minds and asking for help if they need it. As a result of this, a dynamic dialogue between pupils and teachers can be enhanced in a two-way learning environment (Rudduck &McIntyre, 2007 McCallum et al., 2000, p.280).

Although it has been argued that pupils do not have sufficient knowledge to decide on the structure of the curriculum, it is suggested that they can give opinions about particular lessons or learning strategies and in general about the way they can learn more effectively (McCallum et al, 2000). Moreover, as Nieto (1994, p.398) comments considering pupils views does not suggest that their views should be final, since this would embrace too romantic a notion, and might be just as problematic as not including them in discussions. As it is crucial for teachers to listen to children given that they are continually evaluating teachers work (Alison cited in Bragg, 2007, p.512) providing pupils with the opportunity to voice their thoughts about things that matter to them in school will increase their sense of ownership and belonging which will result in them having a more positive experience of learning and school life on the whole hence the level of attainment in the school will increase as well (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p.82).

2.5.2 Examples of strategies applied to promote pupil voice in England

Facilitating pupil voice as Alison Peacock, co-author of *Creating Learning without Limits* comments, requires pedagogy which aim to be ‘as interactive as possible, very much discussion-based, very participative’ (Bragg, 2007, p.509). In the United Kingdom, pupils are normally given the right to have a say in issues related to their welfare and their legal, medical and social fields but their contribution to education is very limited. However recently the government has started setting up organizations not only to facilitate children’s health and welfare but also to encourage children to participate in their own education. For instance, according to an Ofsted inspection report, since 2009 pupils’ and parents’ viewpoints have been investigated in more detail in order to make sure that student voices are being heard during the inspection process, with the main target of raising pupils’ achievements, as well as improving schools. Furthermore, one of the governmental commitments in the UK is the Education Act of 2002 which focuses on raising achievement with regard to pupils’ voices being consulted about different matters in the school, in other words getting attention that every voice matters (Knight, 2004, Online). In addition to these, ‘citizenship education’ has been instituted which emphasizes teaching pupils about ‘public institutions, power and politics’ to encourage them to actively take part in their communities thus developing their sense of belonging (Rudduck, 2007, p.11).

In term of strategies to develop pupil voice inside the classroom, teachers have applied different methods. One example is using Circle Time which allows children and the teacher to sit in a circle and talk about different issues which matter to pupils or concern them. Therefore, this strategy gives every child the right to take part in the discussion and decrease the issue of a power relationships between children and the teacher as Goodwin (2001, p, 16) states, it is possible to eliminate the sense of hierarchy when everyone is sitting in a circle.

Evidence shows that applying circle time on a regular basis can be beneficial for all children and also for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Goodwin, 2001). In the UK, the 'Working together' guidance promotes participation among pupils (Knight, online). Therefore, all these strategies aim to develop more dynamic learning while facilitating a situation where all pupils are heard and valued.

Furthermore, the use of school councils is a UK-based approach of promoting pupil voice and participation and including representative groups of students who are selected by their peers to participate and have a say in decisions which affect them in the school (School Councils UK, Online). In addition to this, 'Students as Researchers' has been used as a way to promote pupil voice and participation within schools. As Fielding & Bragg (2003, p.4) describe students as researchers involves young people not as recipients of knowledge but as individuals that are able to produce knowledge actively. Consequently, students as researchers shared responsibility between the pupils and the school community to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as evolving pupils' self-assurance to help them become more self-determining learners (Fielding, 2007, p.303).

Moreover, interactive teaching is suggested as a pedagogic method that can encourage pupils to take part in discussions and talk about their thoughts through questioning and discussions. According to Hargreaves et al (2003, p.218) interactive teaching is seen by the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) Framework for Teaching (DfEE, 1998, p. 8) as being an important ingredient of successful teaching. Galton et al. (1980) explained that teacher-pupil interaction is supposed to promote; questioning and discovery and 'the teacher was seen as stimulating this activity by probing, questioning, guiding—leading the child from behind' (1980, p. 157). Hence, in this method of teaching and learning several learning media have been applied to stimulate thinking and open up discussions in order to gain pupils viewpoints. For instance,

stories, games and different activities are used to encourage pupils to narrate their thoughts and to become reflective thinkers (Quicke, 2003, p.54).

2.5.3 Reflection on barriers restricting pupil voice

The reflection on barriers is mainly on strategies used in the UK as there is not literature reflecting what kinds of strategies are used in Iranian schools. As earlier mentioned consulting pupils' views and involving them to participate actively in the school or classroom community is beneficial from different aspects for not only pupils but also teachers and school improvements. The importance of listening to the voices of pupils has been emphasized by many authors (for example; Rudduck et al, 2007 Bragg, 2007 Fielding, 2001). Listening to those voices that Ainscow and his colleagues (1999) refer to as 'hidden voices' may therefore be useful in gaining insights into the school context. When Corbett and Slee (2000, cited in Messiou, 2006, p.306) state: 'within an inclusive education dialogue there is a plurality of voices devoid of existing hierarchies of status and privilege'.

Despite the benefits, the term pupil voice is not only innovative but also a controversial phenomenon in our current era as it requires educators to include children's voices in different aspects of their school life which matter to them. But evidence has been discouraging as in practice children are rarely involved in having a say. As mentioned before putting pupil voice in action is extremely bound up with educators' views about the concept of child which shapes their pedagogies and policies towards children. To place pupil voice in the centre of the education, educators need to reconceptualise their views on the conceptions of children or at least try to examine how they think of children from time to time. This reflects Stables's comment when he argues 'conceptions of childhood have been insufficiently challenged in recent times' by educators (Stables, 2011, p. 2). In addition to this, as Lundy (2007) argues, it seems that Article 12 of CRC is not still fully understood by

educators and as a result existing theories and pedagogies in most cases still illustrate children as deficient and submissive (Jenks, 2010).

Progressivism criticizes the pupils' voice movement by questioning: how it would be possible to offer rights without giving children any responsibilities. Lansdown (1994, p.37) states that there is no track record of eliciting pupils' views during the elaboration of the National Curriculum. Therefore, power is again in adults' hands as they are left to decide on the best interests of children to set and sign rules and to offer noninterventionist forms of education to children (Hodgkin' 1998 cited in Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, p.79). Moreover, the dominant picture of children as innocent incompetent creatures makes it controversial to take their views seriously and not consider them as childish and therefore weightless. Rudduck and Flutter (2000, p.79-80) commented that children were portrayed as not being equipped, from the point of view of either morality or experience, to participate effectively. It is to say that consulting pupils' views can be risky for schools as it may subvert familiar arrangements and beliefs while empowering pupils to comments on issues related to their school life (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007, p.7-9).

Teachers argue that give the chance to voice their thoughts, pupils will perhaps start criticizing different aspects of teaching and learning unconstructively. Therefore, there are some uncertainties for some teachers about consulting pupils' views as one teacher in Bragg's research (2007, p.509) stated: 'but I listen to children all the time anyway!' This demonstrates the idea that some teachers particularly in primary settings think traditional child-centred pedagogy with its emphasis on learning through play is sufficient for listening to children's voice and that there is no need for practicing the pupil voice approach through consulting pupils in the class (Bragg, 2007, p.508& 510). In addition, some teachers think pupil voice activities are time consuming when the priority in schools is covering the

curriculum first (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007, p.9). Furthermore, interactive teaching with its emphasis on providing high proportion of opportunities for children to answer questions and to talk to their teachers, in practice can be overwhelmingly factual and managerial (Galton et al (1980, p.157).

Children are surrounded by supremacy relationships in their families, schools and the society. Thus, empowering the voice of children seems not only challenging but also threatening to adults (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, pp. 79-80). Giving voice to pupils challenges the traditional power relationship between teachers and students. Pupils are afraid of speaking their minds in front of their teachers as they are not assured that their comments will be accepted by teachers and that teachers will not respond negatively. For this reason, in order to avoid causing conflict in more traditional institutions, schools have been found to control and restrict pupils' opinion-giving by seeking their views only about school uniforms, meals and colour of the walls, and never related to adults work or school regimes . As one child stated in the study undertaken by MacBeath & Mortimore (2001, p.78) on the issue of power in school councils 'There is a pupil council but the head teacher comes to the meetings so you really can't say what you think, well you can, but he always says you're wrong'. These conservative attitudes can cause negative impacts on children's identities. For instance, in religious societies like Iran, too much emphasis on religious education and teaching children 'what to believe' while prohibiting them to question any of these beliefs and depriving them of their right to give their opinions, can lead young learners to disbelieve in religions and not to see any positive impact of religion in their lives (Earl's field notes 2001 cited in Fielding and Rudduck, 2002, p.4).

In addition, not only can childhood be affected by elements of gender, class and ethnicity, but giving a voice to children can also be hindered based on these elements. For instance, more

articulate and probably middle class children may get more chance to be heard and taken seriously compared to their more inarticulate lower achieving peers or children from working class backgrounds. These children normally do not fit into the criteria of school regimes as competent coherent people, who have proficiency in the kind of language required for building constructive dialogue. Fielding and Rudduck (2003) point out; engaging in consultation may serve to reinforce the existing dividing practices and the systems for valuing some students above others. Therefore, consulting pupils' views can be seen as a selective hierarchy approach which only reflects the views of a specific category of pupils (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002, p.2).

In fact practicing pupil voice and encouraging pupils to have a say is no simple matter. It needs a very careful consideration in terms of time, school and teachers' culture in order to facilitate an environment in which both teachers and pupils feel safe to speak their mind in constructive ways (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, p.83). Therefore, school culture and its readiness is important, thus careful considerations needs to be made when choosing strategies to encourage children to participate and talk about their opinions. This is because without thoughtful planning the experience will become not positive but negative for pupils. Therefore, this entails two particular dangers explained by Humphries (cited in Fielding and Rudduck, 2002, p.5) *accommodation* and *accumulation*. Practitioners and school staff seek pupils' views to reflect on issues and try to modify them in ways that do not challenge the existing regime. In addition to this they try to consult with pupils but all consultation processes are about ticking boxes. This is demonstrated by Hart (1997), who developed the 'ladder of participation' where at the bottom of ladder consulting pupils views and their participation is mainly seen as 'tokenistic', 'manipulative' and 'decorative'. A simple example is of tokenistic school councils, where children's opinions are manipulated regarding

basic issues such as the colour of uniforms, their dinners or lockers. Further to this, it can even be a dangerous experience for pupils, which gives schools the opportunity to recognize and silence different views. This may be seen in more conservative societies such as in Iran where encouraging critical constructive voices of children can become a tactic for schools that allows them not to encourage disagreement but instead to seek out discontent in order to mute it.

However some researchers', such as professor Ben Levin, have commented that seeing students as 'revolutionaries' who want to undermine the school system once they are asked to voice their opinions, is groundless. Student's requests are mainly to have some choice over what to learn and how to learn. Ben Levin (1999 cited in Fielding and Rudduck, 2003, p.3) stated: 'most students wishes are modest, even timid. They do not seek to overthrow the system or even to control it'. For a long time educators all around the world have tried to make schools a place where all pupils want to learn new things and to achieve that requires entering into a dialogue with children (Cook-Sather, 2002).

2.6 Pupil Voice in this research

As mentioned earlier, the child's voice has not been heard in all contexts because of various perceptions of child by adults in positions of power and, more broadly, by societal norms and constraints that have silenced this voice. Therefore, as discussed earlier, it is undeniable that promoting the pupil voice approach is not a simple task and some educators are still sceptical about pupils' capabilities and maturity level of voices of children (Flutter, 2007).

As discussed earlier, the theoretical framework informing this study was influenced by the emergent sociology of childhood and suggests that there is a need to move beyond 'psychologically-based models of childhood' as childhood is largely socially constructed

phenomenon. Therefore, children's roles are separated based upon the historical period and culture as well legislation such as CRC or Children act 1989 in the UK which offer the view to see children as 'active social agents' who have the right to participate and voice their opinions does not mean that we (educators) should deny differences between the adult and the child worlds (Morrow, 1999, p.152).

As Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998, p.17) point out if we fail to differentiate between children's and adults' voices, then we may fail to see the effect of power imbalance between the two agents. This is why Mimi Orner asks about 'whose interests are served when students speak?' (Orner cited in Bragg, 2007, p.23). She discusses that demands for student voice as a central element of student empowerment 'perpetuate relations of domination in the name of liberation' because they do not take into account the interest of children and also refuse to consider intersection of identity, language, and context and power that enlightens all pedagogical relations (Bragg, 2007, p.23).

Accordingly, as mentioned previously, 'power' relationships are not equally distributed in the school context, since it is suggested that particular pedagogic contexts promote their own version of voice. For instance, authoritarian education systems insist that 'the apprentice model as a guide to child rearing ("the three R's") will leave no or limited room for the child to be heard. In this way, the voice of the child can be threatening, so they need to extinguish their 'childishness' through unquestionably obeying their elders (Friquegnon, 1997, p.45-46).

This is to say that, pupil voice requires a more participative form of education and therefore, in order to realise its potential it is suggested that educators revisit their belief in the importance of listening to their students' voice before taking any action. Therefore, to place pupil voice at schools or classrooms first educators should ask themselves, as Friquegnon

(1997, p.44) remarks whether children benefit more from innovative and self-directed learning than control.

In fact, the tension is between ‘dominant and dominated voice, and between voice and what *sub-voices* and *yet to be voiced*’ (1990 Bernstein, cited in Arnot and Reay, 2007, p.318). In regards to dominant and sub-voices in school, Bernstein (1990) believes that voice is given by ‘the category of teacher/pupil, but the pupil may be subject to distributive rules which regulate sub-voices’ (*ibid*, 2007, p.318). In addition to this, it is crucial to raise this point that if room is given to pupil to be heard, which pupils’ voice is being heard by teachers in Iran? As mentioned earlier those only ideal students. One explanation of these students could be that only those ideal students will be heard who are well behaved, and that other types of voices may be ignored (Arnot & Reay, 2007) But who are these ideal students in the Iranian education context? What kind of people do we want our ideal students to become and how are the current practices contributing to this formation?

According to Foucault (1980) regulatory power when it is exercised by people offers them pleasure; he says power is at its most prevailing when it is least repressive;

what makes power hold good, what makes is accepted is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse (Foucault, (1980 cites in Lawler 2008, p. 57)

Can pupil voice actually be used to regulate the voices of children and make them ‘ideal’ students with *docile* bodies? Do educators aim to produce *docile* bodies holding the obedient voice as their ideal future citizens? (Foucault, 1991, p. 138)

An extreme example of obedient voice is seen in Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962), who was accused of crimes against the Jewish people and was involved in the Jewish genocide. Eichmann had always acted according to the restricted limits allowed by the laws and ordinances. His terrible blind obedience resulted in the blurring between virtues and voices of a blind obedience and his obedience voice resulted in his crime against humanity (Assy, 1998). Hannah Arendt portrayed Eichmann's action not as insane but *thoughtlessness* (Arendt, 1994). Therefore, as mentioned before, although factors such as gender; ethnicity and ability can actually marginalise pupils' voices in the school context, in addition to this, the poor level of thinking among pupils in the Iranian educational setting may also be suggested as an additional factor that promotes an obedient voice. Thus it may result in muting their alternatives voices such as their critical and constructive voice.

The above illustrated issues persuaded me to adopt an approach to limit submissive voice and overcome censorship; to facilitate pupils with 'reflective' voice the critical and creative voice of open-mindedness which involves reflection on factors which make your voice biased, prejudiced and self-deceptive (Lipman, 2003, p.26-27). Therefore, as mentioned in my introduction chapter, I first tried to construct a reciprocal relationship with children and invite them to develop their 'reflective' voice. For this reason, I adopted an organic, patient approach, starting from using the stories of the *Nights* with its emphasis on the female voice of its storyteller-Scheherazade within the adopted pedagogical method called 'community of enquiry' inside the classroom. My intention was to provide a platform for children to be heard. Therefore, I used stories as a metaphor to stimulate pupil voice. To place the child voice in the centre required including the child's interest according to Article 3 of UNCRC, 'The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they

should think about how their decisions will affect children' (Unicef, online). Thus, I chose a child-friendly material such as stories. I will explain this adopted pedagogy to empower children's voice in the next section. But before that, the relation between poor thinking and the ignorance of voice will be discussed.

2.6.1 The ignorance of one's own voice: Poor thinking

Dewey (1916, p.146) said : 'All which the school can or needs to do for pupils, so far as their minds are concerned... is to develop their ability to think'. This extract demonstrates what education should do is to develop children's thinking by helping them to find their own path to meaning rather than telling them what to think (Fisher, 2008, p.1). 'We all think ... or at least we think we do' as one child commented (Fisher, 2008, p.6). Yet in fact, we do many things automatically with no need to think and refer to these skills as *routine*. For instance, pupils learn how to read fluently or spell correctly with practice, and therefore once they become masters in performing them, they will accomplish their task more readily. The education system needs to be less focused on imparting information so that pupils can accomplish their routine skills of learning subjects and memorizing facts, and rather needs to help pupils to learn to be reflective and think beyond routines to explore possibilities to apply the knowledge in their lives (Cam, 2003, p.5-6 and Fisher, 2008, p.8).

Poor level of thinking among students was one of the reasons that philosopher of education rejected the idea of imparting knowledge to children without encouraging them to think critically. The main figure in this movement was Matthew Lipman, who believed that many students leaving schools are *insocratic*, and even though they are not illiterate they find it difficult to gain the skills to think for themselves about important issues in their lives (Cam, 2006, p.1, and Limpan, 2003). Most of them are unable to appreciate alternatives to making reasonable judgments, and to think critically. As Socrates commented, 'Unexamined life is

not worth living', sadly however the education system not only fails to teach pupils to learn how to think for themselves, but also prohibits critical thinking in schools which makes it possible to brainwash pupils thoughts and beliefs. In such a case, pupils learn only to reason scientifically and read and write fluently, but not necessarily to think critically; thus negative consequences of common poor thinking have come to be seen as a 'social and personal tragedy' in the current era (Cam, 2006, p.2).

Moreover, poor thinking and the failure of education to help pupils to be able to reflect and be a reasonable person may lead to children's ignorance of their rights to give their opinions about things that matter to them and cause them to lack of ability to think, judge and act for themselves . Fisher (2008, p.5) points out that the consequence of this is that 'the voices of those who would do thinking for us become more persuasive'. At the same time giving children voice and asking their opinions with no guidance and instructions may cause confusion for them if they have never been asked for their opinion before. Indeed, consulting pupils, eliciting and hearing their voices is not substantially different from other pedagogic encounters. This too requires new spaces to foster mutual trust relationship, appropriate pedagogy and realisation rules which little has been made available to pupils in the normal pedagogic practice. Pupils need to gain considerable skill and familiarity with the expectations of such a communicative setting as well as high level of trust and respect (Arnot and Reay, 2007, p.321-322). In particular, in terms of female voices this may require even more attention since it occurs more often in societies such as Iran that girls might not been encouraged to speak out in the same way as boys' due to the cultural expectations of being obedient (Dosanjh and Ghuman & Lau cited in Morrow, 1999, p.158).

2.6.2 Community of enquiry

A 'Community of enquiry' is an approach for teaching philosophy to children that was developed by Matthew Lipman who was discouraged by the poor thinking level of his undergraduate students; therefore in the late 1960s he started developing a philosophy for a children's programme based on concept of the critical thinking influenced by pragmatic philosopher Dewey (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, p.172, Fisher, 2007, Jackson, 2001). The American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce was the first to use together the terms 'community' and 'enquirers' in the domain of scientific inquiry, but it was Lipman who introduced the phrase to describe the pedagogy for teaching philosophy in schools (Lipman, 2003, p.20). According to Lipman we cannot encourage children to have inquiring minds without seeing education itself as a process of enquiry (Murreis, 2008). Lipman used his philosophical novels as stimuli to encourage children to take part in philosophical discussion. It has been extensively recognized and being used as 'an international educational initiative' by some educators all around the world (Jackson, 2001, p.2 and Hand & Winstanley, 2008). The pedagogy is inspired by Socrates with the prevailing metaphor of thinking as 'inner speech' As Socrates says:

When the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, and saying Yes or No. When it reaches a decision—which may come slowly or in a sudden rush—when doubt is over and the two voices affirm the same thing, then we call that its 'judgement'. So I should describe thinking as discourse, and judgement as a statement pronounced, not aloud to someone else, but silently to oneself (Plato quoted in Murreis, 1997, p. 96).

According to Splitter and Sharp (2005), there is no fixed definition of a community of enquiry, because it is one of those complex concepts that can be evolved and modified in

different educational settings (Splitter and Sharp, 2005, pp. 17, 18). It is suggested that, this approach seeks to develop children's ability to think for themselves and to learn to use that ability in responsible, caring ways. Pupils form a 'community of enquiry' in the classroom while the classroom teacher shares a stimulus such as a poem, stories or picture books or even objects to help children formulate questions and explore issues that affect their lives deeply (Stanley, 2006, p.2). Consequently, topics for discussion are based on children's interest to reflect upon (Hannam & Echeverria, 2009, p.9).

Thinking is an activity and community of enquiry pedagogy may help children to improve the quality of their thinking with regular practice since when children enter into dialogue, they get engaged with questions or concerns they have selected to talk about and give reasons for their choices and analyse options. Hannam et al (2009, p.9-10) believe that this does not happen in 'a mechanical way and it does not happen in a vacuum'. They continue by giving an example that a thinking skills programme which mechanically encourages children to think for instance telling them 'Monday we have deductive reasoning, Wednesday we do problem-solving' does not enhance their thinking unless they place the child's interest in the centre, to bring topics important to the experiences of children (Hannam et al, 2009, p.9). Furthermore, it gives teachers the opportunity to facilitate a learning environment which as Alexander (2004, p.26) explains changes ordinary classroom talk from the familiar 'closed question/ answer/ feedback routine into purposeful and productive dialogue'. In fact, pupils learn to ask more open-ended questions rather than closed questions and are encouraged to elaborate explanatory replies (Fisher, 2007, p.620). According to Splitter and Sharp (1995) the internalisation of the voices that build on each other's ideas in a community of enquiry leads to a richer, more varied 'inner' dialogue, resulting in better and more reasonable thinking, through 'self-correction'.

2.6.3 The stories of ‘One Thousand and One Nights’

In this section, my personal interest in the selection of *One Thousand and One Nights*’ stories which I will abbreviate to *Nights*, and the significance of these stories over many years and for this study, will be further explained. The *One thousand and One Nights* stories consist of approximately sixteen volumes and 468 stories, according to the Arabian printed texts. According to an Eastern superstition anyone who finishes reading the complete stories of the *Nights* will not live the life or will become insane. Thus it will take a long time to finish reading, and this is why this book is even longer than Proust’s work (Irwin, 1994). However, only a few stories of this large collection of stories have been heard among people. Phillip Pullman, a British author said on BBC radio 4 that ‘There’s Grimm, there’s *The Arabian Nights* and there’s the Bible. These are the three great repositories of stories that everybody (including children) ought to know about. It’s a great shame, if someone reaches adulthood or puberty without knowing those stories, without having read those stories at least once’ (BBC, online, 2012). Even though these stories come from the East, they are no longer well known by Middle Eastern people (Irwin, 1994, p.1-2). In the West, stories such as Sinbad, the story of Scheherazade Aladdin and Ali Baba are the most popular ones but again the last two stories are not the original ones but were invented by the French translator of the tales in the early 18th century, Antoine Galland (Warner, 2011, p.16).

These stories are called ‘Alf Layla wa- Layla’ in Arabic, meaning, one thousand nights and a night and following Galland’s translation to French the title of this book was changed to ‘The Arabian Nights Entertainments’ (Irwin, 1994, p.3). What is common to all the stories is the frame story and the storyteller, Scheherazade, who recounts all the stories to the king, Shahriyar, for a thousand and one nights. In the stories of *Nights* Scheherazade like the other virgin girls who married the Sasani king in Persia, Shahriar, has been fated to die due to the

king's wife's infidelity, which caused a the strong feeling of hatred in the king's heart for all women. This is why King Shahriar made it his rule to marry a virgin girl every night and cut off her head the next morning. Since his minister (vizier) was unable to find any virgin girl to marry the king, the vizier elder's daughter, Scheherazade, volunteers to marry the king. The vizier seeks to change his daughter's mind by telling her fables while portraying the real female obedience through the story lines and the characters within it, but Scheherazade is resolved to fulfil this role. Nevertheless, she has a plan and this is why her younger sister, Dunyazad, comes to the private chamber on the fated first night and demands to hear the story. Scheherazade starts telling the story of 'the merchant and the Demon' 'until dawn breaks', but she did not finish the whole story and the king is thus urged to postpone her execution for another day in order to listen to the rest of the story the next night. Each night Scheherazade tells the story but it never concludes and this lasts for a thousand and one nights. By then, King Shahriyar no longer wants to execute Scheherazade (Warner, 2011, p.1-2). Nacer Khemir (cited in Warner, 2011, p.2) says about this mysterious arrangement of all these stories happening at night when it is dark: 'profane stories can only continue in the privacy and darkness of night, the time and place of dreams'.

2.6.4 Why use the stories of the *Nights*?

The stories which are included in children's literacy books in Iran normally have morally didactic purposes, thus, the tone of the stories is overtly didactic with facile story lines (Winston, 1995, p.81). The underlying message of such oppressive tales ties in with the absolutist way of thinking which again promote obedience with their repressive tone (Foucault, 1991). The essence of absolutist thinking is the determination that one's view is the right one, and the inability to accept alternatives. According to Lazarus (cited in Ostell, 1992, p.162-163) absolutist thinking raises 'from a belief in the *rightness* of particular views,

behaviours or outcomes. When people think in an absolutist manner issues are seen in black and white terms, there are no shades of grey'. This view reflects Maria Tatar's (1992) viewpoint when she argued that literature for children has made children into passive recipients of stories creating the ideal child as a 'docile child' (1992, p. xvi).

Thus, I have chosen the *One Thousand and One Nights* as a means of providing a thinking stimulus during my research. The frame story starts with the patriarchy of the king and the ingenuity of the female character, Scheherazade, who had to choose a way to delay her death in the absolute darkness of the male patriarchy. She therefore chose to tell stories, and through storytelling to her sister, she begins an indirect dialogue with the king not only to defend her life and all those of her country's daughter's lives, but also to open the king's vision of being human and his responsibility as a ruler. As Winston (1995, p.82) argues, 'the examples of violence in the tales should also been seen as symbolic'. He continues by saying that 'it is through imaginative engagement with the symbolisms and the narrative art of tales that children become involved, both emotionally and cognitively' so it limits children's inattention and boredom as appose to didactic stories (Winston, 1995, p.81-82). Hence, this rich and provocative story and other stories from the *Nights* collection may encourage pupils to raise different questions after listening to the stories and these questions can be used for classroom discussion during the sessions about issues surrounding our lives in this modern era (Haynes, 2002). In addition to this, the 'Nights' stories contain elements of astonishment which aim to create 'open mouths, shaken heads and inward chuckles' (Warner, 2011, p.6). The beauty of these stories is seen as a mysterious promise to its listeners. Change occurs even though this seems impossible (Warner, 2011, p.4-5).

As I have argued before, I have mainly used existing literature in the West for my research; therefore, the selection of the story was the only way to bring a flavour of my own culture to

the research. Therefore in the choice of stories I chose the stories of the *Nights* as they provide the potential to comprehend elements of Persian values especially within the frame story. Thus, it seems that both useful and crucial in applying these stories to introduce my own cultural heritage throughout the research. This is why it has been argued among some scholars that despite the *Nights* stories being cross-cultural, the origin nonetheless comes from Persian tales called *Hezar Afsan* (Beyzaie, 2011).

There are different elements that prove this argument such as the Persian names of Shahriar, Scheherazade and Dunyazade within the frame story. Moreover, it is undeniable that, having two female characters (two sisters) is not an accidental arrangement and indeed it goes back to the ancient Persian metaphor. Since the younger sister, Dunyazad, who remains virgin in the *Nights* is the symbol of 'Anahita', the divinity of 'the waters' who is associated with fertility, healing, beauty and wisdom and she helps to preserve the Earth's fertility as we see Scheherazade is the mother of three children by the end of the *Nights*. This alliance of the two symbols of water and the earth may be seen in Iranian tradition and culture in different ways. For instance, in most ancient Iranian houses, there would have been a small pool in the middle of the garden and having clay made jugs to keep water was also popular in Iranian's house (Beyzaie, 2011). Therefore, without her sister's assistance it would not have been possible to overcome her death.

It is important to note that in the *Nights* as with other fairy tales the number three plays an important role and we see the three main fixed characters throughout the whole book, King Shahriar, Scheherazade and Dunyazad. Number three is an important number in Mithraism- the name of the old Persian God and it symbolizes Ahura Mazda, Mithra and Anahita in Zoroastrian religion (Oloomi, online). In addition to this, the stories in the *Nights* become more valuable when they are told by a woman to another woman in a way that transfers their

message to the king in an indirect way. Therefore, the alliance of these two female characters in the whole book, Scheherazade and her sister Dunyazade, is portrayed as a metaphor 'for love against death'. Indeed, the elder sister, Scheherazade, would not have been able to win back her life without the help of her sister, and the silent but crucial female character of these stories, Dunyazad.

2.6.5 The role of the stories and storytelling

Long before the invention of the 'black magic box' of television people used to sit around the campfire and tell stories; this was not only to entertain each other during cold long winters, but also to inform each other about the news, real events and family connections (Fox Eades, 2006, p.11). Indeed oral storytelling is as an ancient human skill and it has been used as a way of teaching children the values and traditions not only relating to their own culture, but also to the lives of other nations. Dickinson & Neelands (2006, p.60) explain that children need stories for many reasons. Stories engage emotions as well as intellect of children, so children think and make meaning as well as feel as they respond to the story. In addition to this, stories stimulate children's curiosity about the consequences of events involved in the story and children ask themselves 'what will happen next and why'. Thus the medium of storytelling has been used in education for children for many years to introduce a variety of ideas, thoughts and feelings as well as to nourish their imagination and curiosity.

However, stories are not only intended to amuse children, but to stimulate children's thinking, so as to help them to learn from this imaginary experience (Fox Eades, 2006, p.11&12 and Colwell, 1980, p.3). Stories are an effective learning medium as they include a wide range of abilities and children with different levels of understanding can respond to the same story differently but still feel included (Dickinson & Neelands, 2006, p.60 and Fry cited

in Barton and Booth, 1990, p.12). As Barton and Booth (1990, p.12) suggested, stories help raise important questions, and ‘shape the landscape of our minds for the whole of our minds’.

Listening to stories helps children to enter the story world and identify themselves with the characters within the story. Stories encompass many emotions, whether real or imaginary; they can talk about life, death, love and hate and invite their listener to connect to different aspects in life (Fox Eades, 2006, p.16 & Barton and Booth, 1990, p.12 and Colwell, 1980, p.2). Hannah Arendt (1977) called this imaginative travelling, *going visiting* which allows the listener to dive into the world of imagination and explore different perspectives and feelings by connecting to others (Sharp, 2007, 2009).

Stories such as original fairy tales contain much violence, as well as, fairies and heroes, yet the binary concept makes it easy for the child to comprehend complex concepts of death and life which is useful to appeal to children’s thinking to seek for authentic meaning in life. As Bettelheim (1976, p.7&9) states: ‘real life is not only sunny’ (Bettelheim, 1976, p.7 and Haynes & Murriss, 2000, p.10). Since the most difficult accomplishment in life is to seek meaning, fairy stories can help children either to identify themselves with the characters or to become silent witnesses who empathize with the story characters as child role models; together, they feel assured that the ending will be happy. Thus the feeling of reassurance provides them with the courage and confidence to free up their imagination to enter into the fictional world, so as to experience it and make it feel real. Through this imaginary experience, children face many problems and challenges as the story goes along but are aware that in the end virtue wins the day (Bettelheim, 1976, p.9 & Tatar, 2009, p.18).

2.6.7 Why tell stories?

Oral storytelling is an ancient human customs and even though reading stories to children is a valuable medium for them to listen and speak, being told stories is a creative journey for the teller and listener to create the story as they go. However, when you read stories for children a storyteller does not create the story scene but reads the written words, which are set out on the papers (Fox Eades, 2006, p.14). As Eades (2006, p.13) suggested: 'Being *told* a story has elements to it that are not present when a book is read aloud'. Oral storytelling in the classroom also provides the opportunity to the storyteller to adjust the story without changing the main plot in response to the age of children, classroom culture and the language they speak. For instance, in my study in Iran I had to change a few sentences such as 'the queen embraces the slave' into 'the queen talks to the slave kindly' in order to adjust the story within the classroom culture in Iran, whereas, reading a story does not permit the teller to be so responsive (Fox Eades, 2006, p.14).

A further main point is the effect of eye contact between the teller and the audience during story time, because eye contact with one's audience enables the storyteller to alter the style in response to the moods and emotions of the listener. For instance, some children do not concentrate while listening to the story, thus, eye contact with them and emphasizing a word or start moving while telling the story to grab their attention are one of the privileges of oral storytelling. Children feel safe and cared for when they notice that the storyteller observes them and they try to communicate with them by understanding their attitudes and emotions (Fox Eades, 2006, p.15). Moreover, oral storytelling is a shared journey between the teller and the audience and becomes a special experience for both sides; therefore, it helps to build an intimate relationship between them (Colwell, 1980, 2-5).

2.7 The benefits and challenges of adopted pedagogical method

In this section I will discuss the benefits and challenges involved within the adopted pedagogical method. But before that it is important to point out that the adopted pedagogical method is not circle time. In fact, more liberal educators proposed the romantic view of the child and tried to postpone adulthood as long as possible. Therefore, they apply traditional child-centred pedagogy using circle time with an emphasis on the importance of play and children's views (Bragg, 2007, p.508). Circle time has become an important part of primary school in England as some teachers are interested in leaving the room to explore their student's issues of interests. In circle time children sit in a circle facing each other and its emphasis according to Haynes (2002) is on developing effective communication among children. This way problems can be better resolved encouraging children to express emotions, to exchange ideas and develop tolerance of different opinions (2002, p.11). In this approach although children sit in a circle and adopt a set of rules, the classroom discussions arise from children's interest and questions in response to the stimulus. The process of the sessions is not only cognitive but also employs different emotions. As Murriss (1997, p.8) points out all emotions such as excitement, joy, anxiety, anger etc. are alert when engaged in talking about topics interest children. However, children are encouraged to reason and reflect on their statements. Moreover, divergence and disagreement is normal. The aim is to build up an enjoyable discussion which challenges students' views rather than offering solutions (Haynes, 2002, p.11).

2.7.1 Reflective thinking

Murriss, Haynes, Splitter and Sharp suggest that this method is a powerful pedagogical programme which provides question making and dialogue among children; therefore, it can foster the fundamental skills and dispositions of critical thinking, as well as increasing their

confidence and self-esteem in speaking up and learning to listen and respect others' viewpoints (Hand and Winstanley, 2008, p.85). It is proposed that this approach may foster reflective thinking which may create more reflective voices. Reflective thinking originated with John Dewey, and according to him, reflective thinking is:

An active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends ... it is a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of reasons (Dewey, 1933, p.6)

Muris (1997, p.8) argues that in the view of Socrates, love for somebody starts with the desire for the visible and the physical, but quickly moves 'beyond' the aesthetic qualities to the 'real' person behind them. This search is similar to that of intellectual inquiry and 'the feeling that there is something behind or beyond that is really worth getting at, something to establish a relationship with' (Bitting & Southworth cited in Murris, 1997, p.8). Reflective thinking occurs when we are perplexed or uncertain about something and therefore we seek to find a resolution. In other words, being reflective requires examination of our common beliefs and challenging our assumptions even if they contradict the established norms (Cam, 2006, p.6).

As German philosopher Immanuel Kant told his pupils:

You will not learn from me philosophy, but how to philosophise, not thoughts to repeat, but how to think. Think for yourselves, enquire for yourselves, stand on your own feet (Kant cited in Muris, 1997, p.7).

However, to be a reflective thinker not only necessitates being critical, but also a creative thinker. This is why Mathew Lipman's explanation of reflective thinking differs from Dewey, even though Dewey inspires Lipman's idea of reflective education. Dewey and Lipman both

emphasize that schools need to provide a learning environment where children can learn to think and to them thinking is seen as a process of enquiry (Cam, 2006, p.7). Dewey's form of inquiry is based on experimental science, while Lipman's is mainly centred on philosophy and the discipline of philosophy. However, they both stress the importance of community.

For Dewey democracy is a way of life, and the interests of individual should take into consideration without setting some people's interests over the others. For Dewey democratic citizenship is undermined when 'schools are exclusive, discriminatory, hierarchical, authoritarian or cliquish' (Cam, 2006, p.7-8). Lipman's idea of community of enquiry also stresses the connection between education and the democratic way of life. For Lipman the classroom is a pluralistic community based on the principles of collaboration and dialogue, and everyone within this setting therefore has an active and equal share. Therefore in a community of enquiry, pupils not only learn to inquire and think for themselves also they learn how to exchange ideas and practice social discussion (Cam, 2006, p.8). Thus these qualities will help pupils to become less impulsive and more open-minded, so that they will have a better sense of when to act and when not to (Lipman et al cited in Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, p.174).

2.7.2 Classroom Talk

Another aspect of using this pedagogical method is facilitating classroom talk and social interaction. As Dickinson & Neelands (2006, p.65) state stories provide a context for classroom talk. It has been claimed, that the pedagogy of a community of enquiry is also based on the Vygotskian assumption that children will learn to think for themselves if they engage in the social practice of thinking together (Cam, 1995 & Wells, 2003). During the 1960s and 1970s school children were seen as 'lone scientists' following Piaget's theory of seeing children's development at different levels, in which their cognitive development only

happens by interrelating with incentive resources. However, this theory has been challenged by sociocultural psychologists of the Vygotskian opinion who consider that children's cognitive development 'requires it to engage, thorough the medium of spoken language, with adults, other children and the wilder culture' (Alexander, 2004, p.11).

Therefore, in this regard, child development is not only to be seen as a biological problem but a social phenomenon. Therefore, school is not only a place where children learn subjects such as science or mathematics but their sense of self and identity also develops through the interaction with others. The 'others' role in 'scaffolding' their cognitive development is critical and this is what Vygotsky has referred to as the 'zone of potential (proximal)' which is when a child's understanding flourishes throughout the supervision of the teacher or a 'more capable peer' (Alexander, 2004, p.11). This is why Fisher (2007, p.619) explained the community of enquiry as a form of dialogic teaching between children and teachers and between children and children emphasizing the development of critical and creative thinking through questioning and dialogue. Smith et al. (2006, p.444) also put an emphasis on being collective as an essential feature of a dialogic classroom.

Although this approach facilitates whole-class discussion and more interaction between teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil, again the role of the facilitator is crucial in terms of trusting children and shifting the power to make discussion happen. Matthew Lipman describes a community of enquiry as moving 'forward indirectly like a boat tacking into the wind' (Lipman, 1991, pp. 15-16). The starting point for a community of enquiry is a choice from a large number of questions generated by participants from a stimulus (chosen by the teacher or pupils). However, teachers can turn classroom talk into a 'teaching technology' which according to Mroz et al. (2000, p.380) results in a directive mode of teaching involving factual questions which have predictable answers, which do not help pupils to expand on their ideas.

Therefore, as Smith et al (2005, p.95) believe, having students physically and verbally involved in a conversation does not guarantee their effective participation.

Hence, Murrells (1997, p.18) examines more closely the distinction between open and closed questions and the types of questions to begin the enquiry with is not as important as teachers' intention towards the questions. For example, a teacher can start her enquiry with a closed question inside the story but students direct the question to a more open ended one and even if a teacher knows the answer, but still treat a closed question as an open one. Or the teacher might ask more abstract questions such as 'what is anger?' claiming that this is an open-ended question but at the same time the teacher believes that she knows the answer.

Murrells (1997, p.18) states:

Questions are 'open' only when the questioner has an attitude of open-mindedness, and feels puzzled about the question. And this attitude of open-mindedness can turn obviously closed questions such as "When did the Second World War begin" into an open question.

An open-minded attitude is important in terms of empowering the critical voices of children and in fact, it is useful for Iranian pupils where they rarely critically examined voices of 'authorities' such as teachers. Murrells (1997) suggests that in order to overcome taken for granted knowledge pupils need to examine their beliefs as well as the reasons for those beliefs by comparing different views. She continues by saying these beliefs can only be understood in the way that they are connected to our own experiences through reasoning. A question, she argues, is 'we feel really puzzled by a question, and judge it to be significant, only when we have made the question our *own* question' (Murrells, 1997, p.18). Whole-class discussion on a regular basis may help us to guard ourselves against obedient voices and the thoughtless acceptance of tradition and authority. The critical mind is open to the possibility that other reasons might necessitate change in the beliefs that one holds at present.

However, the emphasis on the importance of empowering children's voices does not mean that children should be forced to voice their views over the classroom talk. The 'silence' of children may also have many faces, this reflected in the view that 'if the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling' (Gray cited in Lewis, 2010, p.17). Therefore, the silence of children can be interpreted in the way that they would like to take control of the interaction with an 'other' and this can actually shift the power to them as they feel 'no response' or 'do not know' is also permissible (Lewis, 2010, 19-20). In addition, as Bragg (2007, p.22) believes that 'silence can be an important tool of resistance, and young people should have a right to privacy'. This again requires having an appropriate relationship with the teacher as well as a safe environment to be able to speak one's views effectively or to stay quiet without feeling excluded.

2.7.3 Rebalance the hierarchy relationship

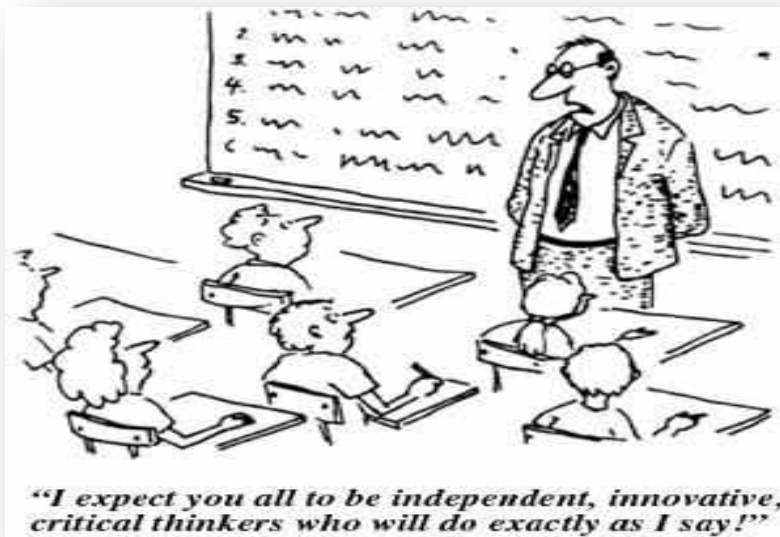


Figure 4: Hierarchical relationships in the classroom

Even if voice is not always able to change relationships based on power, changes in power relationships may have an effect on changing voices (Bernstein, 1990 in Haynes & Murriss, 2000, p.4).). Power relationships may also ‘inhibit listening’, thus it would be difficult for teachers and pupils to listen to one and another since the curriculum itself prevents this from happening (Haynes & Murriss, 2000, p.4). Murriss (2008, p.667) argues in favour of the pedagogy of using stories within a community of enquiry when she claims that in this way traditional roles of teachers as educators and children as receivers of knowledge are shifted. In this approach children are placed at the centre, providing an inclusive environment where teachers need to ‘respond to diversity, listening to unfamiliar voices, be open and empower all members and celebrate ‘difference’ in dignified ways’ (Messiou, 2006, 313). And thus, hierarchical relations between classroom teacher and pupils will be removed and children will be liberated from traditional systems of schooling. This establishes every child’s right to be heard, with the belief that their opinions are worth listening to (Vansieleghem, 2005, p.19 and Stanley, 2006, p.12).

In fact, schools as well as teachers have an important role to play in promoting children’s freedom of expression and thought (Lansdown and Newell, 1994). However, the above cartoon suggests that in real scenarios, the education system in some countries such as Iran tends to operate in a formal and authoritarian way which does not leave rooms for children to think for themselves in order to explore their ideas and contribute in their provision and improvement of their education. To illustrate this positioning of the adult-child relationship, Fricker (2007, p.10) differentiates between active and passive power. Reflecting on Fricker’s point, listening to children in Iranian school which follow behaviourism paradigm can be challenging (Mirhadi, 1997, p.119). This is because here active power would dominate when the adult uses power to reward a child with point’s card or punish a child physically. Passive

power is the belief that adults may not punish or reward children; however, the fact that they are able to punish or reward will have an influence on the way children behave and respond.

Newell and Lansdown (1994) points out, the political position of teachers will be important as it may be affected when it comes to give space for public voice to children, given that teachers fulfil the role of public servants who are controlled by the state through a top-down process (Rosenow, 1993). Teachers state that the demands of the existing curriculum prevent them from paying full heed to issues that matter to children. This is due to the fact that the topics that are relevant to children are not always a part of what they are required to deal with in the classroom (Morrow, 1999, p.160).

2.7.4 Challenges involved when employing ‘stories’ within the community of enquiry

In the present research, stories are used to encourage pupils to talk about their opinions, think critically and creatively, listen to different ideas and discuss within groups. Nonetheless, it is necessary to reflect on existing criticism and potential problems, for instance, whether stories can encourage group discussion or peer talk, or whether they will ‘funnel all talk through the teacher or facilitator’ as Barton and Booth (1990, p.8) suggest. In other words it may be questioned whether the use of stories is helpful for the teacher to change from a bearer of knowledge to a participant in an exploratory process. Hearing stories told for children is enjoyable and provides an element of fun and joy, which seems to make some teachers feel uncomfortable, as they may believe pupils are not supposed to sit in the classroom and have fun. Within popular beliefs they go to school to learn knowledge rather than to have fun. Nevertheless, according to Seligman (2003) feeling happy and having positive enjoyment in the class can improve learning. Furthermore, practitioners feel this may unsettle the power relationship between them and their pupils (Fisher, 2001, p.13). For this reason, in some

countries certain practitioners still prefer to apply a lecture based method of teaching instead of facilitating more innovative and interactive sessions, which may make them uncomfortable (Maiorana, 1992, p.2). Some educators are also sceptical that teaching critical thinking when teaching specific subjects will not be effective, since the majority of students are not aware of picking up the thinking points while practitioners are seeking to engage them to think reflectively and constructively. Therefore, practitioners have become interested in teaching thinking skills directly to pupils, so that the latter can be encouraged to learn how to transfer skills to other contexts (Fisher, 2001, p.1).

An additional problem is the overcrowded curriculum, which makes it difficult for practitioners to apply any extra-curricular activity (Hand, 2008). Some educators believe that these pedagogies such as community of enquiry do not justify the time and effort expended on it. For instance, in terms of promoting critical thinking in children and to become a critical thinker, a pupil needs to practice critical thinking skills on a daily basis, so they can apply it where appropriate. More specifically they disagree with the use of philosophy within community of enquiry since some educators have raised the question whether children can be taught philosophy. They claim that philosophy is a difficult subject for a child to comprehend, and children are not cognitively ready to have philosophical enquiry in their classroom and to understand and ask philosophical questions. A wider, more profound understanding of cultural knowledge is needed which cannot be anticipated from primary school age children (Suissa cited in Hand & Winstanley, 2008, p.138). Moreover, there is insufficient evidence to support the fact that philosophy has a greater influence over children's cognitive ability than any other subjects in the curriculum (Hand & Winstanley 2008, 3-4). In addition to this, some practitioners do not feel comfortable encouraging critical thinking within pupils. As for them, being a critical thinker means gaining the ability

to criticize not in a positive way, but also negatively. Therefore, giving the opportunity to pupils to be critics causes some practitioners to remain sceptical about applying strategies to promote critical thinking.

Applying this method involves children having the right to express their disagreement (Hannam et al, 2009) and this means that children have the right to disagree by giving their reasons and as Haynes (2002, p.2) states: critical thinking is closely connected with the rights of children to disagree in an autonomous way . In addition to this it gives them the space to examine their ideas without being too concerned about making mistakes (Haynes & Murriss, 2000, p.6). Nonetheless, how will it be possible for a child to disagree with his/her teacher's points of view when teachers are not only limiting pupils thinking by the school boundaries but also controlling pupils thinking through regimes of boundaries?

Some teachers have suggested that certain stories used in the sessions with children can give 'the wrong message' to children, and this may cause anxieties for parents and even for pupils (Haynes & Murriss, 2009, p.1). Some teachers also become so anxious in facing questions where pupils asked about taboo subjects such as sex or race, so their anxieties may lead the discussion to censorship or their responsibility to protect pupils can 'suffocate the voicing of original ideas' and silence pupils organic and creative ideas by teaching them to follow the crowd, and not to try to be specific or different (Haynes & Murriss, 2009, p.12). Teachers' anxieties can be even greater in the Iranian classroom, as any questioning about religious views is not only banned, but will result in punishment for the person who inquires. This therefore makes forming a community of enquiry with its organic principles even more challenging. For instance, the use of stories of the *Nights* is also considered as relatively marginal and not valuable to consider academically. One reason is the element of joy, which is given to the listeners when listening to the stories of *Nights*. The stories are amusing, and

in these stories, the storyteller talks about materialistic love, rather than the spiritual meaning of love which makes *Nights* invaluable among most Middle Eastern scholars. Furthermore, in these stories the two elements of criticizing power and dramatizing the genders that play a crucial role as the dominant literature in Iran, originate in male speech and not female. This may thus act as a warning to scholars to see the male dominated power criticized through female speech. This is why it is said by some that there is a hidden message in this, namely that if anyone reads all the stories of the ‘Nights’ they will either lose their mind or die, as the language of these stories sounds feminine and insane, and not rational or male dominated (Beyzaie,2011). Furthermore the challenge when using stories and storytelling techniques is creating a ‘storytelling culture’. Especially in countries like Iran where children are not used to seeing adults telling them stories inside the classroom and spending time doing activities which invite pupils to participate more actively and freely. Stories will not help to grow children’s intellect and imaginations without the community of pupils who enjoy listening to the stories and take story time seriously, as well as, listen thoroughly (Barton and Booth,1990., p.8).

Within the classroom, teachers mainly aim to improve the quality of children’s thinking, so as to evoke a sense of curiosity (Murrells, 1997). Some would argue that this way makes children’s perplexed as the enquiry starts with doubt with no end product. Indeed, when pupils are intellectually involved in classroom activities; they seem more motivated and engaged. It is suggested that being challenged and puzzled brings pleasure when John Rawls (cited in Fisher, 2008, p.2) expressed the relation between thinking and pleasure he said ‘other thing being equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of rational capacities, and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity’. Moreover, they seem to like teachers who intellectually challenge them as Chris (10 years old

in Fisher, 2008, p.2) said: ‘I like those lessons where the teacher doesn’t tell you what you already know, but you have to think it out for yourself’.

2.8 Summary

This literature review was divided into four parts. As has been discussed, educators’ underlying beliefs and understanding of the concept of the child can influence the way they shape their relationships with children and their practice. Thus questions about children and the concept of childhood remain central to the term ‘pupil voice’. In section one; I began my literature review by looking at the conceptualisations of childhood within historical and contemporary times. This discussion began with Philippe Aries, who argued that childhood is a modern invention to current times. The discussion then continued by focusing on social constructivists who rejected the concept of childhood as a fixed period of life arguing that childhood is a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. I then developed my thinking in order to define childhood in non-Western societies through a reflection on Western literature. The convention of the rights of children was then discussed stressing on the effect of Article 12 of the UNCRC which emphasises on the importance of listening to children’s views and taking their views into account. I then considered the UNCRC from an international perspective, to claim that although UNCRC aims to set up universal rights for children all around the world this legal international protocol is not actually effective in all countries, given that it disregarded cultural relativism as well as the wording of the articles is open for misinterpretations.

In section two, I sought to examine the concept of voice and five typologies of voice were discussed. Following this, the concept of ‘pupil voice’ was explained along with its benefits for pupils, teacher and school improvement. Examples of the strategies, which were used in England by teachers, were explained followed by a reflection on barriers, which restrict the

voices of pupils from being heard at school or at the classroom level. Section three then dealt with the definition of pupil voice proposed in this research, and the rationale behind this decision was explained. A key point that has been suggested is that aside from factors of gender, ethnicity and abilities which can marginalise the child's voice, a poor level of thinking also limits their voices. Therefore, it is argued that certain pedagogies create their own version of voice. For instance, the current pedagogy in Iran, with its emphasis on imparting knowledge and the islamisation of education, may indoctrinate children's voice, and create submissive voices which may result in ignorance of rights and critical and creative voice in children. The pedagogical method applied in this research was then discussed, namely using the stories of the *Nights* within community of enquiry served to restrict submissive voice and nurture more reflective voices. This was followed by a discussion in section four on the potential benefits and challenges, which this approach may bring in terms of empowering the child's voice.

Finally, I revise my research questions before I begin my research methodology chapter. The research questions are as follows:

- In what ways might the selected stories of the 'Arabian Nights' in Iranian and English classes enable pupil voice?
- What are the Iranian and English pupils' experiences of the workshops?
- With particular reference to teachers, school regulations and pupil voice, what are Iranian and English pupils' insights into their experiences in school?

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into five parts. In the first section the theoretical assumptions underpinning the approaches used in this enquiry will be examined in details, and an explanation of how these assumptions have led to the adoption of the given research methodology with its potential strengths and limitations, will be discussed. Following this, the methods of data collection used in this study will be explained and justified. In this section, I will make connections between the nature of the study and its theoretical assumptions. The procedure for data analysis will be described and explained in details in section four and in the last section Ethical considerations will be discussed.

3.1 Research Methodology

As Merriam (1998, p.1) commented, 'Choosing a study design requires understanding the philosophical foundations underlying the type of research'. In order to explain the reasons why I chose a qualitative multiple-case study as my research methodology, it will first be necessary to explain the philosophical assumptions, which were espoused when designing this study. It is essential to acknowledge the philosophical assumptions underlying the research although these may be hidden in the research process, but their impact on this process is certain (Creswell, 2009, p.5). Following this, a definition adopted for this case study research, the selection procedure and the potential limitations will be explained. The figure below summarizes the design of this study, as adopted from Creswell (2009).

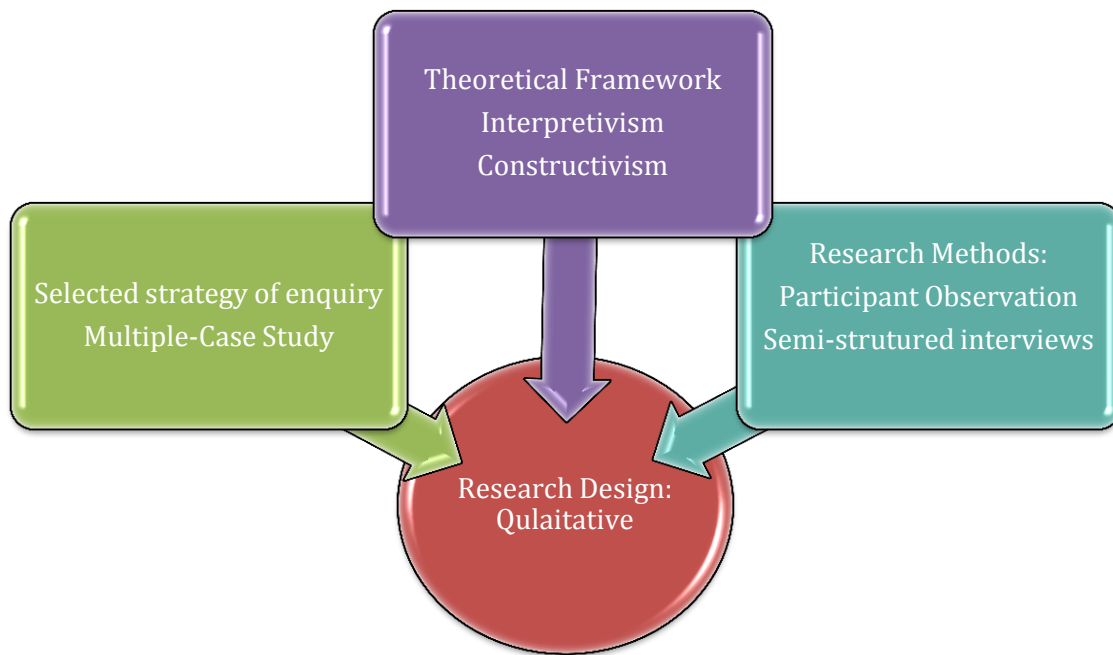


Figure 5: The cycle of design for this study (adopted from Creswell, 2009)

3.1.1 Theoretical framework

For many years children were ‘seen and not heard’ was the common belief in many societies. Children are viewed as not being capable human beings who are able to express their views reasonably in relation to matters in their lives (Greig & Taylor, 2002, p.38). This is because we get to know things either through personal experience, and this *common-sense knowing* is basically ‘a matter of agreement and belief’ configured by the authority to which we are subject (Babbie, 2012, p.3-5 and Cohen et al, 2010, p.5). In any society where we grow up, we learn to believe things that everyone knows and has been told. In other words, we are taught to agree with society’s norms, and if our personal principles conflict with ‘social regularities’ and if we start questioning these traditions and dominant authorities, then we may be excluded in our own society (Babbie, 2012, p.10). As Babbie (2012, p.3) states: ‘the basis of knowledge is agreement. Because we cannot learn all we need to know by means of personal experience and discovery alone, things are set up so we can simply believe what

others tell us'. This is why our personal experience of our own childhood and more importantly what we are told about the nature of children by the local culture, our family or even so-called experts shape our mind about the nature of children's capacities for so long.

3.1.2 Paradigms, Ontology, and Epistemology

This uncritical selective manner of knowing the world of children has led researchers to search for truth through research with children, following the type of paradigm or worldview that the researcher holds. The word paradigm is a way of looking at the world first used by Thomas Kuhn (1970), and means 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Creswell, 2007, p.19 and Punch, 2009, p.17). For many years the central way of thinking or paradigm in social sciences was positivism. Therefore, in this view a phenomenon within the enquiry is considered to be independent of the researcher's presence (Neuman 2000, Corbetta, 2003). Thus, positivists claim that 'science provides us with the clearest possible ideal of knowledge' and thus knowledge is seen as measurable and objective (Cohen et al, 2007, p.11). Therefore, through the lens of positivists, children are seen as 'objective in nature and that their behaviour, understanding, knowledge or meanings are structured, determined and universal' (Greig & Taylor, 2002, p.40). In this worldview, researchers employ deductive reasoning, starting by testing a theory empirically in a controlled experimental design, and resulting in a quantitative framework (Cohen et al, 2007, p.11, Corbetta 2003).

However, this view has been challenged by interpretivism, which sees knowledge as a socially constructed phenomenon (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). In this view, studying human, their actions and thoughts remains a complex issue, which needs a more holistic approach to investigate the reality of people's lives as each individual person embraces reality differently (Thomas, 2009, p.73 and Corbetta 2003, p. 25). This is why, a qualitative research framework, with its emphasis on inductive reasoning, seems to be more suitable when

considering ‘children are subjective in nature’ (Greig & Taylor, 2002, p.43). Indeed, seeking their perspectives and understanding meanings through face-to-face interaction is essential in this process to see children as a ‘subjective, contextual, self-determining and dynamic being’ (Greig & Taylor, 2002, 37), and thus, in order to understand their thoughts and meanings researchers need to try to find a contextualized holistic consideration of participants perspectives (*ibid*, 2002, p.37). Therefore, studying children in their own rights and not as a ‘determined, measurable and objective’ sample, but as ‘social actors’ led me as a researcher to be influenced by constructivism which is combined with interpretivism (Bryman, 2008 and Creswell, 2007, p.20). As Creswell (2007, p.20) states ‘in this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences- meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for complexity of views’. Interpretivists adopted an interpretive approach as ‘systematic analysis of socially meaningful action’, so they observe people directly in the natural settings in order to get better understanding and interpretations of ‘how people create and maintain their social worlds’ (Neuman, 2011, p.101-102)

Social constructivism and interpretivism, which underpin the philosophical assumption of the design for this qualitative study, aim to give voice to pupils and explore new insights into pupils’ opinions (Greig & Taylor, 2002, p.35). In this sense the nature of the child is subjective. In addition, the child has her/his own perspective, but it is also socially determined and theories are inextricable from context and culture (Greig & Taylor, 2002, p.38) Therefore, while undertaking an enquiry into the topic of pupils’ voice, I choose to view the voices of pupils as constructed socially and culturally on a multiple, individual basis in numerous ways, rather than simply taking them to be quantifiable. In this view pupils bring

their own personal knowledge inside the sessions which reflects constructivism when they believe that ‘knowledge is made up largely of social interpretations rather than awareness of external reality’ (Stake, 1995, p.170).

It is essential to point out that each paradigm is valuable in itself when doing any kind of research. It is the nature of enquiry that ultimately determines the choice the use of the paradigm depends on ‘what you want to find out’ (Thomas, 2009, 74). In order to understand and differentiate paradigms it is important to understand the concepts of ontology and epistemology in this research. ‘*Ontology* refers to the nature of social reality – claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other. *Epistemology* meanwhile, refers to the ways in which it is possible to gain knowledge of this reality’ (Blaikie 1993, cited in D’Cruz and Jones, 2004, p.50). Thus, the philosophical assumptions derived from the paradigm underlying this qualitative piece of work in terms of the ontological and epistemological assumptions it makes are summarized below (Creswell, 2007, p.16-17).

Philosophical Assumption	Characteristics	Implications for practice
<u>Ontology</u> Constructivism What is the nature of reality?	Subjective Multiple realities	Using quotes and themes in words of participants

<u>Epistemology</u> Social constructivist ‘theory of knowledge’	Minimize the distance between the researcher and participants-interactive to construct meaning	Collaborative/Interactive spending time in the field with participants
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Figure 6: Philosophical assumptions of the study

3.2 My research project: Qualitative Case Study

This study is qualitative in nature, as its main objective is seeking pupils’ words about different issues in relation to their personal views about concepts arising from the stories of *Nights* where they were asked to relate those concepts to their own life experiences also to seek their views about their some aspects of school life during interview process. Qualitative research involves words not numbers during the process of data collection and analysis (Bryman 1988, p. 366). In addition to this, Creswell (2003, p.20) observes that qualitative researchers who ‘establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants’. However, a case study methodology can be applied using both a qualitative and quantitative research methodology. As Stake (1999, p.2) explains there is no single fixed definition for case study and researchers study their cases using different disciplines, but the main characteristics of case study methodology is to enable researchers to explore an in-depth understanding of multiple perspectives in the real-life context .As a result, it has the potential to shift power by building a relationship with the participants within the field (Simons, 2009, p.23). These distinctive characteristics render the case study a suitable approach for my research.

3.2.1 The Case Study Approach

A case study is defined as ‘an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context’ (Simons, 2009, p.21). Therefore, it provides ‘real life’ examples in real life settings such as classrooms. As Simons (2009, p.21) continues ‘It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led’. Therefore, this way provides an in-depth understanding of ideas under investigation to the reader compare the providing them by abstract theories (Cohen et al., 2008, p.253). In case study methodology the ‘case’ as Yin (2003, p.1) describes it is a ‘contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context’; thus, it needs to be studied in its context in order to see things in its wholeness to gain a rich picture (Thomas, 2011, p.23). The distinctive strength of a case study as Yin (2003, p.8) states ‘its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence’. Hence, to study case studies in this research, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews have been applied to obtain a more holistic and meaningful picture of views of pupils. Case study research as ‘a bounded system’ (Smith, 1978) has its own boundaries and limitations in time and place. All participants were 9 to 10 years old and each case study took 5 to 6 weeks including 6 hours of practical workshops followed by face-to-face and individual interviews.

3.2.2 Multiple-case study

Case study design can be either a ‘single’ case study or ‘multiple-case study’. As Yin (2003, p.46) explains, single or multiple-case study are both included under the same methodological framework of case study methodology. Thus, in this study, multiple-case studies are considered to adopt the same methodological principles as a single (classic) case study, so my research methodological framework is considered to be multiple or collective (Stake, 1995) case studies rather than a comparative study that follows different sets of

methodological paradigms. Yin (2003, p.46-47) describes multiple- case studies as a means of investigating whether different conditions, culture and variables persist or if they contradict one another. He mentions the replication effect commenting that ‘*Replication, not sampling logic*’ as the attempt to replicate the research in different sites and with different cases sharpens the rigor and increases the reliability of the research. As Yin (2003, p.53) states, ‘Single-case study designs are vulnerable because you will have to put “all your eggs in one basket”’. More important, the analytical benefits of having two (or more) cases may be substantial’. Thus, two classes of year 5 in England and five classes of year 4, including two at boys’ schools and three at girls’ schools in Iran, have been studied as multiple-case studies for this research.

Due to the nature of my study and the need to make the approach more precise for this study, a qualitative mode of multiple-case study has been adopted as my research methodology in order to gain an in-depth understanding of pupils’ views using qualitative methods within a qualitative paradigm. I will explain my multiple-case studies as being;

- The entire classes of pupils in the seven classes of 9 to 10 years old pupils in primary classroom were drawn as multiple- case (collective) studies;
- Each ‘case’ was a bounded system in terms of time (5 to 6 weeks) and place (primary classrooms- 9 to 10 years)
- Use was made of multiple sources for data collection to gain a detailed in-depth understanding of pupils’ views
- A considerable amount of time in each setting was spent in establishing a trust relationship with pupils
- The aim was for particularization, so as to present a rich portrayal of pupil voice within the studied settings, and not generalization

3.2.3 Selection Procedure

Although it is suggested here that the element of typicality or representative factors should be discounted when selecting the case in case study research, as Simons (2009, p.30) points out, 'each case is unique so no one is typical of another'. In terms of multiple (collective) cases, it is suggested that the selection of cases from different geographical areas does not guarantee representativeness, but in fact illuminates differences. Owing to the challenging feature of obtaining access to English schools such as teacher's unwillingness to give their time to me, and more importantly, the danger of undertaking social sciences research in Iran without going through the process of being approved by the Ministry of Education, a convenience sampling strategy was adopted for this study. In convenience sampling (accidental or opportunity sampling) the element of easy access is the primary factor involved in choosing one's population to study (Cohen et al, 2007, p.113-114).

Being a doctoral student in the UK made the process of undertaking research in the Iranian education system a daunting challenge. This was due to the political tension in existence between the two countries, Iran and England, as well as the supreme leader's sentence accusing social scientists of promoting Westernized ideas among students and scepticism and suspicion about religious beliefs. As such the process in terms of gaining approval from the Ministry of Education in Tehran presents significant risks. Because the procedure involved me going through a lengthy process of ideological and political questionnaires, I have decided not to run this risk and sought to gain entry into the private schools through personal contacts rather than state schools. The latter are managed and supported financially and are under close supervision of the government. Therefore, I sought to gain access into private schools through personal contact with head teachers. Nonetheless, this cannot be said to have been a stress-free process for me, and even in one case whilst I had secured the agreement of

the head prior to my first session with the children, the head teacher changed his mind and decided not to run the risk of having me in the school. I was thus asked to leave the school and to come back with an approval letter from the Iranian Ministry of Education.

Stake (1999, p.4 & 6) states that ‘Case study research is not sampling research’ and the ‘opportunity to learn is of primary importance’. Moreover, Thomas (2011, p.62) has argued that ‘a sample should show the quality of the whole. A ‘sample’ is not what is wanted in a case study’. Therefore, to pursue the aim of the study while considering the limitation of time and difficulties encountered in gaining access for fieldwork, a selection of case studies in Iran and England were based on accessibility as the first priority. All the schools selected for this project in Iran were private schools due to their greater accessibility than state schools and also because in England, access was obtained through my landlord, who is part of the church community in Coventry; research could also be undertaken in two faith schools. Bearing in mind that not all cases will be successful, in addition to optimizing the possibility of understanding children’s perceptions in each case, particularly Iranian children where the concept of voice and critical thinking sound more political than educational five case studies in Iran and two in England were undertaken by me within two phases from May 2011 until February 2013.

3.2.4 Potential Limitations

A ‘case study seems a poor basis for generalization’ notes Stake (Stake, 1999, p.7). Thomas (2011, p.3) further indicates that ‘the case study method is a kind of research that concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalize from it. When you do a case study, you are interested in that thing in itself, as a whole’. Thus, the cases study is more about particularization than generalization (Thomas, 2011, p.3). The constructivist and interpretative nature of this study make it unwise to generalize findings. Therefore, the aim of

the study is not so much to establish *representative* sample group within the wider population when undertaking this qualitative case study research, but rather, the intention is to look at the phenomenon being studied from different angles, or as Foucault (cited in Thomas, 2011, p.4) comments as “a polyhedron of intelligibility”. It is hoped that revealing pupils’ views from different angles will have an impact on getting closer to the authentic voices of children.

In conducting the qualitative case study research, I was the main instrument of data collection, as I observed and interviewed participants and interacted with them in the field. Hence, subjectivity and the researcher’s own lived experience are unavoidable when undertaking this type of research. Indeed, as Coffey (cited in Simons, 2009, p.82) points out ‘it is naive and epistemologically wrong to deny the situatedness of the self as part of the cultural setting’. Bernstein (1974 cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p.25) states that an interpretive approach can create inequalities in power implicitly and explicitly may result in imposing the researcher’s own definitions on participants. This is important in terms of the reflexivity of the interpretivist researcher. For example, when children are interviewed by adults, their responses might be affected by the authoritative figure of the adult. In fact, the issues of power cannot be eliminated, and researchers need to be aware of these and their influence on the data produced (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 25). But it can be rebalanced by minimizing the system of hierarchy between adults and children.

To reduce the effect of the subjective ‘I’ in this study, I attempted to plan my sessions with children in advance under the discipline of the community of enquiry scheme to emphasize the need to facilitate rather than teach the children. Since the pedagogical method I used in this study is ‘characterized by conversation’; it aims to be more ‘dialogical and multilogical rather than monological, constructivist rather than transmissional’ (Kennedy, 2004, p.744). Therefore knowledge is seen partially co-constructed and emergent (Kennedy, 2004, p.744).

So the relationship between a facilitator and children is not hierarchical but co-inquiring. As Kennedy (2004, p.75) points out power is still present in this system, but not ‘as reified in role hierarchy or arguments from authority but in the transformative, systemic dynamics of dialogue’. At the same time Simons (2009, p.92) suggested, it is important to remember that ‘in fieldwork you are both ‘stranger and friend’. In fact, as a researcher I cannot remove the power relationship but being conscious of it and remaining reflexive as well as reflective is essential. So I tried to be a friendly facilitator, I told them stories and I played with them without becoming their friend. Thus, for example they were not allowed to call me by my first name. Children in Iranian school called me by my family name and in English schools due to their difficulty of remembering my surname; they would call me Miss Mon.

3.2.5 Multiple case-studies rather than a comparative study

Flexibility is a key characteristic of doing qualitative research. As Simons (2009, p.38) further notes while designing one’s case study it is important to ‘stay open to changes and methods as understanding in the field grows’. Therefore, even if the initial aim was to consider a ‘comparative research’ paradigm, according to the research problems which I have summarized in this section, all these issues ‘led to increased recognition of the importance of cultural context’ while undertaking cross-cultural research (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1984, p.194). Hence, to avoid false comparisons and to increase validity and add confidence to the findings (Crossley & Broadfoot, 1992) I have decided not to call this study a comparative research between Iranian and English pupils, but a qualitative multiple-case study. This decision made due to different reasons. First, there were practical research issues involved such as daunting challenges of gaining access to schools in both countries and the limited available time. In addition, the single-sex nature of Iranian schools, which resulted in

spending a longer period of lived experience inside the field because I had to collect my findings for each gender separately.

My sampling in England was composed of a convenience sample which resulted in only attending two primary schools with overall 'satisfactory' report for the Ofsted investigation at the time I collected my data; so my sample in England was insufficient to get a fuller understanding in terms of issues related to pupil voice. For example, I did not collect my data in any school with an outstanding or good overall effectiveness Ofsted report. Furthermore, My background and personal experience of schooling in Iran as well as the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms underlying the theoretical concepts of the present study led me to reflect on the necessity of being familiar not only with the language and the education system, but the essence of the knowing other factors which shaped pupils views while interpreting the findings. Indeed, it is unavoidable to not consider all the broader social-cultural, political and economic factors within the society in doing international research (Crossley & Broadfoot, 1992, p.106-107).

As Kay and Watson (cited in Crossley & Broadfoot, 2006, p.104) describe: 'we must get inside the skin of other people as nearly as we can. We must learn the 'language of life' as far as possible. We must 'make sense' of their conditioning and concerns in their idioms'. The theoretical underpinnings of this study concern the knowledge of pupils' perspectives as constructed and subjective, and thus, my background would affect any interpretation of the findings. Moreover, schools being single-sex in Iran resulted in an unequal number of case studies in the two countries (5 case studies in Iran and 2 in England). Thus, the time spent with Iranian pupils involved a longer period of time during the fieldwork as well as considering my own background as having been raised in the same culture , and also being fluent with the language (Farsi). All this made the process of bonding with Iranian children

more profound, as my findings will later reveal. All of these issues changed my view when considering the focus of this study, namely issues arising from a series of case studies in Iran, with some reference to these issues insofar as they appear in English schools. Whilst the study can now no longer be termed comparative research, nonetheless experiences in the two countries create a useful dialogue between the data at times.

In accordance with this, research methods in this qualitative research methodology are not generally seen as mechanical techniques intended purely to gather data, but aim to help the researcher to understand the individuals' opinions and thoughts, which are not easily observable and cannot be quantified, but rather need to be comprehended thoroughly through human interaction with the participants (Pring, 2000). In this sense, the main objective of this study is to explore multiple realities from pupils' perceptions from different dimensions not only one direction; seeking their views inside the classroom publicly and later listening to each pupils views individually during interviews to obtain multifaceted view of research focus. In the next section, I will discuss my choice of research design for data collection procedures, and the rationale underlying the adopting of this design, as well as the feasibility of the methods selected.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

As discussed in the previous section, social constructivists view reality as a socially constructed phenomenon which is multiple. Different elements such as the personal, social and cultural are all involved when constructing meaning. According to Arksey and Knight (1999, p.3) issues such, as "perception, memory, emotion and understanding are human constructs, not objective things". Therefore, in constructivist views, our perceptions of the world can have much in common, but they are all subject to our personal interpretations. This is why although in any society people may share similar beliefs about routine and common

sense experiences, they are not identical, and their life experiences are diverse, which make them less open to a society-wide level of interpretation (*ibid*, 1999, p.3).

In order to answer the research questions considered in this study and to overcome bias and the potential issue of subjectivity, as well as adding confidence to the findings, methodological triangulation is used. This type of triangulation, as Denzin (cited in Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.23) points out, 'refers to the use of a research design drawing on a variety of methods to collect and interpret data'. This allowed me to approach the concept of 'pupil voice' from different angles. Gathering multiple views from both Iranian and English pupils in multiple case studies provided convergent or divergent results, which will shed light on understanding the concept of giving voice to pupils in order to 'strengthen the completeness of a study' (Akrsey&Knight, 1999, p.25). Therefore, this study aimed to learn from children by listening to their voices, so instead of aiming only to consider the age of pupils to provide a 'childish' and 'fun' environment for them to participate, it aimed to consider a broader view, and tried not to underestimate and take-for-granted knowledge about children's personal views based on their age. Stories within community of enquiry were used to provide a 'participant friendly' environment to facilitate dialogue and activities, and to provide different opportunities to children to participate. Consequently, different forms of communication are used in this study in the form of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, in order to study children in a broader context where they are not only children who should have fun, but also participants of a study that hold different views based on their gender, culture and social and economic identity (Fraser cited in Christensen, 2010, p.146-147).

Christensen (2010) points out:

Taking research and children seriously does not prevent the children from actually having fun (indeed ‘shared humour’ and the exchange of a smile is unique in connecting and facilitating human relations globally), but it does require researchers to engage in dialogues that connect with children in their own terms (2010, p.148-9)

To gain an in-depth understanding of participants individuality and their distinctive views about different concepts arising from the stories of ‘Nights’ and activities used in the class, and also to better comprehend about experience of school life in these multiple-case studies, qualitative methods of data collection including participant observation, semi-structured interviews were used inside the field to help individuals to tell their own stories in both the public arena of their classroom and in more private circumstances during individual interviews. In addition to this, to gain a full picture, I interviewed classroom teachers and head teachers. The aim was to use these in parallel as a source of background knowledge to comprehend the voices of pupils for comprehensive analysis.

In this section, I will focus on explaining and justifying the data collection methods used in this multiple-case studies research, in order to explore pupils’ voices from different angles and to help me, as the researcher, to ‘actively look and listen for what is **not** being said’ (O’Toole, 2006, p.96), and to enhance my understanding and to read the meanings between the lines. Moreover, the credibility of the findings and ethical considerations during data collection procedure will be discussed in further detail.

3.3.1 Sources of data collected during the fieldwork

Multiple methods of data collection were used in this research in order to boost the validity of the findings and to answer the research questions more precisely. There were three sources, from which I have collected my data;

- Verbal and written responses of pupils during participant observation to gain more sense of their public views;
- Verbal responses collected from semi-structured interviews with all pupils to explore in greater depth each individual participant's insights about their experiences over the sessions as well as some aspects of their school life such their relationship with their classroom teachers, school council;
- Verbal responses collected from semi-structured interviews with classroom teachers and head teachers to gain better understanding about existing obstacles restricting voices of pupils to be heard

3.3.2 Research Timescale

The data collection process started in May 2011 and was completed at the end of January 2013. I normally had practical sessions with the pupils in England once a week for an hour, apart from the last session, in which we completed part 1 and 2 of 'Three Sisters' stories in a 2 hours session on the same day. Since for 'three sisters' I used an interactive storytelling technique named story Whoosh activity, as created by my supervisor, during the first hour of the session, we as a whole class told and acted out the story, and then based on the concepts arising from the story we had the classroom dialogue in the second hour of the session. In Iran, data collection happened during December and January due to it being an Islamic society, in which during Christmas time, schools are open and people normally do not

celebrate. The sessions were run by me either once or twice a week. Interviews were conducted after completing the sessions for the whole day, and took place over one to three days. I coded the English case studies as EN1 and EN2 and the Iranian case studies as IR (B1 and B2) for boys' schools and IR (G1, G2 and G3) for girls' schools.

The research timescale is shown below;

<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Case study (En1)</i>	<i>Case study (En2)</i>
<i>The story of two kings</i>	09/06/2011	16/10/2012
<i>Scheherazade meets King Shahriar</i>	16/06/2011	23/10/2012
<i>Follow-up session</i>	30/06/2011	30/10/2012
<i>Aladdin and his magical lamp</i>	07/07/2011	13/11/2012
<i>Three sisters</i>	14/07/2011	20/11/2012
<i>Three sisters</i>	14/07/2011	20/11/2012
<i>Interviews</i>	19/07/2011	23/11/2012
		30/11/2012
		06/12/2012

<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Case study (IR/B1)</i>	<i>Case study (IR/B2)</i>
<i>The story of two kings</i>	10/12/2011	30/12/2012
<i>Scheherazade meets King Shahriar</i>	17/12/2011	31/12/2012
<i>Follow-up session</i>	24/12/2011	6/01/2013
<i>Aladdin and his magical lamp</i>	31/12/2011	7/01/2013
<i>Three sisters</i>	7/01/2012	16/01/2013
<i>Three sisters</i>	7/01/2011	16/01/2013
<i>Interviews</i>	11/01/2012	21/01/2013
	14/01/2012	22/01/2013
		27/01/2013

<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Case study (IR/G1)</i>	<i>Case study (IR/G2)</i>	<i>Case study (IR/G3)</i>
<i>The story of two kings</i>	19/12/2011	30/01/2012	2/01/2013
<i>Scheherazade meets King Shahriar</i>	25/12/2011	6/01/2013	9/01/2013
<i>Follow-up session</i>	25/12/2011	13/01/2013	9/01/2013
<i>Aladdin and his magical lamp</i>	2/01/2012	21/01/2013	12/01/2013

<i>Three sisters</i>	9/01/2012	20/01/2013	16/01/2013
<i>Three sisters</i>	9/01/2012	20/01/2013	16/01/2013
<i>Interviews</i>	16/01/2012	27/01/2013	19/01/2013
	17/01/2012	28/01/2013	26/01/2013

Table 1: Research timeline

3.4 Observation: Why participant observation?

Traditionally, social scientists have remained distant from those being studied by staying outside of the system, so as to preserve their bias in order to increase the level of ‘objectivity’ of their findings (Lichtman, 2009, p.116). Lichtman (2009, p.116&121) also suggested that in adapting and implementing qualitative research methods, researchers need to face their subjective nature and consider their reflexivity, which involves researchers in reflecting on their beliefs and idea during research process and in fact to what extent their presence might affect the results while conducting the research. Indeed as Lichtman (2009, p.123) points out, ‘if we accept that multiple perspectives are viable, objectivity becomes an untenable assumption’ together with Patton’s point (2002, p.49) when he says ‘distance is no guarantee of objectivity’. Indeed, as Cohen et al. (2007) point out, observation can get you to the heart of the data and give you first-hand experience of phenomenon in its natural setting (Cohen et al, 2007, p.396). Thus, observation for this study happened inside the classroom and not in a contrived setting.

3.4.1 Advantages of being a participant observer

I decided to position myself as an observer-participant who helps pupils to question, reason, justify their reasons and engage in collaborative dialogue with each other. Thus, I decided to

go inside the field to be part of the natural setting even for a limited amount of time, in order to shed light on the direction of pupils thoughts and to get to know them personally to some degree. As Williams (cited in Patton, 2002, p.48) states: 'Doing this project the way I'm doing is allows me to touch things that otherwise I would never touch' (Patton, 2002, p.48). This is why doing a participant observation enabled me to collect richer and more in-depth data which could not have been the case if I had only interview children (Simons, 2009, p.55).

Moreover, my study involved capturing pupils' thoughts; therefore the aspect of getting close to them to gain their trust seemed both desirable and necessary. Hence, spending time with pupils in their classrooms helped me to have close contact with them, so as to build up a good rapport with the participants and change my position from being a stranger to an insider, which in turn helps to increase confidence in my findings during the interviews. Patton (2002) states that the personal contacts of the researcher with participants can develop 'empathy', which involves 'being able to take and understand the stance, position, feelings, experiences, and worldview of others' (Patton, 2002, p.40). Patton (2002, p.40&53) refers to this 'empathic neutrality', which means to be nonjudgmental, open-minded and mindful.

In this study, going inside the field as a participant observer enabled me to look afresh at pupils' perceptions in their natural setting- the classroom, where they formed a community of inquirer voices able to engage in dialogue arising from the concept encountered in practical workshop activities. This enabled me to listen to their voices through interaction with each other. Indeed, these mutual voices might go unnoticed and unheard if only individual interviews had taken place. Therefore, observation helps to be alert to other way of *giving voice*, especially in my culture where there is a high potential for patronizing when talking about the concept of giving voice to children (Simons, 2009, p.55). Its advantages is that it

may discover views that pupils may not freely talk about if they are asked directly in interviews, but enables children to ‘move beyond perception-based data and to access personal knowledge’ (Cohen et al, 2007, 396).

In addition to this, being a participant observer was beneficial for me, as it enabled me to be part of the classroom community. As Adler and Adler (cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p.397) note ‘we cannot study the world without being part of it’. Therefore, observing children in their classroom empowers me to gain insights from alternative dimensions and assist me ‘to see students in different contexts’ in order to create reliable evidence (Cohen et al, 2007, p.403 & 138). Furthermore, Lichtman (2009, p.165) notes that one definition of culture is ‘a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviours that individuals use to cope with their world and with each other’. Simons also (2009, p.55) notes, that observation gives an opportunity to understand the implicit values that guide an organizational culture. Consequently, being part of the classroom as a participant observer gave me a privileged position in terms of get to know my participants also understanding the rules of schools to some extent, and hidden factors which may restrict their ability to be heard. All this which would not been achieved in other ways.

3.5 Putting theory into practice

It is important for the observer to know and choose what to observe but also to be open to the unexpected. Considering the research topic ‘pupil voice’ and central focus of research questions to find out pupils authentic voices made me ask myself how to place the focus of this study into the foreground. According to Simons (2009, p.56-57) researchers decide on what to observe as their data collection methods need to consider three factors; first, the audience and focus of the research, then being open-minded and ‘thinking outside boxes’ as Sanger (1996, p.5) notes ‘We look where we expect to find rather than opening ourselves to

any possibility that might turn up'. Finally learning to 'see differently' and put aside our familiar lens to see what is there and central to observe is of importance (Simons, 2009, p.56-57).

Considering the factors above made me think about applying the community of enquiry method to design an interactive dynamic environment for the first stage of my data collection. The use of this method gave me the direction to apply the discipline to support pupils in building up a trust relationship, which follows with learning how to reason and question critically. As Morrison (cited in Cohen et al, 2008, p.397) states observation assists researchers in collecting data on 'the interactional setting', therefore, the pedagogical method was useful in creating interactive discussion between children-children and children and me inside their classroom. In this current study, verbal data was gathered during classroom discussions and warm-up activities as well as children's written questions from stories. To provide clearer picture to my reader, I will explain an enquiry-based session in the next section in greater detail.

3.5.1 Planning for community of enquiry sessions

As I explained in my introduction, my aim was not to teach children philosophy, so I avoided calling my sessions 'philosophy' sessions. My preference was to direct children towards engaging in more questioning and discussion about issues that arose their own interests after listening to the story, with no right and wrong answers. My approach involved asking children to sit in a circle and explain to the children that they were going to warm up their brains for thinking, so in these sessions, they were encouraged to think hard, and to say what they thought, and to give a reason, as well as listening very carefully to each other. I asked them to ask questions to which there were no easy answers, and no right or wrong answers.

Sitting in a Circle

Seating arrangements in Iranian schools are lecture-based, and children either sit two in two at each desk or individually. This way of seating is encouraged in Iranian schools as a means of reducing pupils' engagement during the presence of teacher, and developing authority to the teacher. I aimed to keep changing the natural setting as little as possible, but as Cam (2006, p.14) notes 'Collaborative learning that typically moves between class discussion and discussion-based small activities requires the right kind of physical arrangement'. Therefore, for my sessions I asked the children to sit in a half circle. This decision was made because I used different styles of storytelling technique for each session, so this sometimes included their physical involvement while telling the story for each session. Dickinson and Neelands (2006, p.127) called the circle as a symbol of 'common unity' since in their words 'the circle helps children to see that there is no one person in front, no place to hide or sit apart from, and that everyone is equal'. Therefore, it was helpful for children to see each other face-to-face, so as to interact with each other, especially during classroom discussion time. Moreover as Dickinson and Neelands (2006, p.127) point out this way of sitting makes children aware that 'teacher is included in the learning experience rather than teaching from the front'.

Ground Rules

Time pressure led me decide to make a poster for ground-rules and present it to the children from the first session, before starting to have classroom discussion. For the same reason, I also prepared lesson plans for each session beforehand, in order to organize my time so as to cover the objectives of my lessons. Classroom conversation does not involve much cognitive effort and it is more focused on social and emotional aspects of talk. Therefore, there is neither discipline nor ground rules for classroom talk (Mercer, 1996). Nevertheless, enquiry

needs ‘ground rules’ to be agreed between the classroom teacher and pupils. Respect is an essential factor in fostering a climate of dialogue (Appendix 1).

An example of ground rules is as follow;

Only one speaks at a time

We all listen carefully to each other

We think before we speak

We give reasons for what we say

We show respect to others

We can disagree

Table 2: Ground rules

10 Steps

The structure of my lesson plans included introductory and warm up activities for 15 minutes, moving forward to presenting my stimulus to children in 10 minutes. This was followed by making them think by themselves for 5 minutes. After this, I moved forward to questioning, displaying questions and voting for about 15 minutes, and I made sure that I had devoted enough time to the children discussing around the question and concept arising from the stimulus. I normally allocated 10 minutes for their dialogue and concluded the session with the last words or the final activity (See Appendices). This is shown in the diagram below;

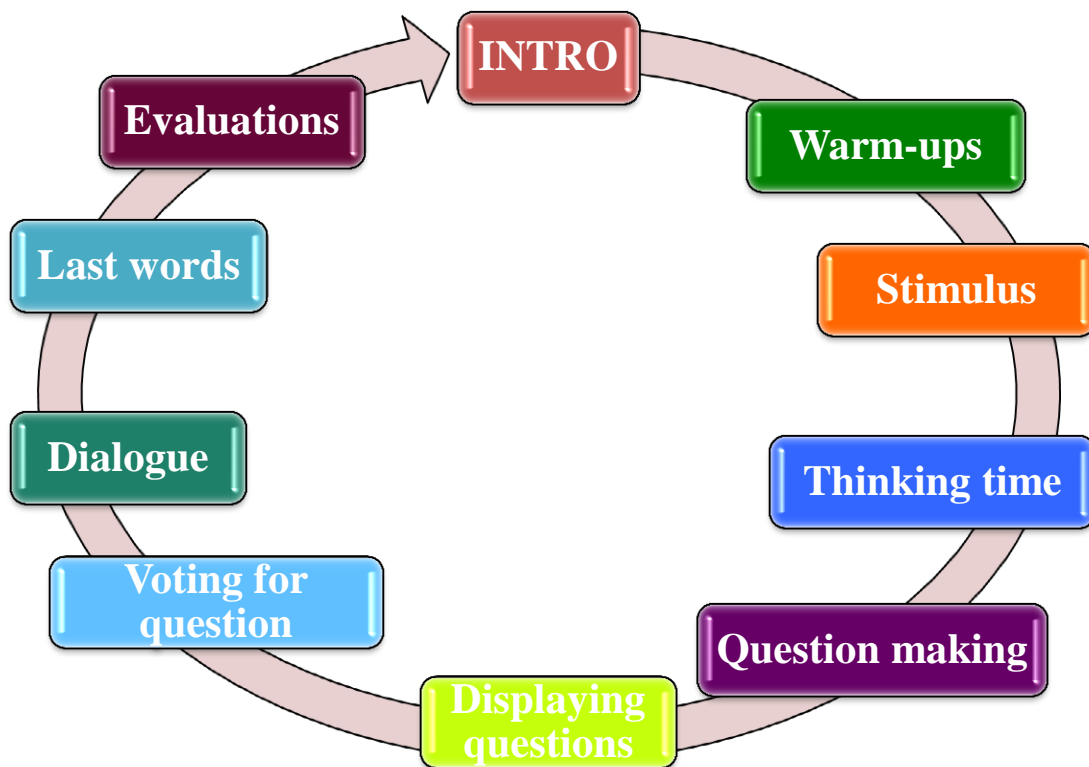


Figure 7: 10 steps

Stimuli

I sought to use a variety of stimuli such as thought provoking games and activities to invite the children to work in groups and to try to encourage them to reason and thinking critically in relaxed ways. Nonetheless, as I explained in my literature review chapter the main stimulus I used was the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The stories of the *Nights* not only invite the audience to enter a world of magic, fantasy and wonders, but they are also provocative. As the frame story starts with the battle between life and death, the storyteller Scheherazade uses the most human of devices that of storytelling not only to forge her destiny and delay her death, but also to bring humanity back to the king. Through her stories, she slowly introduces the concepts of abused wives, faithful female lovers, clever girls and devoted fairies in a way that nourishes King Shahriar's humanity, whilst opening his eyes to another image of humanity (Warner, 2011, p.4&10). Therefore, my preference was to use the

stimulus to leave children's speculation and imagination open, rather than using didactic thinking materials to boost my sessions.

Drawing out and displaying questions

As Fisher (2008, p.623) states: ' Socratic questioning means using a series of questions to progressively engage higher levels of thinking including literal, analytical and conceptual levels of thinking'.

Literal (factual) questions	Ask for information Can you remember what happened? what is this about?
Analytic questions	Call for critical and creative thinking what reasons do you have? what are the possible solutions?
Conceptual questions	Call for abstract thinking what is the key concept?

Figure 8: Socratic questioning (Fisher, 2008, p.624)

Children are encouraged to move from factual questions to more conceptual ones after having a stimulus such as a story: for instance, moving from what happened in the story (literal) to more open-ended questions. Therefore, for the purposes of questioning, I drew on the 'Question Quadrant' suggested by Philip Cam (2006, p.15) (See Appendix 2). First, I asked children to think about the story by themselves and talk about it to the person sitting next to them about anything they found puzzling and interesting in the story. I then asked them to write down their questions with their names on post-it notes individually. Then, I grouped them into 4 or 5 and gave each group an A3 size poster of the 'Question Quadrant', asking them to place their questions into the box, as appropriate. After a small number of sessions, once the children had understood the different types of question, I preferred to group them

and ask them to discuss in groups and then to decide on the questions to select, so as to write ideas down on A4 paper as a group, with their names included. The use of the question quadrant was helpful in assisting children to recognize different types of questioning, and their questions became more open-ended after a few sessions. However, I could see that working as a group to make questions was not working successfully for every class, as sometimes dominant children used to write their own questions without allowing the whole group to become involved in the process. Moreover, in some groups, children insisted on using different coloured markers to specify their own questions in their group. I feel that establishing group work takes time, especially in Iranian classrooms, where the greatest emphasis is placed on developing competition rather than co-operation between individuals.

Selecting questions for discussion

The first time I began to apply the ‘Community of Enquiry’ method; I sought to be in control and was taken to develop to the more philosophical questions as soon as possible. Thus, after collecting the questions from them, I generally worked on the questions in my own time, and tried to change them so that they seemed closer to the more philosophical ones that I wished to elicit. Following this, I brought the questions to the class. Later, I was more confident about working on the questions with children and directing them to think beyond the story and the characters within the story, and relating their enquiry to their real life experiences. For example, when they raised the question as to why the queen did not like King Shariar. They related the issue to their real life episode asking ‘why should we like each other?’ (For more examples please see findings chapter 4). It seems that, reflection on my own weaknesses and gaining experience helped me to remain more relaxed, and allowed the children to work on their question making at their own speed, without speeding up the process. Naturally, my role was to extend and deepen the enquiry, but gradually I learnt how

to allow dialogue to occur. I learnt that being flexible, as well as adventurous, was essential in creating the culture of questioning and intellectual rigour, rather than merely following step-by-step instructions.

Challenges during observation

Getting access in schools and gaining permission to conduct this study was a daunting challenge as I explained earlier, but being a participant observer leads to others challenges. For instance, the structure of my sessions was asking the classroom teacher to be present during the sessions but only as a silent observer with possible limited involvement from them. The teacher's physical presence was beneficial for me, as I aimed to gain their overall feedback at the end of the workshops and to maintain the classroom setting in a more natural way. Although most teachers agreed to remain as passive observers as far as possible during the sessions, this did not occur in all the classrooms. Therefore, there were times that teachers in both English and Iranian classrooms became involved in shouting at the children to regulate the classroom discipline, and this changed the atmosphere of the session. Teachers shouting at children not only decreased children's participation level, but also affected me as a participant observer in losing my concentration and interrupted my train of thoughts for some seconds. Thus, I had to stop the session for a few minutes, or change the activity to make a fresh start.

Furthermore, the high pressure of covering the curriculum made it difficult for teachers to give me time to run my sessions. Thus, I had to be flexible with time arrangement from schools. Although in most case studies, teachers were willing to help me and let me run my sessions during literacy or library hours, there was a time in Iran that one classroom teacher refused to give me her time for most of my sessions (apart from one session) to be conducted during the school hours. Thus, I conducted all my sessions except session four with those

children after school time as a school club activity, which involved obtaining all the parents consents to let their children stay longer at school.

As Cohen et al. (2008) state, 'Evidence becomes cloudy immediately in observation' (Cohen et al, 2007, p.396). In order to reduce the effect of faulty-selective memory and to increase credibility, after gaining parents consents to record the sessions, I used a video camera to record my sessions. In addition to this, taking a joint role as a participant observer and a facilitator made it hard to take notes while also facilitating sessions. Using a video recorder was useful in capturing the sessions, and participants normally ignored the camera once we started doing activities. I was also cautious to place the camera in the corner outside the circle, so as to reduce the potential distraction effect. Cohen et al (2007, p.407) show that using electronic devices has its own downside. Videos are time consuming to transcribe and analyse. Also sometimes the size of the class was large, and this made it difficult to capture all the children. This is why for my analysis I simply focused on the verbal responses of the participants, rather than their gestures. In addition to this recording equipment can fail and sometimes even the background noise in the class can make some parts inaudible (O'Toole, 2006, p.111). To overcome the potential challenges of using a video camera, I also located two voice recorders in different angles in order to capture the voices of the participants as far as possible.

3.6 Interview: Why interviews?

Arksey and Knight (1999, p.32) note: 'Interviewing is a powerful way of helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit- to articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings'. We interview people about issues that are impossible to observe directly. In fact, as Patton (2002, p.341) points out that 'we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions'; therefore to gain a holistic

and in-depth understanding about each pupil's views regarding the practical workshops and also their opinions about some aspects of their school life the use of individual face-to-face interviews in conjunction with participant observation to follow up their views in more depth in this research seems inevitable. While group interviews can be helpful for interviewing children in order to encourage interaction among them, considering the aim of the research, which was to give a voice to all pupils, Individual interviews were undertaken in order to give voice to each child, who is comprehended as 'a unique informant with a unique perspective' (Patton, 2002, 347 and Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.1).

Applying multiple methods privileged me to listen to the silent voices of the participants who were less assertive and timid in taking part in classroom discussion, but being heard during individual face-to-face interviews. Since spending time effectively with all pupils including the quieter ones involved developing a bond of trust between participants and me as the researcher. Therefore, all participants at the time of the interview were aware of the objective of the study, and became familiar with me.

As discussed in the literature review, for many years, children's voices have been neglected in social science research in most societies, and the common sense approach was to believe in Piaget's developmental theory, namely that 'children are not competent to understand and describe their world due to cognitive and linguistic immaturity' (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.115). However, in recent years more attention has been given to children's ability to be understood and to articulate their thoughts. Moreover, data gathered from children is valuable for researchers in helping us, as adults, to understand their world better. Indeed, 'it is important to understand the world of children through their own eyes rather than the lens of adults' (Cohen, et al. 2007, p.374).

One way to elicit children's views is by interviewing them, enabling participants to express their opinions freely. Gray (p.214) suggests that it is more likely that children enjoy talking more than asking them to fill in questionnaires so interviews may generate more responses, as they do not have to 'commit themselves in writing'. However, it is critical to bear in mind that interviews work well only if the researchers build up an affinity with the participants and assure them about confidentiality.

There are different kinds of interview based on the research objectives the researcher has chosen. Interviews can be conducted using unstructured, semi-structured or structured discussions (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.4). In structured interviews, questions are agreed in advance, and the researchers are obliged to ask mainly closed questions written in a set order without being able to improvise or ask follow-up questions. However, in unstructured interviews there is no need for researchers to stick rigidly to the set of questions, and they are free to explore any themes emerging during the interview. Unstructured interviews invite the interviewees to be open and spontaneous, so 'the interviewer adopts a more passive, less directive role'. Semi-structured interviews are located between structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are 'loosely structured' and flexible to probe for more clarification and elaboration (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.7).

I aimed to study participants' thoughts and viewpoints about different issues related to the workshop and mainly issues in their school life in-depth. So the choice of individual face-to-face semi-structured interviewing approach seemed appropriate for this study, for different reasons. First, considering the pressure of time and the age of my main participants (9 to 10 years) made it impossible for me to adopt and conduct an unstructured interview with them. Moreover, considering my research methodology as multiple case studies made it necessary to follow the same script in order to ensure 'cross-case comparability', since conducting

unstructured interviews generate different responses which made it difficult to analyse and compare the findings between the cases (Bryman, 2012, p.472). In order to use the allocated time efficiently when interviewing a large number of pupils under the pressure of time, it was necessary to write a set of questions as a guide for my interview beforehand (Please see Appendices). This was helpful, as it not only helped me to conduct more focused interviews with participants, but also had the advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews, which helps the interviewer to probe and explore responses in more details as well as to ask participants to elucidate their responses straightaway, allowing me to be attentive and conduct interactive interviews with my participants (Gray, 2009, p.213 and Patton, 2002).

3.6.1 Interviewing children

Considering children's needs and their differences from adults in terms of their cognitive and language development, their life experiences and their attention span made me plan carefully in advance. Bearing in mind that fostering trust is a continuous process and face-to-face interviews with children needs careful attention to make sure the interview process is enjoyable and non-threatening. It is important to take steps to ensure that interview setting is comfortable for children and that they are given a voice. Thus, I tried to use different interviewing techniques to re-balance the power and status between my participants and me as a researcher, so that I was not seen as an authority figure but as someone able to help participants to express their views frankly and openly (Cohen et al 2007, 374-75).

Before starting the interviews, I explained the process and the aim of the interview and asked for their consent to record the interviews. Afterwards, I started by asking 'ice breaking' questions about the sessions I had with them, asking openly 'Tell me about the sessions we had together' and asking them whether they enjoy the sessions and what they liked the most or did not like. It was also essential for the research to be cautious about 'paralanguage' –the

non-verbal signals of the participants and to try to help them to reveal their real thoughts. Where there were signs of anxiety in my participants, I attempted to have eye contacts with them and changed the tone of my voice in ways that set them at ease and reassured them that there was no right or wrong answer, but that their views were valuable and that I learned from them (O'Toole, 2006, p.96 and Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.116-117).

During the interview, bearing in mind children's concentration and the limitations of their attention span, I sought to keep children to the point and keep the duration of the interviews short (Cohen, et al, 2007, p. 375). This is why I attempted to use simple language when asking questions and make sure that each participant understood the questions and give them enough time to think. I used a mixture of closed and open questions, and also sentence completion question cards. In addition to this, I used flash cards with a provocative sentence written on them and asked them to read the sentence and tell me whether they thought an idea such as 'let's pretend children swapped the places with teachers' would be a good thing to happen, a bad thing or could be both. I asked them this question since one important aspect which will silence the child's voice is the inequality of power between adults and children as explained before in my previous chapter. Therefore, I wanted to get to know from a child's point of view whether they wanted to own this power and control even if just in their imagination.

3.6.2 Interviewing Teachers and Head Teachers

I interviewed all Iranian teachers observing my sessions with children after completing workshops, so as to elicit their perspectives about my sessions and whether they think promoting children to have a voice and think for themselves is important and if it is how they develop these aspects in them. Moreover, I interviewed head teachers to gain some general

ideas about the school and the ways they promoted and encouraged pupils to talk about their views, and also the status of critical thinking in the current curriculum.

3.6.3 Potential Drawbacks

There is no doubt that interviews are expensive in time and also open to interviewers' subjective preconceptions and bias. They may also cause a feeling of lack of comfort for participants (Cohen, et al, 2007, p. 349). In this study I had to spend long hours in the schools in order to interview all pupils that attended my sessions and sometimes I had to travel many times to school to complete the interviews. One of the most challenging issues I faced when interviewing Iranian children was the lack of a suitable setting for the interviews. Sometimes the allocated venues for conducting the interviews were not appropriate. This happened to me in different schools where the school staff did not wish to allocate a quiet space for me to conduct the interviews, so I had to change my seating many times during one day. Sometimes even in the middle of the interview with a child, I was asked to leave the room as the room was needed and we had to go somewhere else. Collecting up the equipment and moving to a new space was challenging, as more often than not, I was sent to sit in the library, staff room, dinner room, corridors or even in the prayer room, all of which were public places. This not only had the potential to distract from the interview process, but there were times that for my participant's comfort, I had to discontinue interviewing and postpone it for the next day. There were highly demanding time pressures and an unwillingness of staff to provide better settings to conduct interview. This meant that in order to complete the research while considering the participants' privacy I had to explain the situation to the participants' and asked whether they were willing to proceed with the interview or whether they would like to withdraw. All children eagerly wanted to take part in the interview and they even queued in front of the room where I was conducting the interview, seeking to ensure that I did not miss

anyone. At other times, they came to me during their break time and were willing to take part in the interview instead of going to the playground. Their willingness encouraged and helped me to overcome this obstacle and be flexible in terms of interview venue.

Travelling cost was another potential problem for face-to-face interviews and also using voice recorders to record the interviews could be problematic, in case it stopped working or the battery died. Another problem in using interviews was the large amount of data to transcribe and analyse, which could be very time consuming. Moreover, getting access to teachers to interview them was also challenging. This problem occurred in both England and Iran. For instance, the classroom teacher for my second case study in England only gave me ten minutes to complete my interview with her, so I had to be sure to ask the more important questions first and leave the rest for later in case of running short of time. While conducting semi-structured interviews with each individual pupil, their teachers and the head-teachers was a very time consuming and tiring experience for me, it was worthwhile, as Patton notes that ‘each person you question can take you into a new part of the world’ (Patton, 2002, p.340).

3.7 Credibility of findings

In doing qualitative research, elements of validity and reliability need to be considered by the researchers. It is important for the researchers to think about how trustworthy their findings are. Validity means that instruments used by researchers during the study tend to measure what they intend to measure (Cohen et al, 2007, p.133 and Thomas, 2009, p.107). In conducting a qualitative study, the element of subjectivity and researcher’s bias can affect the validity of data.

However, there are some strategies which helped me to increase the level of validity when doing my case studies. Some interview questions in this study gauged pupils' opinion about their schooling life. The appropriate age to start compulsory schooling in Iran was seven; hence, I resolved to involve 9 to 10 years old pupils for this study, since they would already have gained the experience of being at school for a few years. This is not to underestimate the value of conducting research with younger children, but according to the nature of this research, the inclusion of older children is considered to increase the credibility of the research, as older children can be more articulate when expressing their lived experiences (Docherty and Sandelowski, 1999, p.180).

I sought to use multiple sources of data collection and applied methodological triangulation in order to collect evidence from different sources to answer the research questions (Yin, 2003, p.36). At the same time, I tried different ways to gain more authentic responses from the pupils. For instance, I considered the importance of interview dynamics and the importance of building rapport between the researcher and those taking part in the research to increase the validity of findings as 'the findings cannot be tested but have to be taken on trust' (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p.15). Bearing in mind that developing trust is a continuous process, I sought to establish the good relations with the participants from the initial session with them, by adopting the role of the storyteller and a facilitator who invited them to think critically in a collaborative environment in which disagreements were welcomed and no emphasis was placed on right and wrong answers. All the participants were allowed to air their views with reasons, and they were encouraged to be open to different viewpoints.

Running six hours workshops with children not only helped me to get to know the children to some extent, but also encouraged children to disagree and to give reasons during classroom activities and discussion. I felt that my constant emphasis on welcoming different ideas was

useful in interviews to reduce some children's willingness to give answers to please me. Being inside the field and involved with pupils in their natural setting of the classroom and applying multiple methods to study their views helped to verify the credibility of findings and add confidence to the data. As Arksey and Knight (1999, p.31) noted 'this proximity prompts the researchers to feel more confident about the robustness of the data and about the integrity of their preferred interpretation'.

In terms of reliability and to reduce bias it is expected that the researchers will come to the same results if they follow the same case study design. As Yin (2003, p.39 & 2009, p.54) suggests, a well-conducted case study research should allow another researcher to replicate the findings. It is very challenging to gather the same findings by another investigator, especially when the researcher herself is a research instrument, as well as considering the fact that each participant brings different perceptions and beliefs in each case study, so it is unlikely that another investigator can replicate the same findings. Thomas (2009, p.106) argues that

In interpretative research you are interpreting on the basis of you being *you*, interviewing someone else being *them*. Who you are –your 'positionality' will affect this interpretation and you would not expect someone else to emerge with the same interview transcripts as you.

Considering that researchers may come up with different results when studying a single case does not mean lack of homogeneity of the findings, since according to Denzin and Lincoln (cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p.119) reliability as replicability can be adopted in different ways and all results can be reliable. In this study, I designed the written lesson plans for each session, which my supervisor reviewed before conducting the sessions, and therefore, they can be used as a guideline for investigators to replicate the same case study design.

Therefore, applying the same format lesson plans during my participant observation and careful piloting the semi-structured interview schedule with a set of pre-prepared questions all considered assisting in controlling the reliability and consistency of findings. I have provided all the lesson plans and interview questions in my Appendices. The procedure of the analysis of findings will be discussed in the next section.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning (Hatch, 2002 cited in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p.564). Achieving this requires coding your data, in fact coding is an important part of the qualitative analysis. Codes or patterns within data can be identified either in an inductive or deductive way. While inductive codes emerged from the collected data, deductive ones are developed before analysing the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.12 and Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p.565). A theme/code captures something important about the data concerning the research question (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 478).

However, there is no fixed prescription for analysing and coding qualitative data and essentially, the task involves choosing ‘the right tool for the right job’ (Patton, 2002). The strategy I employed in order to analyse the data in this study was a combination of content analysis and constant comparison analysis between interview and observation data to reduce subjective interpretation and make my discussion more robust. Content analysis is ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from the text’ (Krippendorp 2004 cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p.475). Therefore, in this method researchers generate categories through coding of texts either by counting how frequently the words appear or identifying patterns and themes (Bryman 2012, p.290). Constant comparison analysis looks for themes and that data are: ‘compared across a range of situations, times, groups of people, and through a range

of methods. The process resonates with the methodological notion of triangulation' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 493). I will explain my analysis for this study in the next section step by step.

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data

As mentioned earlier I collected my data through participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews. For the purposes of analysis, first data gathered from observations as well as individual interviews for each individual case study transcribed in a systematic manner and stored in a separate file. Having grouped all findings for each individual case study into one separate file making them accessible and convenient for future use. In addition to this, it helped me understand more fully the complete picture of each classroom.

At this stage I followed Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007, p.163) suggestion which requires getting to know your data through comprehensive reading of the transcripts and field notes. So I started by reading my transcriptions thoroughly to become familiar with the details of findings for each classroom.

Step 2: Data Reduction

Qualitative data can be massive and it is undeniably hard to analyse everything. Therefore before starting coding the data, I had to select my sampling units of analysis. This way according to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) is called data reduction and it means 'the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data'. Sampling units or units of selection 'are those units that are included in, excluded from, an analysis' Krippendorp (2004 cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p.478). To make it clear, in this study, my *sampling* units were particular classroom observations, all interviews with children and interviews with Iranian teachers to provide answer for the research questions.

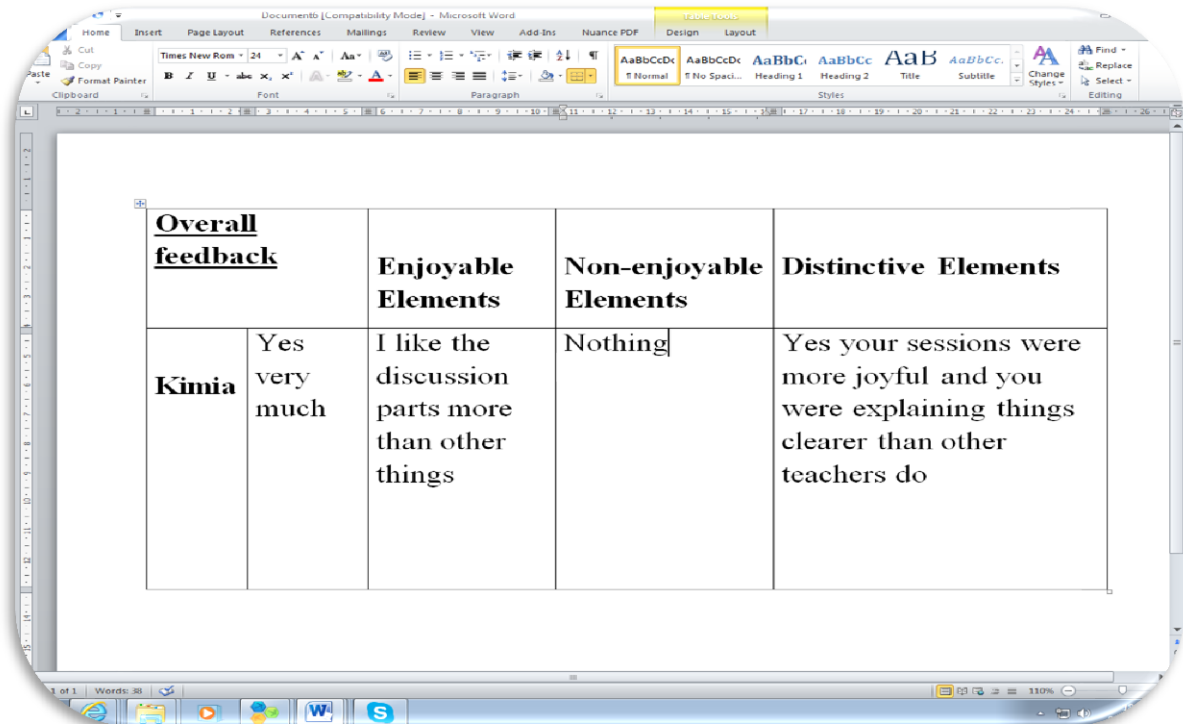
Step 3: Coding

From these selected sampling units, for both interviews and my classroom observations I extracted phrases and sentences as my *coding* units Krippendorp (2004 cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p.478). However, for my classroom observations in order to provide accuracy of meaning and to give my reader holistic experience of the classroom discussions, in addition to the coding units, I offered the larger texts (the whole classroom episodes) as my contextual unit embedded all this codes. This way made it clear for the reader from which section of the particular episode the coding was extracted. For example, by selecting sampling units of analysis from entire classroom episodes I chose a particular classroom observations for each story as my sampling units, within each proposed classroom discussion then particular phrase and sentences were selected as my coding units and these codes were used to strengthen my arguments over the discussion of findings.

Step 4: Sort data in key headings/areas

For the presentation of my findings for the interviews, I tried to follow Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion to use columns and rows to put the data into a meaningful order. This data display enabled me to explore, to describe, and to explain the data. I had set the main questions in the beginning of the study, which guided me to make the interview schedule. Therefore, for my interviews, categories were pre-ordinated in advance on analysis based on the theoretical constructs and also area of my interest in relation to my research questions (Cohen et al, 2007, p.475). For example, I used the phrases '*overall feedback*', '*enjoyable elements*', '*non-enjoyable elements*', and '*distinctive elements*', as my categories to describe the data that referred to children's experiences during the sessions in a systematic manner. At this stage, once I had decided on my codes for each pre-ordained category, I

followed Kerlinger (1970 cited in Cohen et al. 2007, p. 480) to transfer the responses for specific category for the purpose of analysis. Therefore, this stage of generic classification of responses was top-down and deductive.



The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word window titled 'Document1 [Compatibility Mode] - Microsoft Word'. The ribbon includes tabs for Home, Insert, Page Layout, References, Mailings, Review, View, Add-Ins, Nuance PDF, Design, and Layout. The Design tab is active, showing font and paragraph styles. The table below is the content of the document.

<u>Overall feedback</u>		Enjoyable Elements	Non-enjoyable Elements	Distinctive Elements
Kimia	Yes very much	I like the discussion parts more than other things	Nothing	Yes your sessions were more joyful and you were explaining things clearer than other teachers do

For my classroom observation, categories were made after reading the episodes for each classroom. In this stage I broke down each episode in small parts and place a key heading for each section as my category to highlight the main reasons emerging throughout the discussion. This made it easier for me to see their responses in parts and also in a big picture. I created four categories ; **Generating Suggestions**, **Conceptual Explorations**, **Statements** divided in two sub-headings (*Stereotypical* and *Counter examples*) and place children's responses under the heading **Children's Comments**. The last category was **Reflection on the story** in which I placed responses in relation to the story under this category.

For instance, in episode 2 in the girls' classroom, the question children wanted to talk about in episode one was *'why don't we like some people?'* Then they started generating suggestions to answer the question;

Generating suggestions

'I don't like victims who stay quiet when others don't treat them well'

At this stage children started exploring the concept so I placed their views under the heading 'conceptual exploration'

Conceptual exploration: who are victims in these girls' views?

'Miss they are like turtles. I read in a book that people are three types; either they are wolves who speak up their minds without considering they may hurt or disrespect others. Or they are like horses and they say what they think without being disrespectful to others. The third group of people is turtles that stay quiet because they want to please everyone'.

At this stage I placed children's statements under headings '**Stereotypical example**' when children brought general claims or under '**Counter example**' heading when they specified 'Counter example' to place any example which shows that the general claim is mistaken.

Stereotypical examples: *Women are not as strong as men. Women should stay at home, cook and clean.*

I placed children's responses for the statements under the heading of '**children's comments**'.

Children's Comments

Miss I agree most women are not physically as strong as men, but women can be as strong as men if they try'

And the last heading was '**reflection on story**' into which I placed children's responses.

Reflection on the story: Who was the stronger character, King Shahriar or Scheherazade?

'she told stories for 1001 nights. She used dialogue. She didn't get scared of him, but she talked to him gently with her stories'.

At this stage the analysis was inductive and this inductive coding and let the meaning emerge from my data (Creswell, 2007).

Step 5: Highlighting recurring codes

After defining coding units for all the interviews, I started to group all the coded responses for each category together to highlight the more frequent responses for each category for further discussion. Looking through the responses under the same category I was able to detect the most frequent emerging patterns and themes and to begin to highlight those lines which were most representative for each category as my theme for discussion. Similar codes repeated for the same category highlighted in the same colour, for instance I used green for the code; **stories** as the most enjoyable element of the sessions this way help me detect the frequency of the emergent codes among different respondents and its associations between the various codes and categories (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 481).

FEEDBACK iran - Microsoft Word

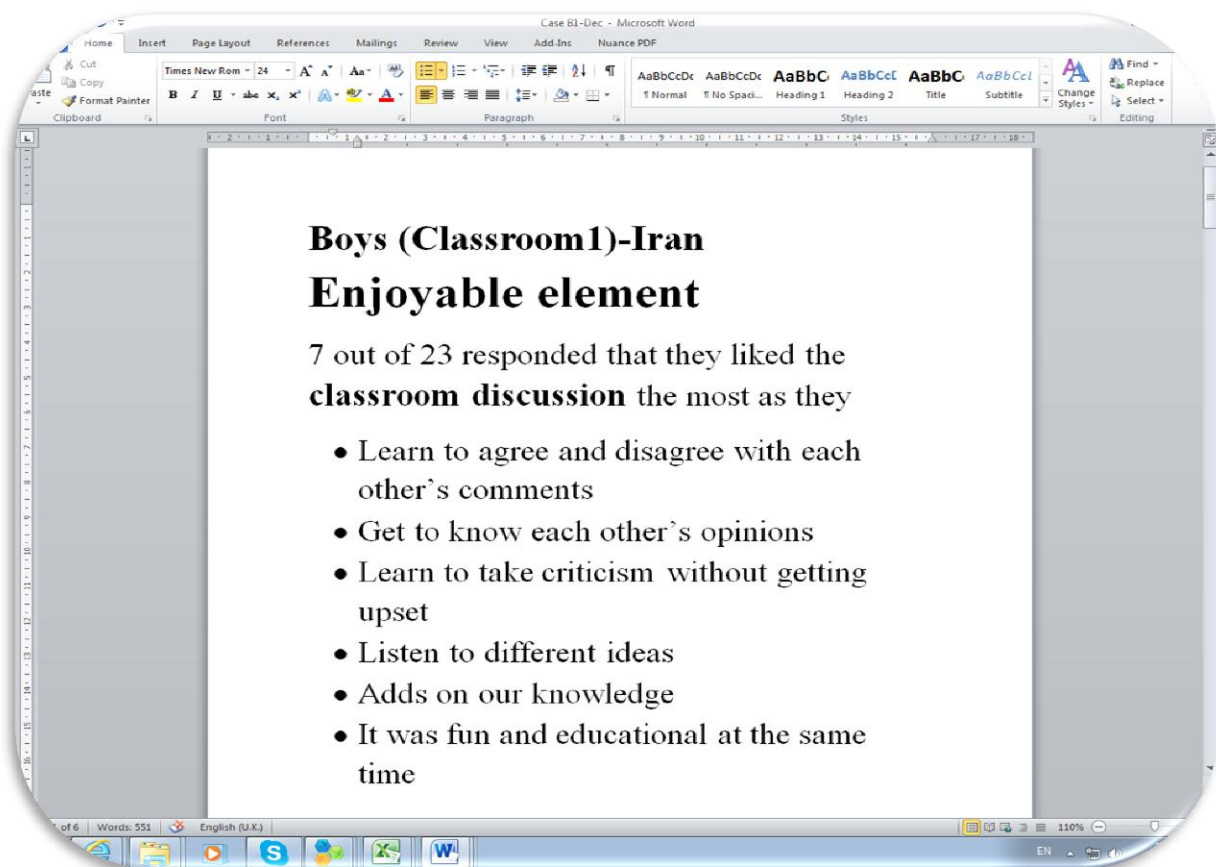
Overall feedback		Enjoyable elements	Non-enjoyable elements	Distinctive Elements
Kimia	Yes very much	I like the discussion parts more than other things	Nothing	Yes your sessions were more joyful and you were explaining things clearer than other teachers do
Arian	Yes very much	I liked stories the most	Nothing	Yes, other classes are more about reading and writing but in your sessions we did group work and it is good for children who are not very sociable or talkative. <u>in sessions like yours they can practice to be more sociable</u> also your sessions were more joyful
	Yes	I liked stories it was interesting	I didn't like the group work I	It was different you were not teaching subjects to us or

of 1 Words: 204 English (U.K.) 110%

In terms of my findings from my observation, themes emerged in each classroom discussion according to the story I used for that session. As I use the same story for each classroom I could see that some patterns for the same story were recurring. These recurring themes were detected in order to enable me to identify the core messages that each story offered for further discussion (Patton, 2002).

Step 6: make a list of sub-headings within one key heading with their frequency (only for interviews)

Although the nature of my research is not quantitative, to increase validity of my arguments instead of using terms such as (many, a few, etc.) I applied numbers throughout my analysis. Therefore, I followed Cohen et al (2007, p.485) and made a list of the repeated topics within one main key heading (enjoyable element) for the interviews (question1) and then place the topics (classroom discussion) under the main key heading as my sub-headings with their frequencies. List the reasons which children given under each sub-headings.



Step 7: Draw inferences -make connections within different data sources

Content analysis was applied to the interview transcriptions and observation notes. First I looked for convergence among my data to understand which themes fit together in each methods of data collection (Guba cited in Patton 2002, p.465). After analysing for convergence separately for all interviews and classroom observation, I sought to figure out convergence among data across different methods of data collection. For example, to understand the emergent theme presented in step 5 from classroom discussion, I first made hypothetical inferences. Then at this stage I turned to constant comparison analysis across methods to reduce biased interpretation. I compared codes derived from observational notes with interview data to figure out convergence/ divergent among different sources of data to understand the core message which entailed the unit of analysis. In comparing my observation notes with interviews I constructed the theme called **‘unmasking the existing needs’**. This indicated that the children may feel reluctant to talk about their issues directly during classroom discussion, but the merit of using stories within a community of enquiry is that it encourage children to be open about matters that concern them most (Lipman et al, 1980, p.62). Therefore, constant comparison analysis across methods at this stage enabled me to triangulate the emerging theme from the observation with interviews ‘to assess the adequacy, relevance, and meaningfulness of themes’ (Charmez cited in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p.565).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In general, research ethics with children are centred on two concerns namely informed consent and protection of participants (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p.94). As stated earlier, power and status imbalance between adults and children can make it difficult for children to refuse to participate in the research. Therefore, I had to make sure that I clearly explained the

purpose of the research not only to gatekeepers, but to children and also their rights to withdraw at any point. In doing research with children I had to consider data protection, confidentiality and the anonymity of participants, as well as the ethical dilemmas that might occur when conducting research with children.

Before conducting the research, consent letters were sent to schools and children's parents to obtain permission and to inform them about the aims of the research and its implication as well as assuring them about the confidentiality of the findings. Also their permission was sought to use electronic equipment such as video and voice recorders during the data collection procedure. In the first session, all pupils were informed about the aims of the research and made sure that participants' privacy was negotiated. Thus, before starting the session, they were asked if they wished to take part or not. Furthermore, I made sure that I assured them of the right to withdraw from taking part whenever they wished. In addition to this, verbal permission was sought to use a voice recorder for one-to-one interviews from pupils in addition to confidentiality of the findings assured to all pupils during the interviews. Participants were informed that all the names and places would be anonymous, as far as possible.

Researchers should take into account the fact that their research should not cause any psychological or physical harm or distress to anyone taking part in it (Rapley, 2007, p.24). In addition to this, Cohen et al (2000, p.61) explains that according to the American Psychological Association some personal attributes such as 'Religious preferences' are sensitive issues, which researchers have to take into account when conducting their research. Thus, in order to protect children as well as respect religious and cultural values in both countries I made sure when telling the stories and during the classroom dialogue that no biased or harmful language or words were used during the observation, and I also made

sure that I built a trustworthy rapport with them, so as that pupils would not feel stressed or anxious during interviews (Lindsay, 2010, p.120 and Bryman, 2012).

In life studies there is no absolute guarantee of total anonymity (Cohen et al, 2000, p.62). Thus, this research is about pupils' voices, and therefore, to assure anonymity and also to respect participants' distinctive views and identity, I have used their real initials followed by their gender and their country when coding, and although I did not change the names I swapped the names to different classrooms when writing the reports for my case studies.

I faced some ethical dilemmas during the data collection procedure in both countries. In England, all parents agreed that their children could take part in my research, but one parent in my first case study in England did not agree to film their child in the class, so I had to be sure to position the video camera in such a place that the child was not recorded. In Iran there were also times that during the classroom discussion talking about King Shahriar's anger towards women, one child revealed her mother's anger towards her in the class in front of everyone. She said, 'when my mum gets angry with me she starts breaking everything and shouting. I don't know what to do when she acts like this. I've asked my friends about this and no-one's mother acts like my mother'. Both the children and I remained quiet.

Lack of information about children's personal issues made it hard for me to deal with these kinds of comments in such a way as to ensure that my comments would not harm anyone. Moreover, the issue of confidentiality made it hard to reveal it to the classroom teacher, so during the interview with the teacher I briefly mentioned this child's concerns regarding her mother's anger towards her. The teacher said that the child's father had passed away and she lived with her mother. Without me telling the exact comment of the child about her mother, the teacher mentioned that the child had been physically punished by her mum and the

school was aware of the physical punishment happening in her house. So when I asked what the school normally does in this case to protect the child, she said that they would not report this and the only way to handle the problem was either to give her a bit higher score when marking the child's exam papers to please the mother and to protect the child from being physically punished or give a phone call to the mother to calm her down before sending the child home.

Moreover, when I asked one of the head teachers in Iran about whether she considered the system of separating boys and girls during primary school to be beneficial for children, she said that she would not answer this question if I wished to record her voice. Therefore, I switched the recorder off and took notes while she was explaining her response. This was also repeated with one of the classroom teacher when I asked her about obstacles restricting children's voice; she said 'if you don't record my voice I will tell you'. So I turned off the recorder to take notes.

3.10 Summary

I began this chapter with the aim of understanding the theoretical framework underpinning this study. This led me to justify the use of a multiple-case study as my research methodology which made room for an in-depth understanding of each case under investigation. I then described the context of my practical sessions with the children, which took place in both Iran and England with 9 to 10 years old children. Reflecting on my methods of data collection, I explained my methods and their potential advantages and disadvantages. In addition to this I explained the reliability of the findings. The procedure for data analysis and how I made use of content analysis and constant comparison analysis is explained in section three. I then concluded by explaining the ethical considerations in this study.

Reflecting on the research questions, the next three chapters will present the findings relating to each research question. Chapter four presents the findings gathered during the classroom observations. I will bring three examples for each story in episode formats. It aims to answer the first research question by reflecting on the ways that the selected stories of Nights enabled pupil voices in the classroom. In chapter five and chapter six, I will present the whole data gathered from semi-structured interviews with all pupils in five different primary classrooms in Tehran and two English classrooms in Coventry. To gain the experiences of pupils attending the practical workshops, chapter five focuses on investigating individual pupil's views on different aspects of the practical workshops. It aims to answer the second research question. Chapter 6 present the individual voices of pupils on the more general aspects of school life reflecting the last research question. It aims to gain their views on their relationship with their teacher, the definition of a 'good teacher', the usefulness of 'school councils', the concept of punishment and any preferred changes in their school community.

CHAPTER 4: VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOMS

I worked with five classes of Year 4 nine to ten years old pupils in both girls' and boys' private primary schools in Tehran, which included an average of 25 pupils in the boys' classrooms and 12 pupils in each of the girls' classrooms. According to the information gathered from the head teachers in Iranian schools, the children were mainly from middle class families and with mixed abilities. I also worked with two classes of Year 5 in a deprived area of Coventry, which included 41 pupils including twenty-five boys and sixteen girls who were mainly White British with mixed ability. I saw all these classes either once or twice a week for a 60 minute session. As discussed in my methodology chapter, it is important to stress that I will only reflect on my findings from English classroom as supplementary information to reflect of findings gathered in Iranian classrooms. This will help to strengthen my argument and to identify a more realistic implication, which this project may offer for further studies.

To add rigour to my reflection I presented three examples for each story from three different classrooms including one 'boys' and one 'girls' classroom in Iran (as discussed schools are single sex in Iran) as well as bringing an example from the English classrooms. The reason why I chose to present three episodes for each story was so as not to underestimate the uniqueness of the other case studies, but to avoid repetition and also to manage the large amount of data which made it challenging to present all the findings within the classrooms in the thesis. At the same time undeniably, insightful dialogue did not occur in all my sessions with the children due to the pressure of time, and inharmonious classrooms which resulted in children's unwillingness for whole class discussion or group activities as well as teacher's interventions which most of the time led to diminishing the dynamics of the classroom's discussion.

4.1 Classroom's Episodes

Lipman et al (1980, p.17) explained 'the meanings they (children) are hungry for are those that might be relevant to-and might illuminate- their lives'. So children started asking question from the story but I was encouraging them to try to shift their questions to their own life experiences. Stories like raw ingredients create a platform for children to publicize their ideas. Splitter and Sharp (2005, p.68) state: 'The process of reflecting on experience-which is really the basis of all forms of enquiry-is saved from the charge of being empty of content by the existence of ideas. If reflection is the basic form of enquiry, then ideas are its content'. Therefore, the discussion rhythm transfers from the specific concept inside the story to the more general concepts. This process interweaves different views to stretch children's perspectives and to raise their awareness of the world around them (Splitter and Sharp, 2005, p.104).

To give readers picture of the experience in different classrooms, my observations will be portrayed as thick descriptions in an interpretative way for each episode. The presentation of results will be from three sessions, including the follow-up session after completing the frame story (S1) , session four after completing the story of 'Aladdin and his magical lamp'(S2) as well as and session six when I completed the last story (S3). The summary for each story is also provided to give a better understanding of the concept under discussion in each episode.

4.2 Frame story of the ‘Nights’ (S1)

The King of Persia, Shahriyar, in revenge for his wife’s infidelity, who wished for the king’s death to marry a slave, decides to marry a virgin girl every day and cut off the bride’s head the next morning. This cruelty lasted for three years, until candidates were running out and the king’s vizier eldest daughter, Scheherazade was undaunted in terms of putting an end to this ‘patriarchal show of authority backed by violence’ with her heroic practice ‘weaving an endless tapestry of stories’ to the king which not only helped her delay her own fate, but also vindicates her sex; it was her role to dispel the king’s anger and remove negativity, and his strong sense of feeling of hatred for women in a way that her intention does not show so obviously (Warner, 2011, p.1-2)

4.2.1 Episode 1(S1) - Boys Primary classroom in Tehran

According to the findings collected from the frame story of the *Nights* (S1), the first question that came to these boys minds was ‘why the queen preferred the slave over the king’. The question is an open ended one, to which the answer is not inside the story, but which invites children to imagine many possibilities. To answer this, their imagination was directed to some imaginary reasons that the king should be so evil that made the queen dislike him. This was revealed in their fictional responses, when the majority of them pointed towards the king as the one who was abusive, oppressive and unfaithful.

Ali: because he was a bad man

Amir: King Shahriar killed the queen’s beloved ones and she wanted to revenge.

Kia: he oppressed the queen

Parsa: he cheated on her

Mobin: he hurt her

Radin: maybe he beat her up a lot

In the second part, when Scheherazade was introduced and healed the kings' anger with her stories, this left children's speculation and imagination open to picture themselves in both the circumstances and journey from one image to the other one; from the battle between the metaphors of death (King Shahriar) and life (Scheherazade). As Fisher (2008, p.74) explains, 'this affective power of story lies in the binary opposites (...) these binary opposites act as structural devices and provides reference points for meaning' indeed the image of life was more appealing to the audience to stay with. Consequently, they asked '*why should we like each other?*' The question evoked different responses and encouraged a plurality of ideas, as there was no simple one-dimensional answer.

I asked Shayan to start because this was his question therefore I asked him what he thought first. He started saying that '*Miss because in order to have a good country we should be friendly to each other and help each other*'. Ramtin continued '*Miss if we don't like each other then there is no such things as friendship will exist in the world*'. Hiran was sitting next to Ramtin and started teasing him and imitating his answer. Ramtin was frowning whispering '*Miss I don't want to say anything more*'. I asked Hiran what he found funny in Ramtin's answer. He suddenly raised his voice, stating '*Miss I said nothing*'. I asked him what he thought about the question, but he said nothing and stayed quiet. Coming back to the conversations Amir continued, '*Miss I think after Adam and Eve came to this world, people loved each other and they made families. People learned to co-operate with each other and not to fight with each other*'.

At this time Parsa put up his hand commenting that '*Miss, people eventually fight with each other*'. I asked him whether he could clarify his points more clearly. Parsa gave this counterexample by questioning the fact that '*yes Miss if they like each other then why did the World Wars and also the war between Iran and Iraq begin?*' Shayan added that '*Miss I agree*

with Amir's point because kindness is necessary without that it will be another war again and we will all die'.

To explain the lack of solidarity and kindness in some people indicated the role of families in being unable to nurture these qualities in children.

At this stage, Kia highlighted the important role of families in shaping their attitudes towards other people saying that *'we learn everything from our family and some families are bad. Children in these families learn to be bad and when they grow up and have a high position and power in the society then these bad people create the wars'*. Farhad added that *'I agree with Kia our families are our role models. When a child that sees his family does not know how to like others he also learned not to like people'*. Finally, Parsa suggested that it was the family's roles and responsibility to display attitudes to others when he says *'when I see my uncle hits someone I also will hit others because I think this is a right thing to do'*. The last thing I asked them was to think about their role and responsibility as an individual person in making their own decisions; Saman answered *'how can we make choices Miss? We are kids. We don't know many things'*.

4.2.2 Episode 2(S1) Girls Primary classroom in Tehran

Children started the dialogue by trying to understand the king as a person not as a king, with one stating that *'he was angry because he heard the queen was wishing for his death and all the maids were listening. He felt he was not good and everyone thinks badly about him'* and Maryam tried to analyse the king's feeling by saying that *'he was wrong, but he was angry, he was hurt'*. Indeed, the king was angry, and to relieve his crazed anger he chose revenge. Aram imagined a situation where people may act in the same way as the king by asking me *'Revenge is not always wrong Miss no? Like when a murderer killed your beloved ones, you*

should revenge'. Raising the issue invited children to picture the situation from different angles. Therefore, in response, Kimia indicated to her point by saying *'revenge would not help because the sadness of your loss never leaves your heart'*. Partoo added *'I agree with Kimia. You feel even worse'*.

Indeed, revenge did not heal the kings' negative feelings, but the stories did. Nahal tried to explain the king's rigorous action by saying *'Miss I think King Shahriar killed everyone because he felt no women will stay faithful with him anymore'*. I asked children whether they thought he was right to generalize that all women are unfaithful.

Yasi answered *'No Miss he shouldn't'* and to illustrate her point, she pictured her own real life example, that in the class her classmates due to the common belief about the region she comes from neglected her. Yasi continued *'Sadaf and I are from Isfahan not Tehran, everyone says people from Isfahan are cheeky and stingy, but I am not cheeky'*. At this moment, Sadaf said *'Yes Miss, they always call me stingy, saying people from Isfahan are all stingy, but I gave them lots of things'*.

After completing the second part, I asked the children to vote for one question to discuss as a whole class. The question that arose from the children after completing the frame story was ***'why don't we like some people?'***

Parto started the discussion saying *'we don't like some people because we don't like their attitudes'*. Then, some of them stated that they disliked people who took others for granted. Afterwards, Parto continued her points by commenting *'I don't like victims who stay quiet when others don't treat them well'*. The conversation directed towards the definition of victims in these children's eyes. Elmira defined victims as **naive people** that everyone takes advantages of. I received other characteristics of victims from these pupils who defined them

as **shy**, **emotional** and **quiet** people. Then Maryam concluded her description of victims, stating:

‘Miss they are like turtles. I read in a book that people are three types; either they are wolves who speak their minds without considering they may hurt or disrespect others. Or they are like horse and they say what they think without being disrespectful to others. The third group of people are turtles they stay quiet because they want to please everyone’.

When I asked the group whether anyone considered themselves to be a turtle, the majority of children put their hand up by saying yes, but some of them said they are both a turtle and a horse at the same time. To understand these girls’ perspectives on their gender role I conducted an activity with them, and asked them, as opposed to the story where the number of young girls were decreasing due to the king’s rage towards women, to think what would happen if **‘everybody was a girl’**.

Elmira began by saying that *‘Miss we think it’s a bad thing because it causes the extinction of human beings. No child will be born’*. Nona agreed with Elmira’s point, adding that *‘Miss we need men because they earn more money and if they are not with us we have to work so hard and again we make less money than them’*.

I asked them whether they agreed that women make less money than men. Aram replied, *‘I disagree because if everyone works hard they earn the same’*. Dilan continued *‘I agree with Nona because women are not as strong as men. Women should stay at home, cook and clean’*. Elmira agreed with Dilan’s point saying *‘Yes Miss women should look petit and pretty so on their wedding day they look like a beautiful bride’*.

At this time, children started disagreeing with these comments. Kimia commented *‘Miss I agree most women are not physically as strong as men, but women can be as strong as men if*

they try'. Sadaf added *'I think it's a good idea if men don't exist in this world because we can live our life freely. We can travel abroad without anyone's permission. We don't need to wear Hijab'*. Aram agreed with Sadaf's point *'Yes Miss it's a good thing to happen because there are no men to beat up women. Women can go to university'*. Nona highlighted her point again, stating *'but if there are no men then we don't have anyone paying for our expenses'*. Maryam pointed *'I disagree with Nona. Lots of husbands are actually stingy'*. To conclude the session, I asked them who in their eyes was the stronger character, King Shahriar or Scheherazade? All the girls replied Scheherazade. As Kimia commented *'she told stories for 1001 nights. She used dialogue. She didn't get scared of him, but she talked to him gently with her stories'*.

4.2.3 Episode 3(S1) English Primary classroom in Coventry

The question selected was 'Why did the king want bed-time stories?' Then I started talking about the 'question quadrant' and trying to encourage them to change this question and relate it to their own lives and interests inviting them to draw on their own experience to validate their claims. As Cam (2006, p.25) states: 'One of the distinctive features of classroom enquiry is that it uses student experience as evidence'. Therefore, dialogue started with this revised thinking question, which was suggested by one of the children 'Why do people like stories?' and this question then leads to 'why do we like/dislike fairy tales?', which invited mixed responses from children.

The question ***'Why do people like stories?'*** was chosen and the initial explanations were made by pupils. Jack said, *'because it helps you sleep'*, and following his comments Duncan commented that *'because it's fascinating. You want to know what's going to happen next'*. This time, I tried to encourage them to start listening more carefully to each other's comments and to try to apply the language of reasoning to express their agreement and

disagreement with reasons which as Cam (2006, p.44) points out ‘the reasoned expression of agreement and disagreement is central to the dynamics of collaborative enquiry, and their vigorous combination gives the process much of its critical edge’. Almost all children agreed with Duncan’s comments that stories were interesting, and Emma added a comment that *‘stories are interesting and it helps you have lots of imagination’*. Subsequently, there were a number of other responses regarding the benefits of being able to write a story or to read stories with Duncan stating that *‘I agree with Ryan because stories help you with writing when you write a story’* then Sophie commented that *‘writing is good, because it will help you, emmmm not writing reading is good because it helps you use your imagination’*. It seemed that even if they sought to listen to their comments, it was still difficult to build on each other’s comments to support their points. Nonetheless, they gradually started to focus more on each other’s points, while Matthew agreed with Sophie’s points, adding that reading is beneficial to know about other countries. Ryan concluded that one could learn new words when one reads *‘if you never read you’d never come across that word’*. At this stage, I began to direct them towards the type of stories they liked, reflecting more on my main stimulus of the stories of *Nights*. This is why I asked the children whether they liked fairy tales or not, without asking specific question about the *Nights* stories. The responses were mixed, with a few boys arguing that fairy tales were all the same, with a happy ending, and they contained mystical creatures, while some children disagreed with these comments.

As Shannon commented, *‘I disagree with Shaun saying that all end up happily ever after because some of them don’t’*. Duncan, in approval of Shannon’s point, said: *‘in some fairy tales someone might die’*. Again, Matthew was one of the boys who did not sound very interested in fairy tales, noting: *‘I agree with Shaun because if you read any fairy tale it always ends up ‘they lived happily ever after’* (saying this sentence with mockery) children

started laughing. He challenged the group by asking, *'Name one story or fairy tale that doesn't have a happy ending'*. At that time, I asked the children if anyone liked a happy ending. Most of them preferred a happy ending, as Jane said: *'No-one wants to read a book or watch a film with no happy ending. They wouldn't like to watch it, because they'd probably get upset when there's no happy ending'*.

In the next section I will focus on the second story I used in the classrooms. I start with a summary of the story before describing classroom episodes.

4.3 Aladdin and his magical lamp (S2)

The story of Aladdin and his magical lamp starts when Aladdin is a child. He is a careless boy who wants to play all the time. His father, a poor tailor, died when he was ten and he lived with his mother and despite his mother's tears and prayers Aladdin did not want to learn any skills. One day a stranger, an African magician, came to the town pretending that he was Aladdin's uncle who was away from the country for so long.

He suggested to Aladdin's mother that he can help Aladdin become a merchant same as him thus, he took Aladdin to shops. He purchased a shop for Aladdin as a proof of his affection to him and his mother. Then, during a walk, the African magician revealed that he needed Aladdin's help in opening a hole in the ground. He asked Aladdin to wear a ring and call his father's name three times, so the hole opened. The hole led to a cave and inside the cave there was a magical lamp. The magician persuaded Aladdin to enter the cave, and to bring him the magical lamp. Aladdin found the lamp, but as he was about to leave the hole, the magician asked him to hand him the lamp first. Aladdin was in doubt and said he would give him the magical lamp when he comes out. The magician got furious and spread magical powder on the hole, which trapped Aladdin in the cave. The story continues with how Aladdin escapes

the hole with the help of the ring's jinee when he asked Aladdin to wish to make his wishes come true. In a blinking of an eye he was home with his mother and they decided to sell the lamp but once his mother started cleaning the lamp the jinee of the lamp came out asking them what they would wish for so he can make their wishes come true.

4.3.1 Episode 1(S2) Boys Primary classroom in Tehran

It has been suggested by some scholars that the story of 'Aladdin and his magical lamp' among other few stories of the *Nights*, was composed by Antoine Galland (Warner, 2011, p.16). The Western flavour may be seen in the character of Aladdin, who possesses the wisdom of a 'Romantic child' who is naïve, innocent and what he only wants is to play and be careless (Warner, 2011, p.365). The story itself is long, and different from the Disney version; however, due to the pressure of time, I only focused on the first part of the story, when Aladdin is a child, to get the children's views on that.

I asked children whether they had heard the story of 'Aladdin and his magical lamp'; eight of them raised their hands. I asked them if they have read the story or watched the Disney version. They responded that they only know the Disney version. I started telling them the story using finger puppets. Children were listening attentively and in fact the story time was the only time in this class without me asking pupils to stay quiet as they would stay quiet themselves. Once I had finished telling them the story, they were all asking me what will happen next. I asked them to think about the story by themselves for a minute and then talk to the person sitting next to them about what they found interesting or puzzling in the story. At this stage I started grouping them, not to inquire their questions individually as I did during the first sessions, but as a group. I grouped them in 4 to 5 people in each group, and asked them to write their questions as a group on a piece of paper.

Seemingly, the playful part of the character was captivating these boys attention the most, so children first focused on the playful aspect of Aladdin's character by asking '**why did Aladdin love to play all the time?**' - I asked them whether they also like to play. I directed their attention to the question they raised and asked them whether they can relate this question to their own experience. One of them promptly asked '**Is playing better than going to school?**'

Children's responses were mixed. Kia was the one who first started the discussion '*I like doing both*'. Amir continued '*I like them both but when we go to school we learn new things. Whatever you play you won't learn anything*'. I asked them whether they agreed with Amir's point. Farhad said '*I disagree with Amir Miss. We can learn new things by playing games but the school is the place to learn facts, so our knowledge improves when we go to school*'. Parsa added '*Miss I disagree with Amir because we can learn lots of things when we play thinking games like Rubik Cube or chess*'. Mobin also agreed with Parsa's point, stating '*Miss some of the games can also relate to the lessons we learn at school*'. I asked them to give example and explain what they may learn when they play. Shaya also noted '*Miss when we play, we learn group work better*'.

I asked the class to put their hands up if they considered both aspects to be equally important in their life. The majority of them put their hands up, but a few of them stated that schooling is more important. Farhad added that both aspects of schooling and play can complement each other, and in fact, knowledge could be transformable when playing games when he said, '*when we have knowledge we can play the game even better*'. I asked him to clarify his point by giving an example. Farhad said '*Miss if we know mathematics we can play thinking games better*'.

4.3.2 Episode 2(S2) Girls Primary classroom in Tehran

In Aladdin's story, the element of magic is dominant and this might be the reason why these girls focused their question on the element of magic, so I asked them whether they think magic is real. Elmira commented, *'No, I don't think so Miss. I think with full concentration you can do magical things'* Parto added in regards to Kimia's point that *'Miss, magic is not real it is all tricks'*. Most of the girls disagreed with Parto's comment. I asked them to give reasons why they disagreed with any comments, so Aram pointed out *'Miss even if people say magic is not real and it is fanciful, whenever I watch cartoons and I saw magical things happen, I want to believe it'*.

Sadaf agreed with Aram's comment saying *'Me too I love flying and I think magic is real'*. Kiana added her point, stating that magic is not same as tricks as Partoo noted, when she said *'Miss I disagree with Partoo's comment because maybe there is no magic carpet in the world but we still can do magical thing'*. I asked her how we could do magic. She replied *'with deep concentration'*.

I asked the class whether they agreed with Kiana's comment that deep concentration can make magic happen. Kimia said *'No Miss I think knowledge makes thing happen because in old times flying was something impossible but once a plane was invented people can fly. I think that with knowledge improving everything will be possible'*. Again I asked the class whether they agreed with Kimia's comment. Children were looking unsure. Maryam was the only one who agreed with Kimia's comment, saying that *'I agree because knowledge can help lots of thing happen'*. But Partoo disagreed sating that *'Miss not everything happens because our knowledge improves but when God wants. Everything happens in God's desire'*.

At this point, I showed them a finger puppet of a magical lamp and asked them to wish for one wish while wearing the magical lamp finger puppet. I told them to say pass if they did not wish to share their wishes with the class.

If I had a magical lamp, I would ask for ...

In the classroom with girls, five of them did not want to mention their wishes in the class, but still they wore the finger puppet and with closed eyes, and wished in silence. Other five children expressed their individual wishes followed by a wish for their parents' health. Two of them only wished sick people to recover and be healthy. I summarized some of their wishes;

- *'I wish to travel and see everywhere. I also wish my parents will be healthy always'.* (Saba)
- *'I wish to be a fairy. I also wish my parents will always be healthy'.* (Elmira)
- *'I wish to see my favourite cartoon characters. My mum will be happy and healthy always'.* (Dilan)
- *'I wish to be a dentist when I grow up. I wish for my family to be healthy and happy'.* (Kimia)

4.3.3 Episode 3(S2) English Primary classroom in Coventry

After completing the story I asked the children what was interesting for them in the story and Megan asked *'how did she get that idea?'* I asked her to clarify what she meant by the idea. She said *'the idea of magic. The way Scheherazade used magic when telling the story to the king'.* I asked her why the element of magic was interesting for her. She replied *'because magic is something extraordinary. It's not something that everyone can do'.* At this point I asked the class whether they believe magic is real. Ten children put their hands up and they

said yes. Some of them looked puzzled and not sure. One said *'sometimes magic is real but not all the time'*. Nikita in continuous to his comment added *'magic is real. My sister always gets the right card when we play the game. This is magical'*. Alisha in response to Nikita's comment said that *'I don't think this is magic. You can learn it how to get it right'*. Liya agreed with Alisha's comment by saying that *'that's not really magic'*. Owen added *'sometimes you find a scientific way or you practice to do things'*. I asked them if they thought magic could be proven scientifically. The majority of them said no and Robert added *'I disagree you can't prove it with science because it's magic!'* at this point one of the girls distinguished different degree of magic when she says *'there are two different kinds of magic. One way is using cards but this is not a proper magic. With proper magic you can do anything'*. I asked them to put their hands up if they agree with her point and majority of children handed up. I did the same activity with this group, asking the children what they would ask if they had a magical lamp.

If I had a magical lamp, I would ask for ...

Two children said 'pass' and the rest shared their wishes with the class. Some children wished for having lots of money. Two girls wished to fly to be able to travel anywhere. Three of them wished to have 'unlimited wishes'. Two boys wished to be 18 soon and drive a car, and the two other boys wished to be a hero. One girl wished for being able to time travel when she said *'I wish for time travel and I would travel to all the sad moments in my life. Change all the bad times and that anything that went wrong that you never wanted to happen'*. Another girl wished for a good future and in response to my question that how does she describe a good future. Star said *'having a good job, good education and a good house'*.

The experience of wearing a magical lamp finger puppet was fun for the most of the children as I could see their eyes were shining and they had a big smile on their faces when they were voicing their wishes, but two of the children became emotional when they were sharing their wishes. Katie said '*I wish to move house*' I asked her the reason and she replied '*I am not happy I want to live with my aunt*'. Robert was another child who had tears in his eyes and told me '*I wish to live forever. I don't want to die*' and he told me during the interview that he had lost his grandmother recently. These two children told me over the interviews that they had not found the experience of sharing their wishes in the class an easy experience, but their belief in magic encouraged them to say their wishes out loud.

4.4 Story of 'Three sisters' (S3)

There was a king of Persia named Khoosroo Shah, who often walked with ordinary clothes in the streets of the city to disguise himself. One evening, as he was passing through a street in a poor part of the town he heard some girls talking very loud; going close to the house looking through a crack in the door, he saw three sisters sitting on a sofa, talking about their wishes. The eldest said she wished to marry the king's baker to have royal bread daily. The second sister expressed her wish to marry the Sultan's chef, so that she could eat delicious dishes. The youngest sister, who was very beautiful, said that she wished to marry the king and to give birth to a prince and a princess.

The next morning Sultan called his minister to go and bring those three sisters to the palace. He ordered the eldest one to marry his baker, the second one marry his chief cook and he married the youngest one. The two elder sisters felt jealous of their younger sister and decided on a nasty plan for their youngest sister. Once the queen had given birth to her first child, the envious sister wrapped the baby in a blanket and put him in a basket and sent him down the river telling the king that the queen gave birth to a dog. The king wanted to cut the

queen's head off, but the minister stopped him telling the king that the destiny was to blame, not the queen. The king's gardener saw the basket carrying the baby, who did not have a child himself, took him home and called him Bahman. The next year again, when the queen gave birth to the second child, the envious sisters had the same ugly plan to send the baby down the river telling the king that the queen gave birth to a cat. The emperor of Persia was got angrier with the queen, but again the king's minister stopped him. Again the gardener took the baby boy home and called him Parviz. The third time the queen gave birth to a princess. However, this time the envious sisters replaced the baby with a piece of wood. The king sentenced the queen to death and ordered the grand vizier to execute her. But the minister requested the king to send her to the jail instead of killing her. In the meantime, the gardener again took the baby girl home, and called her Parizad. The children grew up. The gardener died suddenly without telling the children that they were prince and princess.

One day, when the princess was home alone, an old woman knocked on the door and asked for a glass of water. Before leaving, she told Parizad 'your garden will be the most beautiful garden if you have three things, a talking bird, a singing tree and golden water'. Parizad asked how she can have these marvellous thing. She pointed her finger towards the East, saying that if you carry on walking in this direction for 20 days you will see an old dervish. He will tell you how to get those things. Then she left. When her brother came back from hunting Parizad told them everything. Bahman decided go on this adventure. The next morning, he got ready to leave but he gave his knife to his sister telling her if anything happen to me you'll see blood drops on this knife, then he left. After 20 days he saw an old Dervish and asked him about those three marvellous things, he said walk up to the mountain covered with black stones, you'll hear voices while you climb mountain, and do not turn as if you do you will become a black stone. Bahman started climbing the mountain, he heard voices insulting him

and turned back, turned into the black stone. At that time, Parviz and Parizad saw the blood drops on the knife, and knew something bad had happened to their brother. Parviz got ready to go and find his brother, but before he left, he left her a string of a hundred pearls, telling her, that if the string broken, this was a certain sign he had undergone the same fate as his brother. Unfortunately, Parviz also did not listen to the old dervish advice, and he turned into the black stone. The string of hundred pearls broke, giving the sign to Parizad that something bad had happened to her brother. She got ready to go and find them. She saw the old man after 20 days of walking and received his advice, so before climbing into the mountain she put two cotton plugs in her ears so she did not hear anything and managed to get up to the mountain taking the three marvellous things. She asked the talking bird about her brothers and the bird said drop golden water on any black stone you see and you will find your brothers. Parizad did the same and she found her brothers, and they all went home together taking the marvellous things.

One day, when the two brothers went off hunting accidentally they saw that Khosro shah was also hunting. The king was looking exhausted, so the two brothers politely offered him if he would like to come for a short rest in their garden. The emperor agreed to come for a short visit. The brother went home to tell their sister to prepare a special meal for the king. Parizad asked the talking bird for her advice. The talking bird told her to make a dish of stuffed cucumbers with pearls. Parizad was surprised at this request, but the talking bird insisted on it. In the evening, when the emperor entered their garden he admired its beauty. At dinner time, once the emperors saw the dish of cucumbers stuffed with pearls he was extremely surprised. He asked since when cucumbers were filled with pearls. The talking bird replied reminding him that if he did not doubt his wife had given birth to a dog, a cat, and a piece of wood, why would he be astonished to see cucumbers stuffed with pearls (Cooke, 2009).

4.4.1 Episode 1 (S3) Boys Primary classroom in Tehran

I asked them to sit down and listen to the story. In the last session I told the first part of the story myself then in the second part I used ‘Whoosh’ to get them involved in the storytelling (Discussed in methodology chapter). Once we finished the story, I grouped them again in 5 groups and asked them to discuss in their groups then write down their questions as a group. I could hear that in some groups they were arguing or complaining that some were not happy working together in the same group. Ali was unhappy complaining: ‘Miss they ask ridiculous questions. I noticed in some groups’ pupils sitting together as a group but working individually writing their questions separately and not writing question collaboratively. I collected the questions and asked them to go for their lunch break and come back after the break. The question they voted for was:

Why did the king believe the sisters?

Why did Parizad trust the old women’s words?

I asked them to change the questions and relate them to their own life experiences.

Farhad: why do we believe some lies?

Bamdad: why do people cheat us sometimes?

Parsa: Should we lie sometimes?

Shayan: why don’t we believe the truth sometimes?

They chose to talk about the question ‘**Should we lie sometimes?**’

Amir volunteered to start the discussion ‘Yes, *because if we tell the truth all the time, you say something to the person and make them really upset and give him more trouble, so to protect*

others sometimes we should tell them small lies'. Mohammad added *'Miss in my opinion we should tell lies and the truth. Telling the truth sometimes can be dangerous but also if you tell lies it can cause troubles'*. I asked the class whether we should always tell the truth or should we act concerning the situation. Some of the children were saying 'we should always tell the truth' but some of them were stated that 'in regards to the situation small lies are ok'.

Farhad was one of the children who consistently stating that we should always tell the truth. He said *'Miss I disagree with Amir's point that telling the truth gives more trouble to the person because anyway at the end he will get to know the truth and he will hate you because you told him lies'*. Ali continued *'Miss I agree with Amir's point and I disagree with Farhad. For example my friend does not want me to know a secret about him and I had heard his secret from someone else, if I tell him the truth that I know his secret this can make him very angry and sad, so better to tell a lie in this situation to protect my friend'*. I asked the class if they agreed with Ali's point that we should not always tell the truth. Kia commented *'yes we shouldn't tell the truth always because telling the truth might be dangerous; it can ruin our lives and others'*. Radin concluded the session saying *'not only telling some truth can ruin our lives but also by telling the truth we may feel embarrassed'*. Unfortunately I had to finish my session, and I could see most of the children looking puzzled and not sure which statement they should support. I finished my session; but still I could hear them discussing the topic that had arisen while leaving the class.

4.4.2 Episode 2 (S3) Girls Primary classroom in Tehran

In my session with girls, I had less time to cover my lesson plans so I skipped the game and started telling the story. During the storytelling the children were laughing as they found the story funny. In addition to this, the children were all willing to participate using Whoosh and they were enjoying dramatizing the story. After I completed the story with them, I grouped

them and asked them to write down their questions. Again I could hear children had issues working together as a group and even though I asked them to decide on questions as a group, they were writing their questions individually with their names written in front of the question.

Why did the sisters tell lies to the king?

Why did the elder sisters feel jealous to their younger sister?

What's jealousy?

Why do people have three levels either they are poor, rich or average?

Why did the king want to make their wishes come true?

I asked them to vote for the question that they liked the most. And this question was chosen by children; ***‘Why do people have three levels either they are poor, rich or average?’***

This question was expected because the story itself portrays different levels in different ways, three sisters with three different wishes and even three different weddings and also three children reacted to the adventure journey in different ways. One of them stated; *‘I think this story was interesting because it pictures poor, average and rich people in one story with different wishes. But why this happen Miss?’* Maryam commented on the question saying that *‘People have three levels because their jobs are different but some people earn more money and they become rich not with their hard work but with dishonesty’*. Partoo looked at the question from another angle thinking why some people are poor and commented *‘some people are poor because they have been always poor for years even in their previous generation’*. At this point Kimia turned the discussion towards Maryam’s point and greed with her comment by saying *‘the majority of rich people earn their money with dishonesty’*. I asked if they could think about alternative ways that people might become rich. A few

children suggested that being a hard working person or having qualifications may help you become rich. Sadaf disagreed by saying that *'this was true in the old times Miss not now. Now it's more about telling lies and being dishonest'*. I asked the class whether they agreed with Sadaf comment. Responses were mixed, with some children indicating that this statement was general and other factors also involve making you financially successful in life. Again I asked them to think about other qualities than wealth they may consider important in order to succeed in their life. They mentioned **persistence, courage and cooperation**.

4.4.3 Episode 3 (S3) English Primary classroom in Coventry

I had a longer session to complete the story and when I completed the story with this class, I gave them time to work in their group. During the break between the two sessions I wrote their question on the board and once they were back to the class, I displayed the children's questions on the board and they consulted each other; they voted for the question 'why did the sisters lie?' One of them answered 'because they were feeling jealous' I asked them where they can relate this question to their own life experiences. Jack asked **'why do people lie?'**

Owen was the first to start the discussion by saying *'they lie to get out of the trouble'*. Liya agreed with Owen's point *'I agree with Owen, because lots of people tell lies just not to get into trouble'*. Megan added *'I agree with Owen because I have done it before'*. One of the children poses the point that *'when you tell lies they may find out then you are in bigger trouble'*. At this point I asked the class if they thought it was better to tell the truth. Megan noted *'No Miss. Anyway you'll be in trouble even if you tell the truth. I think if you always tell the truth you're not normal'*. I asked her to clarify her point. She added *'because everyone tells lies in their life. Even Mr. Rob tells lies'* (she pointed toward the classroom

teacher). The class became noisy and the majority of children disagreed with Megan emphasizing that we should tell the truth and lies can create more problems. A few of children were looking unsure. Ben pointed that *'sometimes it is ok to tell lies'*. I asked him to give an example. He said *'like when you're joking around'*. Alex added *'last week I lied to my mum when I ripped my trouser, I didn't tell her the truth because she would get cross'*. Children started laughing. Star noted *'Miss you can tell lies for good reason like when you want to surprise someone on her birthday'*. My time was over and I had to leave but I could see that they were still engaged in discussion airing the question 'should we always tell the truth?'

4.5 Reflection on the emergent themes

In this section, I will focus on the discussion of findings which emerged inside the classroom after listening to the stories of the *Nights*. Hence as explained earlier, to obtain pupils views, I followed the storyteller, Scheherazade's way of telling the story within the 'community of enquiry' in order to invite the audience for reflection and the dialogue. The findings not only in my case studies in Iran but with my English classrooms also support the argument that stories of the *Nights* regardless of pupils gender and nationalities was a stimulating medium for classroom enquiry. 41 Iranian pupils and 31 English pupils stated the main enjoyable element for them were stories. This is reflected perfectly in Matthew's view when he said his opinion about the stories of the 'Nights'.

'The stories were really good and you have to get your thoughts and you didn't have to agree with everyone else. You get to choose what you think and what you think is what you think right! So I really liked it also because the stories they were very interesting and you get to have your own say. You listen to the stories very well and improve like your listening school

and speaking. And so improves your listening skills and everyone is a bit noisy when the new teachers are here, but when you're here it wasn't because everyone was like listening to and because they were very good stories. Like the story you told us, the first story, everyone was interested and I just wanted to know more and more. So I was sad that you had to go because I really liked the stories and stuff and the actives that we did and I really liked them. So I told some of them to my brother. Because I really liked them and I'm sure that he's gonna tell them to his kids because they are really good stories' (Matthew, Year 5)

Therefore, the salient role of the stories of the *Nights* will be discussed in this section in terms of their contribution in enabling 'pupil voice' in these multiple-case studies. Children who depend on their gender, social background and also their culture may have different interpretations from each other while listening to the same stories. In this study, it is suggested that stories may enable voice to happen in four ways; unmask the current needs of pupils indirectly, invite them to *go visiting* the 'foreign thoughts' of story characters, offers enchantment and sense of wonder in the classroom, and finally create moral dilemma to develop moral reasoning. I aimed to tie similar themes that emerged among case studies to reach a more complete argument about the emergent themes.

4.5.1 Unmasking the existing needs

As Splitter and Sharp (1995, p.169) suggest, 'Enquiry begins with what is given, which includes children's beliefs, attitudes and unreflective opinions'. Children in this study enjoyed the stories which give a sense of control to them to relate the concept arisen from the story to their real life settings and start having an enquiry which help them to expose their lacks and conflicts. This assumption ties in with Splitter and Sharp's (2005, p.99) statement, stressing the importance of using narrative inside the classroom, when she said 'children enjoy stories and can be motivated by them to think and inquire, especially if stories focus on

issues and events which are intriguing and contestable, while remaining connected to their own experience...when a story is presented, it becomes a vehicle over which children, rather than adults, have control...they use it set an agenda for discussion and enquiry’.

Indeed, one aspect of using provocative stimulation such as stories of the *Nights* is as Fisher (2008, p.73) states that ‘stories of humanity have the capacity to relate to the concerns and needs of people at different stages of development’. Since the concepts raised by children are distinct from their everyday experiences, children are willing to think and talk about them, and are encouraged to reconstruct those experiences making better sense of them (Sharp, 2005, p.105).

In real world scenarios children may feel reluctant to talk about their issues directly, but the merit of stories within a community of enquiry is that they ‘allow the classroom to become a forum for airing issues relevant to children’s own problems’ (Lipman et al, 1980, p.62). This assumption is debatable, but looking back to the theme that emerged after the first story and the story of Aladdin and his magical lamp, my notes from observations and also children’s responses over the interviews supported my assumption that, *Nights* stories can offer metaphors for children’s lives, a means to understand the world and to understand themselves’ (Fisher, 2008). According to the findings in the Boys classroom [Episode 1(S1)] and [Episode 1 (S2)], two matters in regards to these pupils’ views emerged;

- a) Lack of solidarity and cooperation in this class, which resulted in building an inharmonious classroom, where children fight and tease each other either verbally or physically;
- b) Lack of play and playful pedagogy;

To support my reflection and to reduce biased interpretations, I present my field notes and interview findings, as well as my informal conversation with these boys.

a) Lack of solidarity and cohesion

As mentioned earlier in Episode 1 (S1), these children chose to talk about the concept of ‘liking people, kindness and cooperation’. They reasoned as follows;

- ***Having a good country***-In order to have a good country we should be friendly to each other
- ***For the sake of friendship***-if we don't like each other then there is no such thing as friendship that exists in the world
- ***To live and co-operate as a community***-When people love each other they make families. People learn to co-operate with each other and not to fight with each other.
- ***To avoid the wars***- kindness is necessary without it there will be another war again and we will all die

Reflecting on the above comments from children made me think why in the first place these boys started exploring the necessity of developing quality of tolerance, kindness and cooperation. As I spent more time with them, I began to interpret the emergent theme for the above case in such a way that children may not directly reveal their concerns openly, but the dialogic ways of communication may engage students in discussion on questions that are relevant to the current situation they live in, and in fact, their contents of their discussion might mirror their actual needs and requirements either in classroom level or wider society.

In fact, early learning takes place with children's primary educators; parents and carers who ‘model skills of decision-making, conflict resolution and negotiation (Whooley, 2010, p.69)’.

it is important to note that the personal growth only happened when the environment is there to foster mutual trust and respect for each individuals, otherwise as Lipman et al (1980, p.156) suggested ‘no educational program is going to make much of a difference in helping children to become moral individuals’. Findings suggest that the school regime also failed to internalize the dispositional aspect of the quality of social skills such as cooperation in different settings. Thus, the lack of solidarity was noticeable at the classroom level, which released in pupils views as well when I interviewed them and triangulated with field notes as below.

Notes from field note and individual interviews:

- My session was after their PE session, when they were coming back from their football match. They used to come and looking irritated because a few of them made a fight and they had to stop the match in between. Even in one session one of the boys was injured and he came back with a broken arm because of the physical fight happened between two of them. Later in the interview a few of them mentioned the PE sessions where they fought rather than played. As Amir said *‘we don’t know how to work well as a group. We don’t have a harmonized class. Whenever we play football as a class we only fight’*.
- Later, I discovered that there is a clear tension between two of them, Farhad and Radin. Farhad was a high profile pupil and Radin was less academically successful but better at Art. Both these boys mentioned the existing tension among them when I interviewed them. Other students repeatedly mentioned these two as an example of why there was a fight in the class most of the time.
- Also conflicts happened between Farhad and one of the head teacher’s assistant whose role is to supervise children and teachers to give report to the head teacher,

resulted to expelling children's favourite head teacher's assistant due to Farhad's mum's complaint. So children keep blaming him for what happened. During the interview Farhad said to me '*They tease me all the time*'

- When I asked them what they would change if they were given power to change something at school. Some including these two boys mentioned that would '*ban bullying*'.

In the last session, I asked them directly what reasons resulted in a lack of cohesion in this class. Thus, I had a discussion with these boys asking them directly about the reasons of being unable to cooperate with each other. I raised this question that 'why is it so hard to cooperate and listen to each other in this class?'

Their reasons were more general saying that 'because no-one wants to accept the rules' or when Amis said that '*Miss Iranian people are like this in general. I don't know about the previous generation but all of the Iranian children are the same in this respect. I was watching a Japanese program on TV, I saw children in the kindergarten even know how to take turns and listen and wait when someone is talking. We don't know Miss*'. Ali disagreed with Amir's general point, stating that '*I disagree with Amir, Miss. what are the difference between Iranian children and other children in other countries? We can also be disciplined and learn it if we want*'.

I asked them if they had any suggestions for solving this issue. Amir was the one who emphasized the essentials of cooperation stating that '*we should learn how to cooperate. When someone is talking we should listen and not raise our hands. Because when we interrupt the person who is talking this makes him stressed*'. Kia continued stating: '*Miss we all know we should cooperate but we just say this without willing to do it. In our PE sessions no one cooperates properly. They only want to be with their friends in one group or play with*

whoever plays better. We don't collaborate; Miss'. Farhad concluded the discussion skeptically saying that although we are aware of the importance of cooperation and mutual respect, in reality we do not want to put it into practice.

Splitter and Sharp (2005, p.98) said that 'knowing to do something and being motivated to do it are two different things'. In Episode 1 (S2) the children revealed their concerns and valued 'kindness and cooperation' but they are not inspired to practice and transfer these qualities in different settings. However, stories can be used as a powerful medium in terms of picturing different situations for a child where they start thinking about the story character's struggle and reflect on own matters. As Bohlin (2005, p.32) noted:

Fictional characters' struggles are of interest to students as they set a course for their own life journey, make their own choices, and in doing so, give consideration to the kind of person they would like to become. Characters in literature often reveal their struggle with conflicting desires.

c) Lack of play and play-based pedagogy

The focus of the study is not to define the concept of 'play' but as mentioned earlier, children's interest on the concept of discussion indirectly mirror their actual needs. This view tied with their responses during the interview when made it more vibrant of lack of play and play-biased pedagogy is another concern of these boys.

Findings in Episode 2 (S2) suggest that majority of these boys indicated on the importance of 'play' for them and its essence for children. From their responses, remarkably, I could see that the majority of them gave the similar weight to the importance of schooling and play. A few of them such as Amir tried to highlight the role of schooling over play. When he said, *'when we go to school we learn new things; whatever you play you won't learn anything'*.

However, this comment invited some disagreements from other pupils and they started stating the benefits of play in terms of learning that play is not just a fun concept but can be integrated into learning. It has the potential to help pupils ‘to learn new things’ when you play thinking games such as Rubik cube or chess’. This view was echoed in Moyles (2009) who emphasized the powerful role of play in children’s learning. She said that play provides first-hand experiences for children; therefore, it extends children’s learning and understanding on what they already know and what they can do about it (Moyles, 2009, p.28). Findings from interview also reflect the essence of play for these boys.

Notes from interviews

- In response to my question asking what they would change at school, some of them told me they wanted to have more time to play. In particular these boys interest was playing ‘Rubik Cube’. They told me that they tried to transfer their interest through their representative in the school council to staff, but their request was rejected.
- ‘Playing thinking game’ was mentioned by some of these as equally enjoyable as stories in the sessions.
- Moreover, they liked the playful aspect of telling story through drama which resulted in choosing the story of the ‘three sisters’ as story among others. Moreover, the character of ‘Aladdin’ was also appealing for children the wanted as they found him ‘a playful kid’.
- During the interview also some mentioned that they learn better with play.

Arian: *‘My grandmother was a teacher before and when she teaches me maths we play with numbers. For example she says 8 multiple 8 is 64 and this number is a secret code for your sister. I don’t forget it this way’.*

Dewey (1933) drew a distinction between playfulness and play ‘the former is an attitude of mind; the latter is an outward manifestation of this attitude’ (cited in Moyles, 2010, p.34). Playfulness brings freedom and flexibility, and also relieves their tension and pressure they feel during the school day. The above extract is a good example, that playfulness provides the moment for the child that he started enjoying the process of learning and be ‘in the flow’. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) coined the expression of ‘flow’, which he indicates that when someone is ‘in the flow’ they will experience deep concentration, engagement, and pleasure without awareness of time passing (in Briggs and Hansen, 2012, p.19). In addition to this, the pupils view may enhance your sociability ability as Shaya said ‘*Miss when we play, we learn group work better*’. According to Vygotsky (1978) ‘play situations’ creates limits on the behavior (Briggs, Hansen, 2012, p.6). Therefore, children’s actions become more cautious to regulate their behaviors because their actions are determined by the rules of the game.

Play activities create ‘transformational possibilities: children can reproduce and go beyond what is given. (...) play provides a bridge between the possible and the actual’ (Wood, 2004, p.33). Children liked playful activities because it offers entertainment, fun and pleasure (Dickinson et al, 2006, p.12). Therefore, lack of play can create boredom for a child which is reflected in Amir’s comment;

‘I like going to school to study and be with my friends, but sometimes I feel so bored at school. Even our PE sessions are sometimes boring just repeating the same things again and again. Rainy days are the worst because we can’t even go to play during break time’ (Arya)

In fact, play is mentioned as one of the main rights of children. According to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31, online); ‘States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the

age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'. It is suggested how best to fun activities such as plays can actually motivate children to get involve and participate more. This view unities with the UNCRC (Article 13), which states that children's right to freedom of expression includes a right to impart information 'either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice' (Lundy, 2007, p.935).

However, the current curriculum in Iranian education lacks playful pedagogy and little attention is given to this aspect of children's rights. The long-established values in relation to schooling in Iranian education suggest that schooling as a formal experience and teaching is also a 'formal activity'. Therefore no place considered for the essence of play and playful pedagogy in planning the primary school curriculum (Moyles, 2010, p.xvii &3). Traditional education may limit imagination and spontaneity if assuming that logical rigor only happens in the absence of imaginative and creative activities. Hence putting more weight on core subjects such as numeracy and place it in the centre of child's education may leave limited room for innovative activities.

A playful approach according to DCSF (2009, p.14) supports learning since it seems that playful children apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in more diverse ways within different situations. Moreover, Action Alliance for Childhood (2007 in Moyles, 2010) also suggests not to see play as a disruption from the curriculum, but as the best way to implement the curriculum. In fact it has been argued that effective pedagogy includes opportunities for co-construction between children and adults, thus the teacher's role is conceptualised as 'proactive in creating play/learning environments, as well as responsive to children's choices, interests and patterns of learning' (Wood, 2004, p.29).

4.5.2 ‘Go Visiting’

Reflecting on all Episodes suggest that, children are not passive listeners while they listen to the stories but they visit all the characters in imaginative journey. By listening to the stories children start thinking about the characters in the stories, and as Sharp (2007) suggests good literature enable children to ‘understand why the characters think the way they do’ as well as ‘gives us access to how others perceive the world’. Hannah Arendt (1977, cited in Sharp, 2009, p.xv) called this activity ‘*going visiting*’. by going visiting children ‘imaginatively entering into the worlds of different people with different views, listening attentively to their stories, trying to figure out the worldviews from which they are coming and how *they* might see you and your perspective as strange’ . Therefore, children get the opportunity to ‘see things pluralistically’ rather than myopically through imaginative journey into the worlds of different people while listening attentively to others stories. This imaginative travelling in time creates a new worldview in children by helping children to discover new ways of thinking to shift their priorities, reconsider what is significant for them, and change their views (Sharp, 2009, p.xv)

An example can be seen in Episode 2 (S1), which suggests that children first tried to understand the king’s negative feelings towards women by empathizing themselves that the king was hurt and angry. Then, one of them even exemplified the moments in life when one may choose revenge as a solution to overcome negative feelings as the king did by saying that ‘*revenge is not always wrong no Miss? Like when a murderer killed your beloved ones, you should revenge*’.

Therefore, as seen in different episodes by *going visiting* children not only access what characters of story think but also *why* they think and act in a particular way (Sharp, 2009, p.xvi). Fox Eades (2006, p.16) points out, stories enclose the complete range of human

emotions and events help the listener to experience the events in the story through the eyes of story characters. Therefore, stories help children to identify themselves with the characters, or to become silent witnesses who empathize with the story characters. Stories involve the listeners in the lives of its characters emotionally and intellectually.

In addition to this, As Jose and Brewer (cited in Jose 1989, p.698) state that school children are willing to identify themselves with the similar gendered story characters. Hence in this case, these girls may perceive themselves with the same gender characters of the story, at one side neglected young girls who were the victims of patriarchal power, the other side Scheherazade- a heroine- a true inspiration who chose to take difficulties into her own hands. Thus, this binary image of representing feminine characters may lead children to put themselves in the character's shoes and discard the image of neglected young girls by saying that 'they don't like victims'. In their eyes victims are 'shy, quiet, emotional and innocent people', like turtles who stay quiet and hide in their comfort zone. Children focus on what the characters in the story say and react and sometimes they get engaged with recognizing the intellectual attitude of the story character which later children may begin to practice and value these intellectual procedures themselves (Sharp, 2005, p.99). This view was reflected in Martha Nussbaum's point of view (1990, pp.139-140) when she stated that through the lives and complex dilemmas of the story characters in the story ethical questions can be arisen and accessible to enquiry and discussion. Since she states that the reader or listener of the narrative like the characters in the story both are engaged in an 'adventure' which 'involves valuable aspects of human moral experience' (1990, p.142 & Sharp, 2005, p.100).

Reflecting on episode 2 (S1) and episode 2(S3) *Going visiting* help children to have a better judgment; escape from narrow-mindedness and common sense belief when two of them pictured the situation when others draw stereotypical conclusions like the king did about 'all

women are unfaithful'. They shared their own experiences of being called 'stingy and cheeky', due to the common sense belief about people from their birth region. Or in the Episode 3 (S3) some children expressed their views that in order to become wealthy, one must to be dishonest. By going visiting others, they may be liberated from prejudice that opens new options for them that actually one can become wealthy without dishonesty. Eventually the child's choice may stay the same but at least she tried to see alternatives to skip from rigidity. It seems that when insightful dialogue takes place good judgment would occur because this way will give children the opportunity not only to gain a multi-perspective understanding or multi-dimensional views from each other sitting in the classroom community, but also to receive 'foreign thoughts' through story characters (Sharp, 2007, p.303).

4.5.3 The role of Enchantment in the 'Nights'

In the literature of the Middle East, *aja'ib*- meaning marvels, wonders, astonishing things- describe a genre that ranges from fantastic travel yarns to metaphysical myths. *Nights* stories contain wonders of all kinds on this narrative spectrum, and aims to produce precisely that condition of 'ajab-astonishment- in the reader and listener (Warner, 2011, p.6). Warner (2011, p.6) comments; 'Surprise is an essential trait. When the story takes yet another imaginative leap and brings about the desired effect of *ajab*, the pleasure becomes more intense'.

Children admired good quality stories and as Bettelheim (1976, p.5) notes 'for a story to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and clarify his emotions'. From the findings, for example Episode 3(S1), Episode 2(S2) and Episode2 (S3) bring the concept related to the fairy tales and its genre. Children like fairy stories which bring

enchantment and happy endings for them. Even only a few English boys were against of fairy tales (Ep3/S1) because of their happy endings and their predictability, which leaves no room for surprises for them, but children like ‘good quality’ fairy tales. Since even these boys still liked the stories of the *Nights*. In fact, there are some concerns about oversimplifying fairy tales with their fixed ending point, which is ‘happily ever after’ and gives the impression to children that Zipes (1992, p.167) mentioned: ‘happiness is just down the road’. However, as Bettelheim (1976, p.7) states: ‘real life is not only sunny’ (Bettelheim, 1976, p.7).

This is why when I asked one child about the kind of story he likes; he said ‘I like real stuff’. Remarkably, another one, when asked during the interview why he did not like fairy tales, said: *I kinda like fairy tales, but I don’t like the way of loads of loads of in every fairy tales there is something about a man and a woman’s love*. Then, when I said that the stories of the *Nights* were also a kind of fairy stories, he said in response: *I know that but they were better ones, better quality. I enjoyed them more than any fairy tales I watched!*

Warner (2011, p.22,431) questioned in her book *Stranger Magic* ‘if it is possible to set the Arabian Nights in relation to the concerns of modern society and modern consciousness, as they were developing in the age of reason. How do such flights of fancy speak to reason?’ One great attraction which makes fairy stories so interesting for children is their enchantment because it brings pleasure. A sense of wonder opens imagining possibilities not in a direct functional way, but as Italo Calvino explains ‘flying to another world, another level of perception, where he could find the strength to change the face of reality’ (ibid, 2011, p.432). He continues (cited in Warner, 2011, p.433) the world of enchantment is not devoid of logic, it is the means of seeing the world from different angles. Pierce (1993, p.51) notes that fantasy empowers children. It offers them the ‘joy beyond the walls of the world’ (Tolkien, 1989 cited in Black, p.246).

Enchantment appeals to children's attention and the element of enchantment or magic for the majority of children in my two case studies [See Ep2/3 (S2)] were important to be arisen as a concept of discussion. Children liked the magical adventure of 'Aladdin' in the *Nights* stories. Sharon Black (2003, p.237) suggests that probably the stories bring magic back to our everyday existence. In addition to this, Winston (2004, p.6) defined magic as the power capable of transforming things, making them appear or disappear.

Children in fact can distinguish fantasy from reality, and through stories of fantasy children can understand that the stories 'speak to him in the language of symbols and not that of everyday reality' (Bettelheim, 1976, p.62). *'Miss even if people say magic is not real and it is fanciful, whenever I watch cartoons and I saw magical things happen, I want to believe it'*.

Indeed as Bettelheim (1976, p.73) says:

The child intuitively comprehends that although these stories are *unreal*, they are not *untrue*; that while what these stories tell about does not happen in fact, it must happen as inner experience and personal development; that [fantasy] tales depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence.

Following this view, the magical lamp is a symbolic metaphor, but they are not untrue for children. Unreal metaphors inside the story made the child think symbolically 'what would I wish for if I had a magical lamp'. As one child said *'Aladdin was exciting I liked the magical lamp and I think my wishes can also come true'*. The symbolic meanings give children confidence in themselves and in their future (Bettelheim, 1976, p.4).

Children have a natural perpetual curiosity and they wonder about things when they are young. They want to be informed the *purpose* behind everything and not just the *cause*. For children experience takes on an enigmatic, puzzling quality because they do not have the

formed frame of reference in their mind to understand their experience and put it into place as it happens because children's experiences and information are concise (Lipman et al, 1980, p.33). Hence, children unsurprisingly wonder at the world and they ask 'why' for everything to satisfy their curiosity.

Scientific explanations usually dispel their puzzlement, but sometimes children want to understand not only literally but also symbolically (Lipman et al, 1980, p.34). For this reason children want to believe in thing like 'magic' in fairy tales because 'magic' is wonderful as they cannot find answers to explain it, they wonder at it. When we find things inexplicable, 'We are inclined to call it marvellous and wonder at it because we seem to be confronted not by soluble problems, but by utter mysteries' (Lipman et al, 1980, p.32). Stories such as the ones in Nights provide the imagery to incorporate imagination and insight to get children thinking while inspire children's imagination rather adults pre-empt them with prescribed thoughts and interpretation. At this stage children start thinking and creating for themselves (Lipman et al, 1980, p.35-36). Therefore, stories in this way can help children to think more creatively and creative thinkers are the one 'who can think for themselves'

However, as Lipman et al. (1980, p.31) said 'the prohibition against wonder is transmitted from generation to generation'. Therefore, this view reflected in the current curriculum in Iranian education as well which leaves no room for stories and art in general. This was reflected in the children's responses when I asked them what they would change if they had been given the power to transform something in their school life.

Sogol: *'I would change the lessons in the books. I would make our books more interesting'.*

Mon: How would you make it more interesting?

Sogol: *'I would leave blank pages in our maths book, so we can draw when we get tired'.*

Duncan: *‘what I would change is to ask teachers to tell more stories and do more drama. Because when you get older in a bigger class like I am, you don’t get much stories and it is boring when there is no story in the literacy sessions’*

Patricia Whitfield (2009 cited in Haynes and Murriss, 2013, p.5) states that the role of the arts is ‘an essential component in children’s ability to make meaning of their world’. Pupil’s roles at school are widely recognized to answer the questions instead of asking questions and to think for themselves so the school culture mainly suppresses the child’s originality (Lipman et al, 1980, p.61). Indeed, most adults think that there is no time for wondering or they may find it unprofitable to engage children with fairy tales which leaves no scientific aspect for the child’s lives. But the result would be a mass of passive acceptance with silent critical and creative voices that have ceased to question to find meaning for their life experiences because their sense of wonder was obliterated once they started schooling, and they gradually learn not to marvel at anything (Lipman et al, 1980, p.31- 32).

4.5.4 Developing ‘moral reasoning’

As mentioned earlier in the Episode 1/3(S3) children started discovering different views on the concept of the ‘lie’ asking ‘do we need to lie sometimes?’ the question creates moral dilemmas as it ‘involves making a choice when it is difficult to know exactly what is right’ (Winston, 1998, p.5). Therefore, in this way children are invited to ‘interpret, negotiate, and articulate’ moral reasoning through stories in a non-didactic and straightforward way (Winston, 1998, p.7-8). In fact this situation is not straightforward but challenging because the pupils responses reflect that the concept of choice is not always about ‘right and wrong’ but as Carey (in Winston, 1998, p.5) said it can be between ‘two rights which pull in different directions’. Therefore, although the concept of right and wrong is integral to a code of rules and children need to be taught these rules simply to handle moral dilemmas, but in fact in

most cases the unchanged code of rules cannot shed light on children's thinking to make their minds thorough. Since traditional teacher-centred model of education emphasises on morality in a universal and ready-made truth. Ready-made truths make children unable to adapt and transfer moral issues to their own experiences to reconstruct their own meanings. Bleazby (2011, p.455) argues that absolutism is associated with dogmatism and if children believe that for any enquiry there is an absolute truth as an outcome then they always seek out universal and firm conclusions.

On the other hand, some teachers are afraid of moral dilemmas for children, since their concern would be 'moral relativism' which in Dr Carey's (cited in Winston, 1998, p.4) words means 'a world in which there are no rights and wrong except what we individuals deem to be true for ourselves'. Sharp (2007, p.311) emphasizes on 'pluralism' and not advocating 'relativism'. Since indeed not all ideas are equally truthful (Bleazby, 2011, p.456). Children's views are open to question for fostering self-correction. As Splitter and Sharp (2005, p.70) state:

If children grow up thinking that their views are not open to question and that self-correction is a weakness rather than a strength, then they will be unprepared to deal reasonably with the conflict that can arise from the clash of divergent views.

According to Sharp (2007), stories hold values, and therefore stimulate classroom discussion about moral dilemmas which bring a pluralism of ideas, namely 'the ability to think from a plurality of perspectives and the need to engage with others in dialogue before making sound judgements'. She believes that children are able to do this, as 'they are much closer to the imaginative life' (2007, p.311). Since stories inspire children to ask question on the concept that interest them, this gives them a sense of ownership, which not only protects them from external imposition of a predetermined set of moral rules but connects to their own

experiences which may help discover richer and more meaningful alternatives than those ideas they currently have (Splitter and Sharp, 2005, p.180).

CHAPTER 5:

INDIVIDUAL VOICES ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF WORKSHOPS

To acknowledge all the voices of children who took part in this project, all individual interviews are included within this thesis. In this chapter and chapter six, I will present the whole data gathered from semi-structured interviews with all pupils in five different primary classrooms in Tehran and two English classrooms in Coventry. But this part aims to answer this question.

What are the pupils' experiences of the workshops?

In the presentation of the findings in this chapter, I try to identify the frequency of replication of same responses from interviews from different pupils in order to increase validity of my data and to reach a more comprehensive conclusion. Furthermore, it is important to note that this study is about the voices of pupils. To stress children's views, I aim to represent their voices throughout the chapter in different quotations to a feasible extent. I begin with pupils' views on aspects of the sessions, such as what they liked the most, any factors that they did not like, and what kinds of features in the sessions interested them the most. Finally, the challenges they felt during the sessions will be described. The data is presented in five pre-coded categories, including **overall feedback**, **enjoyable element**, **non-enjoyable element**, and **distinctive element** as well as **challenging element** of the sessions.

5.1 Voices from Iranian Pupils

5.1.1 Overall Feedback

The overall feedback from pupils in both boys and girls primary classrooms was positive. In response to the question of whether they enjoyed the sessions, 81 pupils including (37 girls and 44 boys) answered yes, and some stated that they liked the sessions very much.

It was really good. In your sessions we were allowed to talk about our opinions and say whether we agree or disagree. Be more imaginative when we listened to the stories. Also we were asking questions about the story and other stuff (Tara).

5.1.2 Enjoyable Elements

Although pupils mentioned that they liked the sessions, to get more detailed feedback from them, I probed them to explain to me from their perspectives what the most enjoyable element was in the sessions. They mentioned stories of the *Nights* also the way I delivered the story as well as figures in the stories, playing games and classroom discussion as the most enjoyable elements of the sessions.

Stories of the ‘Nights’

Majority of these Iranian pupils have never heard of the stories of the *Nights* before my sessions. When I asked them what they know about these stories only a very few of them put their hands up in all of my case studies in the first session. Most of them only said they had only heard about these stories, but they had never read them. Findings indicate that for both girls and boys, the most enjoyable element was the storytelling part. This response was repeated 41 times by 25 girls and 16 boys and they mentioned that they really liked the stories of the *Nights*. Their reasons were very similar to each other as they mainly stated that;

- **Stories were very beautiful and interesting;**

Most of the pupils reasoned they liked the stories because there were interesting and they enjoyed listening to them.

Stories were very interesting and beautiful. My friend, Kimia, borrowed the 1001 Nights book from the library to read; once she returns the book I will borrow it to read (Maryam).

- **They were thought-provoking and educational;**

Apart from the fact that pupils commented that these stories are beautiful and interesting, the stories of the *Nights* were also a thought-provoking stimulus, which inspired them to inquire and have an insightful discussion in their classrooms. The classroom discussion after listening to the stories of the *Nights* was helpful to inspire them to start asking questions first related to the story and then relate the issue to their own life experiences, so my role was to encourage pupils to participate to have a joint enquiry to address the issue based on what they found interesting or puzzling inside the story.

<i>I liked the stories the most. They made me think (Rojan).</i>
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Pupils also mentioned that the stories were educational and they learnt new things from listening to them. For example in terms of the story of ‘Aladdin and his magical lamp’, children indicated repeatedly the concept of the trust. They responded that they learnt from the story that they should not trust strangers.

‘Aladdin was very interesting. The message of the story was not to trust everyone and I think it was educational’ (Amir, 10 year old boy).

‘We shouldn’t listen to whoever says they know our family’ (Negin, 10 years old girl).

Some children also mentioned that the story of the ‘three sisters’ was not only fun because of the drama, but it was also educational. In response to my question about what they learnt from the story, Ramtin (10 years old boy) stated; *‘I like the drama also I liked the story itself. I learnt that we shouldn’t listen to every voice. You shouldn’t trust every voice’.*

Farhad (10 years old boy) also said that; *‘I learnt if we have a garden, there is no need to wish for having wonderful things such as golden water, a talking bird and a singing tree to*

make it more beautiful. You can just plant more flowers or trees to make it nicer you don't need wonders'.

- ***The most preferred story***

The findings illustrate that the most wanted story among pupils was the Three Sisters, which was repeated by 28 pupils that they liked this story the most. In response to my question about why they liked this story the most, children mostly emphasized the aspect of taking a part. In fact, when I told the story of the 'Three Sisters', I get them involved in the storytelling, and I used the 'Whoosh' storytelling technique. Thus, the majority emphasized that the use of drama made this story for them more remarkable, as Bardia (10 years old Boy) said to me *'I love the drama part. It was like a happy memory for me and we laughed a lot'.*

Not only did the playful and fun part of the storytelling technique appeal to their attention, but drama invited them to play as well as working collaboratively as a group. This aspect of drama was clear for children Radin (10 years old Boy) without me mentioning the aspect of collaborative potential of drama in the sessions said *'I like the last story the most because we were having drama. We were all more friendly and feeling more comfortable with each other. It was like playing a game, and at the same time, it helped us to understand group work better. We learnt that when we want to make the drama work we need to work together as a group'.* Girls' responses toward the story of the Three Sisters were similar to those of the boys, reflecting on the element of drama and playful way of telling the story. Parto said *'I liked three sisters because we did drama and we played more. It was fun'.*

'Aladdin and his magical lamp' was the second most preferred story among both boys and girls. 25 pupils mainly boys mentioned that they liked Aladdin. I used finger puppets when I told this story, and some of the pupils were telling me that they liked the story because it was

funny and full of imagination, and they could connect to the story better, as they could imagine it in their mind by watching me using finger puppets. However, their strongest emphasis was on Aladdin's character, and children repeatedly saying that they liked him because he is a little boy describing him as a **playful** and **adventurous** boy who never listened to anyone. Amir said '*I like Aladdin. He was a very cool kid. He never listened to anyone*'.

Therefore, Not only was this a playful way of delivering the story was considered as enjoyable elements by children, but the specific characters in the stories also appealed to them. Hence, 23 pupils responded that they liked the frame story, and most of them said, and in particular girls, that they liked the character of Scheherazade defining her as a **brave, kind** and **clever** heroine. They also repeatedly acknowledged her storytelling ability, telling me that she was the one who told all the stories, including the story of the Three Sisters.

I liked her because she was the one who told all the stories; she was the one who told 'three sisters' story. I borrowed the stories of the 'Nights' from the library to read her stories (Kimia).

She was such a brave girl. She did the right thing to rescue her people. I admire bravery (Ali)

Playing thinking games

As has been mentioned, pupils mentioned the stories of the *Nights* as the most enjoyable element of the workshop, but alongside the stories some of the children mentioned that they liked both stories and thinking games. 25 pupils repeated this response during the interviews, stating that they really enjoyed both playing games and my telling them stories.

Classroom discussion

Findings indicate that classroom discussion was an enjoyable element for some pupils but not for all. This was shown in a few pupils' responses when I asked them what was enjoyable in my sessions. My findings show that 8 pupils mentioned classroom discussion as the most enjoyable element. Pupils liked it for different reasons, saying that they liked the discussion partly because it was more like a debate, and they learned to agree or disagree with each other's comments, so it was educational and fun at the same time. In addition to this, they revealed that during the classroom discussion they gained the opportunity to listen to different ideas, and get to know their classmates' opinions and this added on their knowledge. As Dillon (1994, p.47) states 'Discussion is a collaborative pursuit consisting of group talk over a common area of enquiry in which the participants are disposed to be open to a variety of points of views, display an attitude of alternativeness and responsiveness while demonstrating a willingness to participate'. This statement is reflected in the pupils' responses when I asked about his feedback on the sessions.

I like this class very much because an issue was mentioned and then we could discuss about it. We learn to take criticism and listen to different ideas. For instance if my opinion is different from my friend, Ali then I shouldn't get upset because we can have different ideas. I shouldn't get upset or angry for this (Amir).

In fact for these children, speaking their minds in the classroom was not a convenient option for different reasons. First of all, this was a new experience for them as in response to the question of whether their classroom teachers applied any activities to ask about their opinions in the classroom, pupils' responses were mostly negative, and only a few of them mentioned that the teacher asked about their opinions only in relation to the lessons.

Sometimes our teacher asks about our opinions in our mathematics class. She asks us if we can think about other way to answer the questions (Maryam).

5.1.3 Non-enjoyable elements

Disruptiveness

Together with the enjoyable element, I was interested to find out their views on the factors that they did not like during the sessions. The majority of pupils, 72 out of 81, said that there was nothing that they did not like during the sessions. From the findings, 7 of them including boys and girls mentioned that they did not like the noisiness and disruptive attitudes of some children. Disruptiveness happened in both of my boys' classrooms, in particular in my first case study in boys' schools there were four boys who were disruptive and they made it difficult to complete my lesson plans for the sessions. There were two teachers in that classroom observing my sessions and their suggestion was sending them out of the class and undertaking the sessions without the presence of these four pupils. Even the head teacher suggested the same solution either sending them out of the classroom or try to give them rewards to motivate them to sit quietly in the class. Indeed in both my case studies with boys I saw teaching assistants constantly bribing boys with point cards that if they stay quiet then at the end of the session they will receive a card (excellent/good/ bad) to collect points to receive a prize. This method of managing the classroom and keeping them quiet was offered to me in both boys' schools and when I refused using the cards and they responded '*they will never stay quiet if you don't give them points*'.

Over doing my research I had no aim in neglecting any voices in my research, so I asked the head teacher that I would like to talk to disruptive boys individually. After getting permission from the head teacher I saw these children individually, explaining to them again that there is

no obligation and assessment in attending my sessions therefore it is all their choice whether they would like to attend or not. While emphasizing that if they like to continue attending the sessions then it is necessary to cooperate with me and to try to avoid being disruptive. They all said they like my sessions and they want to take part in the sessions. In fact after they felt they were given the right to choose to attend the sessions with no force, there were slight changes in the level of their disruptiveness. The change in their attitudes was small, but still enabled me to complete my sessions with them on time.

In the research schools most teachers were stating that boys in general are more disruptive than girls and difficult to control. However, while completing this project I noticed that disruptiveness could not be generalized based on children's gender in this research. The nature of the study was more relaxed than the usual classroom ethos so it was predictable to expect disruptiveness over the sessions; however, the level of disruptiveness was the highest in two of the classrooms (one boy and one girl) where the teachers were too strict with them.

Frame story

A further three pupils also mentioned that they did not enjoy the frame story, as they found the story unrealistic and exaggerated. Parsa stated as follows *'I didn't like the first story very much. Because it is not possible men kill women and only they live their lives on the earth. This is not possible'*.

Sit down and stand up game

Also two of them said that they did not like one of the games, which involved inviting them all to sit down altogether and stand up at the same time. They said the game was boring, and difficult to play.

5.1.4 Distinctive elements

I asked pupils which qualities they found different in my sessions compared to what they normally do in the classroom. According to the findings, both boys and girls mentioned that during the sessions, **they were happy** because we played games and I told them stories. Some pupils, as additional distinctive elements also mentioned **Group Work and question making** in my sessions. However, boys also mentioned another distinctive quality, such as **reasoning**, and **freedom of talk**. Girls also mentioned **my kindness** as a distinctive element of the sessions.

A Happy Class

According to the findings, pupils in both girls and boys classes mentioned that the most distinctive element for them was that we played in the class and accordingly they drew a connection between play and feeling happy. So they described my class as a happy class because we played games and I told them stories. This response was repeated 30 times by boys and 22 times by girls. As Hedieh stated, *'your class was a happy class. Other teachers are very strict. We don't even breathe in other classes. We are mainly very quiet'* another child also said *'It was different. We were playing and feeling happy. You played with us and told stories. It was more joyful'*.

Group work

Furthermore, pupils considered the aspect of doing group work as a distinctive element in my sessions. This response was repeated 15 times by children including six girls and nine boys. Aria explained this as follows; *'Other classes are more about reading and writing but in your sessions we did group work and it is good for children who are not very sociable or talkative. In sessions like yours they can practice to be more sociable also your sessions were more joyful'* (Aria, a boy).

In fact based on the findings, the majority of these Iranian pupils prefer group work to individual work, stating that they can help each other, think together at the same time, and that it is more fun. Some mentioned that group work is a life skill, which is beneficial to gain. As Pouria noted *'Group work is more useful in your life because everyone can do individual work but you need to learn how to work as a group'*.

Freedom of talk, reasoning and question making

When I interviewed pupils' seven boys mentioned the freedom of talk and reasoning as distinctive element in my sessions. Farhad said *'in your class we learnt to work in groups also give reasons for what we say. We (children) normally never give any reasons when we talk. Amir also emphasized the space given to them to speak their minds 'we could say what we really thought and talked about our ideas in your class. In other classes we are not allowed to do this and they don't allow any time for us to speak our minds'*.

Kindness

Children mentioned that I was kind to them, and they considered my kindness to be a distinctive element in the sessions and 10 pupils mainly girls repeated this response. Mahtab said *'you told stories and you were kind to us. Other teachers tell off and ask us to study Maths. We have maths everyday'*.

Another pupil also stated that *'the difference is you are kind. Some of the teachers are mean and they are shouting all the time'* (Setayesh).

5.1.5 Challenging Elements

Findings suggest that for some pupils speaking their mind in the class as well as disagreement were considered as challenging elements during the sessions. Therefore, in this section, I will present the findings on children's reflection on individual experiences of speaking their

minds publically during the classroom dialogues and whether they generally thought that it was important to talk about their opinions and feelings as well as their views on the concept of disagreement during the classroom discussion.

Talking about opinions in the classroom

I asked them whether it was easy for them to talk about their opinions publically during the sessions. The findings here suggest mixed responses from pupils. From the findings 50 pupils felt that it was easy to talk about their opinions in the classroom in front of others. However, 34 (12 girls and 22 boys) of them mentioned that the experience was not an easy one for them. They mentioned different reasons as to why they found talking publicly inside the classroom uncomfortable.

According to the findings, pupils mentioned **giving reasons** as to what they said to be the most challenging factor, and they found it difficult to talk about their views publically during the sessions. They said that reasoning was hard, as they had to think a lot. Accordingly, pupils mentioned that their **opinions are private** and they did not feel comfortable about sharing their views in the classroom in front of everyone.

I don't like sharing my personal thoughts in front of my classmates. My thoughts are mine.

They are private (Ashkan, a boy)

I don't want to say what I think in the class. I only say what I think to my parent (Sana, a girl)

They also mentioned that '**feeling shy**' was another blocking factor, with Bardia saying that '*It was hard to talk about my opinions because I was feeling shy*'. Five other pupils repeated this response as well. '**Lack of ideas**' as well as '**feeling worried about being judged by**

classmates' during the discussion were also cited by children as obstacles to prevent them taking part in the discussion and talk about their views. Pupils mentioned this as follows;

We never had this kind of sessions at school that a teacher was asking about our opinions.

No one knew what to say (Hirad)

My opinions were not interesting to say. I was afraid others would tease me (Mahtab)

A few of them also mentioned that it was hard to speak their minds, because they had to listen carefully to what others said when discussing the chosen concept, and that they had to listen and try to **mention their views in relation to what had been discussed**. Also others may not like their comments. As Amir said *'you were asking us to think before talking about our ideas. In general, thinking is not easy. When I wanted to talk I should have thought first about the concept, compared different ideas then talked about my opinions. I can't say it was easy'*. One further pupil mentioned the experience was not easy as she could see that her **classmates became upset** after she said what she thought. She explained the matter thus *'I felt uncomfortable seeing my classmates get upset because they didn't like my comments. I don't like making others upset. I found it hard to say what I really think'*.

A small number of them also said that talking about opinions was hard for them, but they did not give any reasons as to why they found it difficult. They merely said 'it was hard, but don't know why'.

The importance of sharing feelings and opinions

When I asked the children whether they thought it was important to share their opinions and feelings. Twelve pupils in both boys and girls classes responded negatively to this question saying that opinions and feelings are like secrets and are private, and that you should keep

them to yourself, or they only said it was not important without giving any specific reasons. However, the majority of pupils, 56 in total responded positively to my question namely that it is important to share opinions but it is not important to share feelings. Majority of them mainly focused on the importance of consultation when sharing opinions to make a better decision and that it was possible to ‘think big’.

13 pupils mentioned they think sharing both feelings and opinions was important because others could learn from their good thoughts as Maryam said *‘When someone shares their thoughts you can learn new things from them’*. Besides some indicate that when we share our opinions we can make a better decision and when you share your feelings especially when you feel sad sharing helps you feel better. Bamdad told to me *‘We should talk about our sad feelings so we feel less sad when we talk’*.

Findings suggest that Iranian pupils were more optimistic in sharing their opinions than feelings as the majority of them emphasized that ‘feelings are private’ when Farhad said *‘I never share my feelings because feelings are private and this is my opinion, I don’t like to talk about my feelings’* or saying that *‘Miss, it is not nice to share your feelings’* (Rojan). Some children mentioned that they only shared their feelings to very close people and the people who they trusted. As Mohammad said, *‘you can share your feelings to your parents in a quiet place when no one else is there’*. In addition, some mentioned that they shared their feelings, but only in terms of general aspects not personal ones, and they emphasized that it was not good to share negative feelings because others may be hurt. As Parsa stated, *‘I may have negative feelings about my classmate and if I tell him, he’ll get hurt’*.

Indeed, following the UNCRC article 12, children need to be given opportunities to express their views and feelings, as well as having these taken into account in decisions that matters

in their lives (Haynes, 2005, p.33). However, their voice can also be expressed through their silence without being forced to say their views. Talking to children in terms of sharing opinions revealed that for some it is important to share opinions, but they do not like to be obligated to share opinions and feelings. As Sana stated, *‘I think it is important others know what I think, but I don’t like to be forced to say what I think’*.

Disagreement

Following the discipline of the community of enquiry method, I constantly encouraged pupils to start listening more carefully to each other’s comments and to try to apply the language of reasoning to express their agreement and disagreement with reasons. As Cam (2006, p.44) points out ‘the reasoned expression of agreement and disagreement is central to the dynamics of collaborative enquiry, and their vigorous combination gives the process much of its critical edge’.

One reason mentioned by the majority of pupils in regards to the experience of disagreeing during the classroom discussion being challenging was that the children especially girls said that they do not like to disagree because they were afraid of **hurting their friends** if they disagree with them. *‘It is hard to disagree with my friend. She will not talk to me anymore’* (Saba). They were also afraid of getting bullied by their classmates if they did not like their comments. Kia said *‘Sometimes is difficult, because if I disagree with someone he may bully me later’*. Another child also said *‘It was a bit difficult to say I disagree. It’s better to stay quiet because if I disagree with someone then that person may get annoyed and then say something that makes me upset as well, so it’s better to stay quiet’*.

However, some of them mentioned that they did not find disagreement easy because they were only relatively disagreeing with their classmates’ comments, so part of the comments sound convincing for them and the rest not. *‘It was not easy. Because I did not know what to*

choose and sometimes I only partially disagree with the comments not saying completely disagree'

A few of them also shared their experiences when they disagreed with the classroom teacher and had a different idea about the issue. But most of the time they said that their attempt was either unsuccessful or banned by the teachers. Radin told me about his experience during their Quran sessions. He told me *'My Religious Education teacher always says dog is dirty (najes). I disagree with him because nowadays no one is bringing a dog from the street to keep. We buy them and we do all the vaccinations, so they are not dirty'*. In fact, according to Islamic hadith dog's saliva is ritually impure and the people who are in contact with dogs should wash themselves before praying. Thus, I asked him what the teacher said when he told him what he thought. Radin stated *'He only said you better stop talking, sit down and stay quiet'*.

Group work

Group work as earlier discussed was mentioned by some pupils as one of the distinctive elements of the workshop and findings suggest that the majority of these pupils preferred group work over individual work, however for a few of these pupils group work was challenging and they clarified that their preference is doing more individual work. Since there were four pupils who stated that their preference is doing more individual activities than working in a group. Radin said, *'I don't like group work because no one wants to be in my group. They say I am fat'*.

Moreover, Maryam (a girl) also said that she preferred individual work when she said, *'your session was different because you didn't ask us to read and write, but we did group work and we learnt things such as life skills. But personally I like individual work more'*. In response to

my question why she desired more individual work she said *'because when I worked in a group everyone wants to impose their own opinion to the group. I don't mind if we share everyone's opinions in the group, but I don't like when they tell me what to do all the time without listening to my thoughts. Some of the children are very stubborn'*. Indeed doing group work is a skill to be achieved and learnt, as Amir said *'we don't know how to work well as a group. We don't have a harmonized class. Whenever we play football as a class we only fight'*. In addition to this, one boy mentioned that the individual accomplishment is greater than completing the tasks as a group. Ali explained *'I like individual work. I like to complete a task on my own. I feel great when I complete it myself with no help of others'*.

5.2 Voices from English Pupils

5.2.1 Overall Feedback

The population of English pupils in this study was forty-one in total including twenty-five boys and sixteen girls. All of them responded positively when I asked them if they enjoyed the sessions.

I liked your sessions very much and I was feeling quite pleased about the changes happened in the class (Jack).

I was sad that you had to go because I really liked the stories and stuff and the activities that we did (Matthew).

5.2.2 Enjoyable Elements

Although children responded positively about my sessions, which they enjoyed, to be more specific, I asked them what factors in the sessions they like the most. Thirty- one of them said the storytelling part was the most enjoyable part for them and four boys said playing games was the most joyful part of the sessions. Six of them mentioned that they liked everything, in particular making questions and having a classroom discussion.

Stories of the Nights

Most pupils reasoned that stories were **exciting** and **interesting**. Children reasoned that they enjoyed listening to these stories;

Really interesting stories- the stories were really interesting and I looked forward every week for your sessions because I really like listening to the stories (Liya)

I liked it when we listened to the stories and made our questions. You learn more stories and it makes you want to read more stories (Duncan)

Also stories were **thought- provoking** at the same time **joyful** for these children.

I really liked it every day you came. Stories were joyful and made me think (Alisha)

Apart from this listening to stories from foreign culture and another time seem captivating for some when they said;

I like stories from different part of the world (Jack).

I liked stories and I love reading but I like to choose what to read. I found literacy boring. But the stories you told were really interesting. I really liked to listen to the stories from the past old times (Mike)

The most preferable story

The most wanted stories among English children were first Aladdin and his magical lamp, which was mentioned by 14 pupils (7 boys and 7 girls) as the most interesting story and then the story of the Three Sisters which was chosen as the most preferable story by 13 pupils including eight boys and five girls. Four of them including three girls and one boy, liked the frame story the most and the rest did not have any priority choice as they liked all stories the same. The story of Aladdin and his magical lamp was found interesting by English children in this study as they found the story **magical** and **funny** and opens the possibilities of thinking that their wishes come true the same as Aladdin's.

Aladdin was exciting I liked the magical lamp and think my wishes can come true'

(Shannon)

I liked Aladdin the most because it was about magic. It was magical and fun (Star)

I liked the story of Aladdin because it was interesting. First they were poor and then they become rich. The story gets your imagination and your thinking. I liked it. I like fairy tales (Robert)

Not only did the story grab their attention but also the children liked the character of Aladdin calling him ‘an adventurous nice little boy’

Aladdin was a very creative story, really good story. Also I really liked him because he is a nice little boy and he believes in magic (Alexandra)

Aladdin was a little boy and he was independent trying to figure it out himself (Ben)

Aladdin was adventurous. I like being adventurous (Emma)

The story of Three Sisters was mentioned by 13 pupils as the most wanted story and their emphasis was mainly on the drama part as they enjoyed ‘acting out’ the story.

I liked Three Sisters because you got us involved. I liked it when we were acting out. Everybody got a go (Alex)

I liked Three Sisters because I like joining (Nikita)

Also the story itself has an element of fairy tales with a happy ending and children liked fairy stories. When Amy told me *Three Sisters* it was fun and I liked acting out. It was like a fairy tale full of imagination having singing trees, talking birds and the golden water. I like fairy tales and happy endings. I don’t really like sad endings you don’t want to know more when it ends sad’.

The frame story was mentioned by four children as the most preferable story but 13 of them mentioned about the main characters inside the frame story as the most interesting characters. Eight boys told me that the character of ‘King Shahriar’ was captivating. They reasoned that they thought he was an interesting character when Reece told me ‘*He was doing nasty stuff. Most people were curious about him asking why he killed everyone and why he was nasty. I wanted to know more about him*’.

Another reason mentioned by children was that the king liked stories the same as them as Billy said '*I liked King Shahriar. He liked stories*'.

Other children mentioned that they found King Shahriar to be an interesting character as he was the king with lots of money and power and also interested in hunting

I like King Shahriar. He is a king and I like kings they have lots of money (Joshua)

I like King Shahriar, he likes hunting (Rayan)

King Shahriar was my favourite. I don't know if I would kill anybody if I were a king. But I think he was a cool king (Blake)

Seven children, including three boys and four girls, mentioned that they liked Scheherazade because they found her a brave, clever and a thoughtful character.

I like Scheherazade because she was thoughtful and wanted to save her countrymen's daughters lives (Matthew)

I liked Scheherazade because she risked her life and she believed she can stop him and she did it (Eleanor)

Scheherazade everyone likes stories and she was really clever and had a good plan to stop everyone getting killed (Amy)

Playing thinking games

Four English boys told me that they enjoyed the game together with stories and in particular they mentioned the 'Beanbag' game and 'walk with me'.

I liked the games 'Walk with me'. It was interesting for me to get to know what other people like (Robert)

I liked the bean bag because it was fun and you have to have a guess where the beanbag is going (Harvey)

Classroom discussion

Four boys and two girls told me that the discussion part and question making were interesting for them because they get to make their own questions and have their own say without worrying about following other's views. When Matthew said 'you have to get your thoughts and you didn't have to agree with everyone else. You get to choose what you think and what you think is what you think right! So I really liked it'. In addition to this classroom discussion was fun for some as it seemed like a debate. As Rayan stated, 'I enjoyed the discussion part. I love going against people's opinions. I love seeing their given up faces and feel that hahaha I just made them give up'.

5.2.3 Non- enjoyable element

Thirty-nine pupils mentioned that there was nothing that they did not like about the sessions. Only two pupils mentioned that they did not like the disruptiveness as one said 'Sometimes the class gets really noisy- I didn't like it'.

5.2.4 Distinctive element

33 pupils mentioned that my sessions were different from their usual classroom practice, as they found my sessions participatory, enjoyable and with opportunity to listen to the stories and play games.

Participatory and interactive sessions

What was distinctive for the children in one of my case studies was the participating element in my sessions. Children kept telling me that they found the sessions very different from their own classroom teacher's practice because **I got them involved**. This response was repeated by 11 pupils.

We get to take part. We normally just sit down and listen to the lesson we do not really take part (Star)

It was really different. You asked people about their opinions. Mr Rob asked us to get a book out and just write. He never ask to take part and sit in a circle and act part out (Mike)

Telling stories and playing games

Another distinctive aspect mentioned by the children in both classrooms was having stories and playing games inside the classroom. Nine of them told me that their teachers normally do not tell a story or play games with them and sometimes they read stories in the class to ask questions.

It was different because you told lots of stories and sometimes in classes when we do literacy that's probably one of the times that we hear stories and guide to read it (Duncan)

We never actually play any games. We sometimes read stories (Harvey)

In the classroom we don't read lots of stories. I liked listening to the stories and asking questions about it (Reece)

Enjoyable sessions

Children found the sessions fun and they said they felt happy and calm in my sessions.

I felt happy in your sessions because it was fun and I was surprised to have the opportunity to have something like this (Ben)

Your sessions were different. Because we normally do maths and literacy. In your session we do things I like (Nikita)

In the classroom right you get taught facts, but in your class you get taught facts and you have fun at the same time (Matthew)

5.2.5 Challenging elements

As mentioned earlier over the classroom discussions I encouraged children to voice their thoughts by giving reasons, to agree or disagree with each other's opinions without being disrespectful to anyone was new for these children. The dialogue between the teacher and these pupils is mainly limited to the lessons when the teachers ask questions about the lessons, so they get the chance to talk about the answers.

Normally we sit at our table and the teacher stands in the front we don't sit in the circle and discuss (Shaun).

In RE or maths when she asks questions everyone share answers, when we get it wrong she explains why we get it wrong. She wants to know what we think and she will explain when we get it wrong (Rayan).

A few of them mentioned that they did 'Circle Time' and SEAL activities (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) but not very often and indeed the nature of circle time is different from community of enquiry which was explained in the literature review. In community of enquiry sessions children are encouraged not only to talk about their views and feelings but to think about more open-ended questions and give reasons for their statements.

For some English children in these case studies, the experience of **talking about their opinions** inside the classroom publically was quite challenging. Nineteen pupils including 13 boys and 6 girls said to me that they found it difficult to vocalize their opinions. They mainly stressed on the difficulty of **the questions** raised in the sessions that required thinking hard so it was not easy to get involved in the discussion in a straightforward way.

It was hard. Sometimes you get really hard questions (Reece).

Some of them also mentioned that **giving reasons** for their opinions made it hard for them to speak their mind.

'It was hard because you have to think what you want to say and think about your reasons. You had to think about your answers before you say it because if you just say something it wouldn't make sense'. (Shaun)

A few of them also said that they found the experience of sharing their opinions and feelings inside the classroom uncomfortable because they were scared of their **classmates' judgement**.

It was hard. I was scared that people may not like what I say (Shannon).

The importance of sharing feelings and opinions

The majority of children in both case studies mentioned that they think it is important to share feelings and thoughts. They expressed different reasons that sharing opinions with others may help them learn new things and vice versa also you do not feel excluded from the process of teaching and learning because the teacher get you involve when Alex said to '*You feel like you are left out if you just sit down and don't say your thoughts*'. Sharing feelings is also as important as sharing opinions for the majority of these children, as they mainly reasoned that sharing feelings help them release their sad emotions and feel better. Here are a few examples of the children's responses;

Yes actually no-one keeps good opinion to themselves because they are really good. You should express your feelings because if you don't express your feelings then what are you gonna do. Then you're gonna get stuck with the same feeling. Some people keep bad opinion to themselves but you shouldn't because it makes you more sad (Matthew)

It is important because you could give off other people your ideas and they could change their opinions. Sharing feelings are also important because some people could help you if you're upset (Duncan)

It is important when we hear people's opinions we learn more. We all have different feelings and we should say how we feel (Emma)

A few of them (six boys and two girls) said that they were not sure if it was important to share their opinions and express their feelings, because it depends on your thoughts and feelings, as if you have negative feelings and thoughts, it is better to keep it private or share it with close people.

Not sure. I like sharing opinions with other people but nice opinions not mean ones. Sometimes your feelings are private you keep it or tell it to people who know you quite well (Blake)

Not sure. You don't want to hide your opinion but sometimes you have nasty thoughts you don't want to share and sometimes you feel very sad you really don't want to talk about it (Karl)

Another aspect of the sessions which was challenging for some pupils was '**disagreement**'. Thirteen including 6 boys and 7 girls told me that they found it hard to disagree with their classmates.

Yes I found it difficult because they are my classmates and I am not used to disagree with them (Emma)

Duncan: *Yes, I found it difficult to disagree*

Mon: *Why?*

Duncan: *Because they might have felt the same as me*

Mon: *You don't like when people disagree with you?*

Duncan: *No I don't like it.*

5.3 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings gathered from both Iranian and English pupils in terms of their actual lived experiences during my sessions. Findings suggest that children had a positive overall view of the sessions and from their perspectives- the stories of the *Nights* were the most enjoyable element of the sessions, a view repeated by 41 Iranian pupils and 31 English pupils. Disruptiveness was mentioned as the main non-enjoyable element of the sessions. This was expected because the nature of the study was more relaxed than the usual classroom ethos, however; the level of disruptiveness was greater in Iranian classrooms especially in two of the classrooms (one boy and one girl).

The distinctive elements of the sessions for children were facilitating a happy environment for them, where they can participate, listen to the stories and play games. Classroom discussion was the most challenging aspect of the sessions for some children which was reflected in 34 (12 girls and 22 boys) of Iranian pupils and 19 (13 boys and 6 girls) English pupils, all of whom mentioned that the experience of vocalizing their views was not an easy one for them. Findings suggest that the majority of children think that sharing opinions and expressing feelings are important, but Iranian pupils consider sharing feelings less important than sharing views. They thought they felt constrained in expressing their feelings publically. During the sessions for Iranian pupils giving reasons for their statements as well as their privacy were the main reasons they would prefer to stay quiet in a public space such as their classroom.

The majority of English children had a positive view of the importance of sharing feelings and opinions but only a few mentioned that negative feelings and thoughts were not important to be shared publically. As mentioned, for some the experience of vocalizing views was difficult, as they thought the nature of the questions raised in the classroom was

sometimes hard and they found it difficult to think of any answers and give reasons for their responses. Both Iranian and English children also mentioned the fear of being judged by their classmates as another factor that prevented them from vocalizing their thoughts. Another difficult factor of the sessions mentioned by both Iranian and English children was that of disagreement. In particular the girls were more concerned about hurting their classmates' feelings if they disagreed with their comments. Group work was another aspect of the sessions mentioned by Iranian children as being challenging for some as most of these children found it difficult to cooperate with their classmates to complete a task together. In the next chapter I will present more findings gathered from individual interviews to reflect children's views on more general aspects of schooling.

CHAPTER 6:

PUPILS' VIEWS ON MORE GENERAL ASPECTS OF SCHOOL LIFE

This section analyses Iranian and English pupils' perspectives on the more general aspects of school life. In this regard, it aims to focus on their views on some of the aspects of school life in terms of;

- Definition of a good teacher;
- Relationships with classroom teachers;
- If children swap places with teachers;
- How teachers help pupils learn better;
- Punishment;
- School councils;
- Any changes they would like to see in their school life;

6.1 Voices from Iranian Pupils

6.1.1 What kind of people do these pupils want teachers to be?

One question I asked pupils was about the definition of a 'good teacher' from their point of view. The difference between boys and girls were insignificant, and broadly speaking, they mentioned similar characteristics that they would like to see in their desired teachers. The difference is only seen in terms of boys placing more emphasis on the importance of feeling mutual respect between them and their teachers. Boys mentioned that they would like to see their teachers 'treat them well'. When Ashkan (a boy) said, *'a good teacher is someone who treats us well and forgive you when you make mistakes and not to be too strict. My dad always says that good teachers are strict, but I don't agree with him'*. Nine boys replied in similar vein, confirming that in their views good teachers are those that 'treat children well.

Don't shout at them all the time'. One of them even mentioned a physical punishment, stating; *'A good teacher is someone who is kind and treats me well. Don't smack on my head'*. And when I asked him what happened he replied while staring at my voice recorder *'today my teacher smacked my head. Miss, please don't tell anyone'*.

Findings suggest that both boys' and girls' defined similar prominent criteria to define a 'good teacher'. Their emphasis was on her **ability to teach well** and make pupils understand the lessons, her **kindness** and also her **ability to make the lesson fun for children** were also mentioned as quality values that they would like to see in their desired teacher. Thirty-eight pupils mentioned that a good teacher was someone who taught well. They explained that good teachers made children understand the lessons and good teachers care that children learn the lesson. The teacher's repetition of the lesson and her care to make sure they learn seems to be crucial for these children.

A good teacher is someone who is patient and teaches us well. Repeat the lessons until we understand like my mother. My mum repeats even 10 times with patience until I understand (Maryam).

Good teachers teach well. Care about us. Some teachers don't teach properly and they don't care if children learn or not (Bamdad).

In addition to this, thirty pupils emphasized teachers' kindness as a prominent quality they would like to see in their preferred teacher. They stated that they like teachers who like children, treat them kindly and do not shout at them all the time. Mahtab (a girl) explained *'a good teacher is someone who is kind and doesn't shout at us a lot. She should be like a counsellor that children can talk to her when something bothers them'*. However, some of them, mainly girls, added that although they liked kind teachers, they also liked to see the teacher being strict with them when it is necessary.

I'm not saying they shouldn't tell us off at all, but if I were a teacher, I was kind and strict altogether (Nahal).

Teach us in a happy and kind way. Smile at us but also be strict when it is needed (Kimia).

Another prominent quality for a desired teacher for these children was the teachers' ability to make their lesson a fun experience. For example, they like to see that their teachers sometimes play with them or use games to teach them in a more enjoyable way.

Six of them mentioned that they liked their teacher to play with them and make the learning experience fun.

Partoo: A good teacher is someone who is kind, and motivates children to love studying.

Mon: What would you do to motivate children to like studying if you were a teacher?

Partoo: I teach them lessons but I will also play with them.

Nika: A good teacher is someone who teaches us with play and games. Teach maths with games sometimes. Our maths is very dry.

Arian: A good teacher is someone who knows children and knows which methods to use for different children. Teach us with play.

Additional qualities; which were mentioned by these children as definitions of a 'good teacher' were: good teachers are **trustworthy** and **fair**.

Tara: *A good teacher is kind and trustworthy, so when children say something to her she keeps our secrets with herself without immediately passing it to the head teacher which may end up sending the child down.*

Amir: *You feel safe with her. You can trust her.*

Kimia: *Don't discriminate between children. I'm good at reading a loud, but she shouldn't ask me all the time to read the long text, because my classmates will get upset with me and with her.*

Radin: *Listen to the students. Don't discriminate between children and only praise a few students.*

6.1.2 Relationships with classroom teacher(s):

I asked children about their relationship with their classroom teacher(s), and findings indicate that the majority of children in three classrooms, where pupils had only one teacher as the main classroom teacher for their main core subjects excluding PE, painting, English and Quran, described their relationship with their teacher mainly 'Okay'. Sixteen girls and seventeen boys explained that they do not have a close relationship with their teacher, but in terms of asking questions about the lessons the teacher would listen to them.

Mahroo: *it is okay, but I won't talk to her a lot.*

Mon: Does she listen to you?

Mahroo: *She listens to me, but I'm not sure she understands me.*

Kia: *It's ok. But I don't talk to her a lot because she may ignore me and won't listen to me when I want to talk to her and I don't like it.*

In one girls classroom they repetitively said that their relationship with the teacher mainly depended on their teacher's mood.

Melika said: *Depends on her mood. She gets angry if we ask things when she is not in mood.*

In total only three girls and five boys mentioned that they had a good relationship with their classroom teachers and they listened to them when they wanted to talk to them, but again, when I asked specifically whether they talked to her about their opinions or feelings, the answer was 'No' and their emphasis was on comments and questions regarding the lessons, because they were feeling shy.

Amir : *My relationship with her is good, but I don't talk so much in the class. If I want to talk about the lesson she always listens to me.*

Reyhaneh: *Yes she listens but I feel shy to talk to her.*

Elsa: *Its good, but I can't tell her everything. She listens to me when I ask about the lessons.*

However, five girls and one boy mentioned that their relationship with the classroom teacher is bad. They reasoned as follows;

Sevda: *It's not good. I asked her a few times to change my seat she said no and when I asked her the reason she only says go and sit down.*

Setayesh: *No I don't talk to her I'm scared of her.*

Hasti: *Not good it's hard for me to tell her what I really feel.*

Tara: *It's not good. She makes a fuss for nothing most of the time. She never listens to me.*

Ara: *One of my classmate bullies me all the time, but when I tell my teacher, she tells me off and telling me it is me who has done something wrong not her.*

Radin: *It is not good. She only listens to 2% of what I tell her.*

Indeed each classroom has got a different teacher with different teaching skills and experiences; therefore, the table below summarizes the findings for three classrooms whose children have one main classroom teacher for core subjects. The numbers indicate the frequency of responses from the pupils.

Relationship with teacher	Good	Bad	Okay
Case 1/G	3	3	6
Case 2/G	0	2	10
Case 3/B	5	1	17

Concerning the other two classrooms where pupils have different teachers for different core subjects, they were unable to identify exactly their relationship with teachers. Most of them, including 23 boys and 10 girls said that it depends on who is teaching, but in general, they mentioned that their relationships were ‘okay’ with some of the teachers and neither good and bad with others.

Nona: *It’s okay with literacy and science teachers, but it’s not good with our maths teacher. She is too strict. She gets angry easily.*

When I asked the boys who the first person they would like to talk was if they felt unhappy about anything happening to them at school, only one boy and three girls in all my case

studies said they would tell the teacher first, saying: *‘I will tell my teacher because she should know when something is wrong’*.

Together with asking pupils about their relationships with their teacher(s), I asked them whom they would talk to when they felt unhappy at school. In the boys’ classrooms, **six** pupils out of forty-four mentioned that they would talk to school staff first if they felt unhappy at school. They mainly mentioned the head teacher assistant or the head teacher as their preference, and not their teacher. **Twenty-two** boys out of forty-four mentioned that they spoke to no one at school. They preferred not talk to anyone at schools and some mentioned that they would try and resolve issues for themselves or forget them, but if a serious issue arose they would share their problems with their family at home. They reasoned that family was closer to them, and they would certainly support them to solve the problem. In addition to this they mentioned that they trusted their families, and they were better at listening to them.

Ali: *‘I will talk to my mum because I can express myself freely’*.

Ashkan: *‘I don’t trust my friends because they pass my secrets to everyone. I trust my family’*.

Farzan: *‘I’ll tell my family because they will help me. My friends won’t help and they tease me even more. My teacher makes it even worse because she may tell off my classmates and they won’t be friends with me anymore’*.

Fifteen of them said that they would share their unhappy feelings with close friends, but five of them also said that ‘if the problem is not serious they will tell to close friends otherwise they only tell their parents’.

In terms of girls classrooms the results were not very different. I have gathered twenty responses indicating that they would rather say nothing to anyone at school and if they

needed to talk to someone, they would tell their parents. A few of them also said that the reason they stayed quiet was that they needed to ask their parents approval first as to whether it was acceptable to state their problem at school to anyone.

Tara: *First I tell my mum because she is on my side and supports me.*

Shaghayegh: *I'll try my parents because they try to help me instead of making things more complicated for me.*

Rojan: *I don't tell anyone at school. First I tell my family, and if they say I can tell others then I do.*

Twelve girls mentioned they would share their unhappy feelings with their best friends. But if they could not help they would tell their families.

Hedieh: *'I will tell my best friends whom I trust to keep my secrets'*

One girl said that she would let the representative in school council know when she was upset about anything at school.

Setayesh: *'I get angry. I won't do anything at school. I'll go home and hit my toys to feel better. If I can't forget, I'll tell the representative in our school council'.*

The following table presents the frequency of responses of pupils in response to my question as to whether they would talk to anyone at school if they felt unhappy about anything that happened at school.

	Boys	Girls
No-one	22	20
Close friends	15	12
School staff	6	1
Classroom teacher	1	3

6.1.3 What if children swap places with teachers?

To get a more detailed understanding of children's thoughts about their teacher's role and more importantly their views on the aspect of power, I played a card game with them during the interview, asking them to pretend what would happen if a child swapped places with their classroom teacher and whether they thought this would be a good thing to happen, a bad one, or both.

From the children's perspectives, regardless of their gender, forty-one mentioned this was a 'Bad Thing' to happen because 'children are not as knowledgeable as teachers'. They also reasoned that this increased children's disruptiveness. Nineteen of them mentioned that this could be good and bad. They reasoned the same from the negative aspect, whereby lack of knowledge in teaching and class management would be problematic if a child became the teacher, but also from their point of views it could be good, as it gives the child the opportunity to be a teacher and 'it feels good' when one said 'It's good because it feels good to be the teacher. I love teaching'. But at the same time, being a teacher may affect one's relationship with other children, Nahal said *'It's good to be a teacher and play with your students but it's bad because your relationship with children becomes rough'*. Some also reasoned that it was good in terms of the fact that the child knows better what children like more, and also, the child treat them kinder 'it's good because a kinder teacher comes'.

Seventeen of them including nine girls and eight boys welcomed the idea as they thought this was a good thing to happen. I summarize some of their reasons below;

It is a good thing to happen because;

I don't have to sit on the chair the whole day listening to her

A child knows better how to connect with children

I play with my students

We don't write anymore. No one punish you and we don't get bored. It is more fun.

6.1.4 How teachers' can help pupils learn better?

In response to my question as to what they expected their teacher to do to help them learn better, the answers were mixed. Teacher's repetitions of the lesson and clear explanation while teaching a subject were mentioned by the majority of pupils (15 girls and 12 boys) as the main factor by which teachers could help them learn better.

Alireza: *'I want my teacher repeats the lesson more'.*

Other factors, such as teaching with play, doing more practical activities in the classroom, and learning environment have been put forward by pupils, who stated that if teachers could apply these, it would help them learn better.

- *Teaching with play*

Pupils mainly boys' emphasized the aspect of playful teaching which helped them learn better. They mentioned that when the teacher asked them to do things and play with them they learned better.

Arian: *My grandmother was a teacher before and when she teaches me maths we play with numbers. For example she says 8 multiple 8 is 64 and this number is a secret code for your sister. I don't forget it this way.*

Farhad: *I like her asking us to do things and teaching subjects with play. I learn better.*

- *Doing more practical activities inside the classroom*

Some pupils mentioned that the more practical activities related to the lesson they did in the class, the better they learned the subject.

- *Learning environment*

Pupils also mentioned the peaceful and stimulating learning environment provided by classroom teachers as an aspect that helped them to feel happy and calm and therefore learn better.

Yas: *I learn better when the teacher makes the lesson interesting and not dry and when she makes us happy. When I feel happy I learn better.*

Kim: *When she makes children quiet and I feel calm I learn better.*

6.1.5 What do pupils think about 'Punishment' in general?

Corporal punishment is banned in Iranian schools, and according to the rules and regulations if school staff decide to punish a child they should first give an oral warning and tell the child off in front of everyone but if the child does not stop the school is allowed to send the child to another class and give a written warning to parents and finally if none of these strategies work, they will exclude the child from school.

During the time I spent at the schools, I observed several times that pupils, especially boys were punished either by yelling at them and telling them off and sometimes sending them outside the classroom. Bearing in mind the frame story of the *Nights* and how the king

punished the queen, I was interested to get to know their opinions about the king's reaction towards punishing the queen and what they thought about punishment in general. In response to my question to gain their general view about punishment, twenty-one girls and thirteen boys mentioned that punishment was necessary because this stopped the child from repeating poor manners and prevented the child from being spoiled.

Ali: *You should punish them, so they learn their lessons and don't always do the wrong thing.*

Elsa: *If you don't punish children you spoil them and they always repeat the same wrong manners.*

Also one explained punishment is a way that reflects teacher's attention towards her students. When Amir said: *'If someone doesn't write his homework and the teacher doesn't say anything the teacher's ignorance makes the child feel shocked, and he keeps repeating this'.*

However, some emphasized that punishment should not be the first choice. Adults should first talk to the child in the first place and if no change occurs then child should get punished but not in a severe way like capital punishment. A few boys hinted at the execution in Iran as an example of severe punishment. Some also mentioned that punishment should only exist *'if the child has done something really wrong'.*

Arian: *'sometimes we should get punished if we have done something really wrong but this should not be a severe punishment like execution. In Iran, lots of people are executed and it's wrong'.*

Kia: *'It's better to talk to the child first but if he doesn't listen, then punish him'.*

In response to my question of what kind of punishment they would consider, the responses were mixed. Amir (a boy) and Sevda (a girl) explained the way their classroom teacher punished one of their classmates.

Amir: *My teacher punished my classmate yesterday.*

Mon: What was the punishment?

Amir: *She said she would ignore him for a week like he does not exist in the class.*

Mon: Do you think this way works for the child?

Amir: *No I think this way is not helpful for the child. It makes him not learn anything for a week, and in the end, he will be in bigger trouble to catch up with others.*

Mon: What would you do?

Amir: *I would say not to go to the playground for a week, so he only misses playing, not the lessons.*

Sevda: *My teacher punished all of us. Because two of my classmates were playing dangerously in the playground, we are not allowed to play in the playground.*

Mon: Why did she punish all of you?

Sevda: *She says punishment is for all and a reward is only for one.*

Mon: Do you agree with her punishment?

Sevda: *I disagree with my teacher that we should all get punished. It is unfair.*

Other pupils suggested different ways of punishment, as they mainly said that this punishment should happen when one does something really bad;

- Rewriting homework 10 times;
- Ban the child from playing in the playground for some days;
- Ban the child from watching TV;
- Ban the child from playing with her /his iPad;
- Stop giving them pocket money;

- Make the child think about what he/she did wrong;

15 girls and 12 boys said that punishment was wrong and children should not get punished but adults should make them understand why what they have done was wrong.

Radin: *Punishment is the worst choice; you should talk to the child.*

Aria: *You should talk to them, but don't punish them. It hurts.*

Kimia: *When you punish people, they get hurt. They keep bad feelings inside for the person who punished them. They feel bad, so they do the wrong thing again.*

6.1.6 School councils

All the schools I attended to collect my data had 'school councils', but the representatives in school council were mainly selected from older children above Year 4. The majority of pupils were aware of the presence of the school council, and they thought that school councils could be beneficial for pupils if they performed their promises. Most of the pupils in all my case studies mentioned that they had not seen any difference since the school council had been arranged in their school. In one boy classroom almost everyone was complaining that they only asked one thing from the school council and that was considering some time to play the Rubik game at school, and the head teacher rejected this request by the children.

It seems that having a 'school council' was not beneficial for these children, but also made them more sceptical about its potential as a student community that was able to reflect their views. Most of only answered '*They have done nothing for us so far*'.

Mon: Do you have school council at school?

Farhad: *yes we have but they don't do anything for us. They just ask us to give our opinions but they never approve what we say.*

When I interviewed the representatives of school councils in Year 4, in both boys' and girls' schools they admitted their lack of rights to take any action in terms of pupils' needs. Amir explained: *'I am part of the school council. I told them what children wants. I did my responsibility but they didn't take it serious and they have only changed a very few things for us. I would say almost nothing has changed'.*

In addition to this, the selection of representatives of school council caused problems, as they would have been selected from the high profile pupils, and this caused problems among pupils as this way of selection never gives other pupils the chance to experience of speaking on behalf of others.

Parsa: *I always wanted to be a representative of school council but they never let me be even only for a few days. I want them to be fair. Why should one of my classmates be part of school councils for weeks but not me? This is not fair.*

6.1.7 Transformations that pupils would like to see in their school

When I interviewed pupils' I asked them whether they would like to see any modifications if they were given the power to change anything at school. Findings indicate that 21 girls and 32 boys in response to my questions answered yes. Pupils' responses were mixed and they wanted to see changes in different aspects, which I summarize below.

- *Bigger size classrooms*

The size of the classrooms in those schools I attended was very small and in most cases, benches were separated with a narrow corridor, so there was no space to do any physical activities, and mainly, classrooms were designed for pupils to sit at their desks without moving.

Paniz: *'Change the class size. There is not enough space for us to move'.*

- *More colourful uniform's for teachers and improved appearance for their school:*

Primary school teachers are mainly women and from my observation they normally wear long dark coloured dresses and a scarf. This may be the reason why Kimia commented as follows;

Kimia: *'I will change teacher's uniforms. I will ask them to wear more colourful uniforms, so then they smile more'.*

School appearance was another factor, and pupils mentioned that they would like to see a bigger playground and a refurbished school.

- *Pupils want longer hours devoted for drawings, PE and less hours for Maths:*

Given the long and tedious weekly hours for maths, it is hard for some Iranian primary school pupils in my case studies to see 'Mathematics' as a subject that they enjoy learning. Therefore, in response to my question, if they want to see any changes some boys and girls mentioned that they would like to have more PE and painting sessions during the week instead of spending every single day of their school life studying maths. They claim that the painting hour is only a 35-minute session per week and they also have PE once a week for 2 hours. Girls' tendency to like paintings was more visible for me since during my workshops I used coloured markers when I was asking children to write down their questions, and girls in all my case studies used to give me back their written questions with some paintings around it.

Ashkan (a boy): *'I want to have longer PE sessions and have football matches at school between different classes. Also I want to have longer drawings sessions. PE and drawings are my favourite subjects. We have maths every day except Wednesdays. My dad says maths is the sweetest subject in the world and you can never forget it because it's enjoyable, but in fact I forget maths easily and I don't agree with my dad'.*

Yas (a girl): *'what I will change is letting children draw after literacy and maths lessons because we feel very tired'.*

- *Pupils want more stimulating and coherent information in their study books*

A few pupils mentioned that some of the information in their study books such as history and citizenship education was not correct.

Amir: *I would change one of our books. I don't like the Madani book. I don't like it because it has got wrong information.*

Mon: Can you give me an example?

Amir: *in the book it's written the king had never done anything good for the country and his people. I don't think this is right information. I know that he wasn't an absolutely good man, but it's untrue to say he only did bad thing for this country.*

Mon: Have you raised this opinion to your teacher?

Amir: *No I am only telling you now.*

Bamdad (a boy) and Sogol (a girl) were other pupils who mentioned that they would like to see changes in their books if they had the power to transfer anything at school.

Bamdad: *Our history book is not complete. Some information is not right*

Mon: Did you tell your teacher?

Bamdad: *Yes she said if you are interested you could go and find out information and study yourself*

Sogol: *'I would change the lessons in the books. I would make our books more interesting'.*

Mon: How would you make it more interesting?

Sogol: *'I like drawing. I would leave blank pages in our maths book for each lesson, so we can draw when we get tired'.*

- *Kinder teachers*

As previously mentioned, one of the qualities that these pupils mentioned that they would like to see in their desired teacher was 'kindness'. This response was repeated by some as a change they would like to see in their school.

Tara: *'I will change the strict teachers who are not kind to children and don't explain the lessons well'.*

Mahroo: *'I will change some of the teachers and bring teachers who are more good-tempered'.*

- *Taking less homework home*

Primary school pupils in Iran had to take their books home to write their homework for the next day lessons. Some pupils mentioned that they had plenty of homework to do at home. Their preference is to have longer hours at school, so they can do all their homework at school without taking anything more to write at home.

Ali: *'Let us do our homework at school before going home'.*

Nona: *'to have less homework at home. We have to take lots of book in our backpack home to write our homework at home every day. Our backpack is full of books and very heavy'.*

- *More play*

Pupils and in particular boys mentioned that they would like to have more time to play at school. They said they were not asking for free play, but thinking games such as the 'Rubik Cube'. 12 boys repeated this response that they would consider more time to play games and activities at school if they had the power to change anything at school.

- *No more bullying at school*

During my observation, in two of my case studies, including one of my boy's classroom and one girl's classroom the issue of bullying was noticeable among students and a few pupils including four boys and one girl, hinted at the presence of a bullying issue, and they would like to stop bullying if they were given the power to transform the school.

Farhad: *'I would ban bullying. In this school a lot of children bully each other. They bully me a lot. They tease me all the time'.*

Mon: Have you told your teacher?

Farhad: *'No she can't do anything about it. Her job is only teaching us subjects not changing children's manners. This is their family's responsibility'.*

Radin: *'I would throw out all jealous and bullying children'.*

Mon: What do you mean? Can you explain more?

Radin: *I like group work but no one wants to be in my group because they always tease me saying that I am fat. They call me 'fatty'.*

Mon: Did you tell your teacher?

Radin: *Yes but nothing has changed so far*

6.2 English pupils' perspectives

6.2.1 What kind of people do these pupils want teachers to be?

These children, in response to my question about the quality they would like to see in their desired teacher, responded that they like teachers who cares for children and help them when they struggle. Fourteen pupils repeated this response, for example, Emma said: *'a good teacher is someone who cares for you, and helps you when you struggle'*. Pupils like to see their teachers really care for their learning and be enthusiastic about their teaching. In this respect, Matthew responded;

'Some teachers don't really care what you are doing but the teachers I like are the people who actually care about what you are doing and they mean the comment when they say it'

In addition to this, ten pupils mentioned that they liked children who interacted with them when teaching and asking for pupils' opinions to reflect on their teaching and help them learn better. Reece told me he liked teachers who *'get your opinion of how you can learn better. I don't like teachers who use only their opinion'*. This view is reflected in Megan's opinion about a good teacher as well: *'I like teachers who gets people involved, interact with you'*.

Another characteristic mentioned by these pupils was that they like a teacher who is passionate and make the learning enjoyable for children. This view was echoed in Shaun's view when he said *'a good teacher is someone who is enthusiastic and teaching you in fun ways because children don't like boring stuff and an enthusiastic teacher pushes you more and make you enthusiastic so you learn better'*. Moreover, some seven children said that they like teachers who were kind and treated the child with respect. When Amy said *'A good teacher is someone who is kind and doesn't yell at you all the time'*

6.2.2 Relationships with classroom teacher(s):

I asked children about their relationship with their classroom teacher. I presented the finding for each classroom separately, because teachers were different in these two case studies,

Classroom A) The classroom teacher is a male teacher with fifteen years of experience in teaching.

Classroom B) The classroom teacher is a female teacher who is newly qualified.

The majority of pupils in classroom A- (18 pupils) told me that their relationship with the classroom teacher is ok, but they do not feel comfortable to talk to him about their issues. I asked them about the reason that prevented them from talking to their classroom teacher, and they mainly reasoned that they may not feel comfortable talking to him when Star said *'It's ok. But I will talk to my family. I might feel a bit nervous if I tell to my teacher'*. Some said that they found it difficult talking to him because he is always very busy. When Charlie said *'it's ok. But whenever I go to say something to him, he always says something about the time and asks me to sit down'*.

Four of them told me that their relationship with their classroom teacher was good and they can talk to him but this should be before or after the lesson. Jack for example said *'depends on the time. Start of the lesson or the end of the lesson you can talk to him'*.

When I asked children who the first person they would like to talk was if they felt unhappy about anything that happened to them at school, twenty pupils out of twenty two told me that the first person who they would talk to was *not* their classroom teacher. Eight of them told me that they would talk to their family first, not anyone at school. One child said *'I will go to my family first, they care about it and they will sort it out'*. Five of them told me that they would talk to the school counsellor first, and seven pupils mentioned they would share the issue with

their friends first. As Reece said: *'if I am at school I go to my friends because I like explaining and sometimes there is stuff I don't feel comfortable explaining to my teacher. I found it easier talking to my friend. I go to him depending on how bad it is'*.

In the case of pupils in classroom B, eight pupils told me they had a good relationship with their teacher whenever they asked her questions about the lesson if she is not too busy she will help. Eleven pupils told me their relationship was ok with the classroom teacher, but they did not feel close to her.

It is ok. I may not feel very comfortable to tell the teacher. Adults at school don't really listen much because they have got a lot on their minds and they think about what they should do' (Amy).

In response to my question as to whether they will talk to their teacher as the first person if they feel unhappy at school, eight of them told me they would go to their teacher first but depends on how busy she is as they find it hard to talk to her when she had to do different things.

Three pupils told me they would not say anything to their teacher and they would talk to their friends, as they did not feel comfortable opening up their feelings to their teacher.

I will go to my friends first because they understand me more than adults because adults don't really understand children when they are sad (Emma)

My best friend he would do anything for me, teachers they are not basically close to you they just teach you important things. They are not that interested in listening to our views (Blake)

Six said they would share their problem with their family first, not their teacher, and three of them said they would go to the school counsellor.

My family because they are closer to you It is not easy to talk to my teacher, I feel scared when I talk to others (Demmi).

6.2.3 What if children swap places with teachers?

Nineteen pupils told me this was a bad idea if the child swapped places with the teacher. They reasoned that teachers are more knowledgeable and they know how to teach, if a child becomes the teacher everyone would behave badly and they would end up learning nothing.

Ten children told me they thought this could be a good experience for children and also teachers, so they could show teachers their interest, and also they can explore being a teacher.

'Both teachers can learn from children what they like more and what they like to do and what fun thing they want to do' (Rayan)

'Both its like when you do teaching you won't do the same things your teacher does; you do different things. It is good because that's the first time you get the chance to be the teacher so you can explore' (Alisha)

Seven children said it was a good idea to be a teacher because 'it feels good to be a teacher' and also the learning will be more enjoyable and fun.

'It is a good thing because younger teachers and kids know more fun stuff' (Alex)

6.2.4 How teachers' can help pupils learn better?

The majority of pupils (twelve pupils) told me that when their teacher asks them to work in groups they learn better. They reasoned that this way they could share ideas with their partners in their groups and they could get some help.

'Working in groups because you can get more help' (Reece).

'I like to work in groups because it's more people, more ideas and more contribution to final idea' (Jack).

Eight of them said that they learned better when the teacher made the learning process enjoyable for them.

'I like challenges and I like learning for fun' (Matthew)

'I prefer to learn in a fun way because if you do things in a boring way you don't enjoy the learning' (Amy)

Other factors suggested by pupils were that they learn better when the teachers get them involved, use ICT and also when the teacher explains well. Two of them mentioned that if the teacher changed the classroom setting this could be beneficial for them to learn from each other better and they will be able to share their ideas.

'The way that you teach I learn better, people share things and you sit in a circle and go round' (Alisha).

6.2.5 What do pupils think about 'Punishment' in general?

In response to my question to gain their general view about whether King Shahriar was right to kill all the maids, slaves and the queen. The majority of pupil said he was right to feel angry but he was not right to kill others. One child commented that *'He wasn't really wrong; he saw his wife is unfaithful. It is fine to be angry but you don't kill them just because you feel angry'*.

I asked them what he should have done; most pupils suggested he should not kill anyone and should leave the queen. This view was reflected in Matthew's comment, when he said *'The king was wrong if the queen likes someone else, he could say sorry but you have to leave the*

palace because you don't love me and you're the queen and you like someone 'else. You have to go and live somewhere else because I'm not your parents to forgive you. I won't let you stay in this palace because I made it only for you, not for you and someone else'. Only one boy told me he thought the king was right, but was still not sure about whether he should have killed everyone. He said;

'He was right because if I were the king I hate getting annoyed by other people when they make me frustrated. I would at least put them as my slave maybe I think about killing them later'.

I asked them what they thought about punishment in general. A few of them did not answer the question. Six of them told me that punishment in any case is wrong and it is a wrong solution. Twenty pupils said that if someone has done something really wrong, then he/she should get punished, otherwise if they have done something wrong mistakenly they should not get punished. Ten pupils said that people should get punished if they do the same wrong action repeatedly.

'When they have done something really bad you have to punish them if they keep doing the same wrong thing' (Nikita).

'Some people do it by accident they don't mean it. After they understand what they did and they didn't mean it so you don't punish those people. But in other ways, if they mean it and they don't ever say sorry you have to punish those people who keep on doing it like bullying other. They have to get punished' (Jack).

Pupils suggested different ways of punishment, as they mainly said that this punishment should happen when one does something really bad:

- Tell them off;

- Take their favourite toy;
- Ban the child from watching TV;
- Ban the child from playing with computer;
- Send them to another room to think about what he/she did wrong;
- Ban the child from playing in the playground;

6.2.6 School councils

The majority of pupils thought that school councils were useful for them. When I asked them specifically why they think school councils are useful. They said that they were useful in terms of making schools better, with getting new equipment such as new toys for the school. In addition to this, representatives in school councils can raise money for the school. Liya, who is part of the school council, told me *'it's useful we get to decide how to raise money for school'*. A few children also found school councils to be a connection between children and school staff to discuss their matters. This view was echoed when Shaun said *'you can tell them to pass your comment to the head teacher. It is easier to tell friends/classmates instead of telling it yourself to the head teacher /adults'*. Two of the children told me they did not find school council very useful, as they thought they did not do things very often for the children.

6.2.7 Transformations that pupils would like to see in their school

I asked pupils whether they would like to change anything in their school if they were given the power to transform something. Sixteen pupils answered yes to this question.

Six pupils said that they would like to see changes in their **literacy sessions**, as they found the sessions boring.

'I don't like literacy you just sit there and listen to the teacher and then just write. I hate literacy' (Megan).

'Change literacy sessions, I don't like literacy because when you get older in a bigger class like I am you don't get much stories and it is boring when there is no story in the literacy sessions' (Duncan).

Four of them told me that they would like to have **more stories** in their school day because it helps them to be more creative and expressive.

'I like stories I want to have stories if I can change something- I like creative work you get the chance to express yourself' (Star).

'More stories, I like listening to stories and saying points about it asking questions. We do loads of writing. I like writing but sometimes you need to write loads and your wrist start aching' (Reece).

Three of them mentioned they would like to have **more group work** which helps them learn better. Rayan said, he wants more group work, as he likes working in pairs or small groups: *'what I would change is always to have a partner to work or work in small groups, so when I don't understand, they'll tell me what to do'.*

One pupil said that what he would change is 'having less hard work'. Moreover, the other pupil who wants to see changes in her school said she will 'change the setting'. I asked her why she would like to change the classroom setting. She said *'Sitting in a circle like you did helps me to learn better, I listen better'.*

6.3 Summary

In this chapter I sought to present children's views on my general aspects of schooling and I will now summarize the findings for each aspect.

- **Definition of a good teacher**

Of the Iranian children, thirty eight of them mentioned the teacher's ability to teach well as an important quality so as to assure children understand the lessons. Thirty pupils emphasized kindness and six of them mentioned the ability to make the lesson fun for children. Being trustworthy and fair are all prominent characteristics they would like to see in their desired teacher. The only difference between boys' and girls' perspective was that boys emphasised the importance of feeling mutual respect between them and their teachers.

From English pupils' perspectives, fourteen pupils said they liked teachers who care for their learning, were enthusiastic about their teaching and also made the learning enjoyable experience for children. Ten pupils mentioned the desired teacher as someone who interacts with them when teaching and asking for pupils' opinions to reflect on her teaching and help them learn better. Moreover, kindness and having respects for children were also mentioned by seven children as qualities they would like to see in their teachers.

- **Relationships with classroom teachers**

Overall Iranian pupils' opinions in terms of relationship with their teachers were 'okay' and they explained that they did not have a close relationship with their classroom teacher(s) and if they wanted to talk to them, the conversation was mainly limited to asking questions about lessons. The weakness of the relationship of trust between teachers and children was reflected in children's responses, namely that that if they felt unhappy about anything at school, the first people they transferred the issue to would not be their teachers. As only 4 pupils out of 81 said that they would talk to their teachers about the issue, the majority of them said that

they talked either to their family or close friends because they were closer to them and they can trust them.

In terms of English children's overall relationship with the classroom teacher, in both classrooms this was 'okay', but in one classroom (B) with a female newly qualified teacher, children had a slightly closer relationship with her compared with the other classroom (A) having an experienced male teacher. In classroom (A) twenty pupils out of twenty two told me that the first person that they would talk to was *not* their classroom teacher. In the case of pupils in classroom B, eight pupils said they would go to their teacher first but it would depend on how busy the teacher was. Overall the majority of children in both classrooms said they would go to their family, school counsellor or their friends if any issue at school made them feel unhappy as they did not feel comfortable opening up their feelings to their teacher.

- **If children swap places with teachers**

Neither Iranian nor English pupils wished to take on teacher's role and gain their power as the majority of them said it was not a good idea if children swapped places with their teachers as they were not as knowledgeable as teachers and this also created disruptiveness. However, nineteen of them stated that whereas lack of knowledge in teaching and class management might be problematic, on the other hand it gives the child the opportunity to explore being a teacher and 'it feels good' and also the child might know childlike activities better.

- **How teachers help pupils learn better**

Factors such as teacher's repetition, offering playful pedagogy, getting them engaged and involved in activities and making the learning process fun and enjoyable for them were mainly mentioned by Iranian pupils. English children also mentioned doing group work and more participatory activities while making the learning enjoyable for them was also an important factor in enhancing their learning.

- **Punishment**

Pupil's views on punishment were mixed. Thirty-four Iranian pupils mentioned that punishment was necessary to stop bad manners and poor behaviour, but not a severe punishment such as execution which happens in Iran. Thirty English pupils suggested that punishment was the right solution if the child had done something really wrong intentionally and repeatedly. Children's suggestion for punishment was, for example, rewriting homework, telling them off, and taking their favourite toy, or banning the child from playing or watching TV. Twenty-seven Iranian pupils and six English pupils said that punishment was not the right solution but instead they should make children consider why what they have done was wrong.

- **School councils**

The majority of Iranian pupils were aware of the presence of the school council, and they thought that school councils could be useful only if they accomplished their promises. However, pupils in all my case studies mentioned that they had not seen any changes reflecting pupils' views since the school council had been arranged in their school.

The majority of English pupils thought that school councils were useful for them mainly in terms of making schools better by providing new facilities such as new toys, and fund raising for the school.

- **Any changes they would like to see in their school life**

Fifty-three Iranian pupils mentioned that there were aspects in their schools which they would change if they had been given power to do so. They mentioned they would like to have bigger classrooms to be able to do physical activities, considering aesthetic aspect such as colourful uniforms for teacher's, having a more balanced curriculum and coherent

information in books, building relationships with teachers, taking less homework home, more time to play and banning bullying at school.

Sixteen English pupils mentioned that the changes they would like to see in their schools were mainly about their literacy sessions which are boring for them. They also mentioned that they would like to have more stories in their school day, and found stories useful in making them more creative and expressive. Additional transformations that were mentioned by a few of them were having more group work to get peer support, changing the classroom setting and also having less work.

CHAPTER 7:

IRANIAN TEACHERS VOICES

Although this research is about voices of pupils, this section reports on the interviews I conducted with the five female classroom teachers observing my sessions. To give a more realistic picture, I aim to weave teachers' views in with those of children. Indeed, to reach to a more genuine conclusion about the concept of pupil voice in Iranian schools, a consideration of teachers' voices was necessary. Indeed, I was interested in their overall views of the sessions not to advocate or evaluate my approach, but to give a more detailed picture to educators who may be interested in applying more innovative way of facilitating pupils to have their say in Iran. Additionally, I was interested in the teachers' general views of whether they consider it is important to encourage children to speak their minds and be critical thinkers, and if they do, then what the challenges or limitations are that they may face as boundaries in the current education system. I was also interested in ascertaining their views on the quality of the relationships they have as primary teachers with children, and whether they welcome different views and disagreement in their classes.

Each interview is presented as a case in its own right, so as to give equal emphasis to each voice. This is because these teachers have different working experiences and they had different observations regarding my approach. Data analysis revealed different perceptions due to different experiences. I will present each teacher's response separately, as I coded teachers as (T1, T2...) and I will present each classroom teachers' views in terms of:

➤ **Feedback on my sessions**

- Teachers views
- The desired activities

➤ **Pupil voice**

- The importance of promoting critical thinking and enabling pupils voice,
- Challenges and limitations,
- Disagreement

➤ **Relationship with children**

- The quality of relationships between teacher and pupils

7.1 Iranian Teachers' perspectives

7.1.1 T1

T1 is a female teacher who has been teaching children for 10 years. She has experience of working in both boys' and girls' schools. She observed some of my sessions but not all of them.

Overall feedback

Her overall feedback on the observed sessions was positive, and she reasoned that the approach I used was beneficial for pupils in terms of giving them confidence to think outside the box and work more collaboratively. She said, *'What you did was interesting because you gave confidence to the child to think, take risks and speak their minds and our education system wants to take away these qualities in children'*. She further explained that *'when you were not here children mentioned the different types of question making to me and I could hear in their dialogue repeatedly they were saying "Miss Partovi is asking us to think and give reasons' and this is new for them"*.

T1 mentioned that pupils told her that they liked my session. She clarified that *'Children liked your sessions because you prepare a happy learning environment for them'*. I asked her the reason for the lack of happy environment in their school, and she answered as follow; *'Who is happy Miss Partovi? You can't see many happy people and this is not only the problem in our primary schools'*.

Desired activity

I asked T1 whether she was interested in using any of the activities I applied in the designed workshop. She said *'I really liked the way you were encouraging pupils to ask their own questions and have a classroom discussion to get to know different ideas. The ways we ask questions are mainly to limit pupils thinking as to what is written in their books. I will use your way in my history and science lessons'*.

The importance of enabling pupil voice and thinking critically

T1 commented that it was important to give space and chance to pupils to think for themselves and have a say, but the existence of problems make it difficult for her to promote more dialogic teaching.

Challenges and limitations from T1 perspectives:

- *Physical setting*

T1 mentioned that physical settings in Iranian primary schools were problematic in regards to facilitating whole class discussion or group work. As she explained *'classroom setting and the way children sit makes it difficult to do collaborative work'*.

- ***School ethos***

Furthermore, she mentioned that school ethos prevented children from working collaboratively *'If we want to do any activity to change the learning environment to a more interactive one, then the class may get a bit noisy and others will complain'*.

- ***Lack of sharing culture***

Not only did the school ethos prevent pupils from learning to work together and be active participants in their classroom, but according to T1's responses the classroom setting having benches in rows as well as the culture of lack of trust among pupils made it hard to engage in cooperative activities inside the classroom.

'Our classroom settings prevent us from doing group work, but also our culture emphasizes keeping one's thoughts within oneself and not sharing. I can see that when children want to write, they put their pencil case in between or trying to hide their work, so as not to allow their classmates to see their work. We don't trust each other. We think sharing means losing our ideas and once we share ideas, others will steal and copy our work'.

Furthermore she shared her experience of trying to encourage pupils to cooperate with each other in having a shared stuff for the class such as having one set of colour pencils for each bench in the class. But children and their parents did not welcome her idea and they preferred each child to bring her/his own things.

- ***Lack of innovative teachers***

T1 also mentioned that even if they wanted to facilitate a more dialogic pedagogy this was still a new experience for teachers, and could not happen so straightforwardly.

She explained *‘Our education system has been based on a monologue pedagogy for years and now some younger teachers want to move to more student centred pedagogy, but we don’t know how to apply it to the classroom so we end up wasting so much time and not being successful in doing it in the end’*.

In addition to this, she explained that the education system wanted teachers to follow their lines exactly and not be inventive. She commented that this way made it easy for teachers to teach, because everything is dictated beforehand and there is no need for teachers to work harder to make their lesson plans more innovative; but at the same time compassionate teachers lose their passion for teaching. She said *‘I can see that this system is diminishing creativity in children, I feel sad. If I didn’t love children I would leave teaching forever’*.

- ***Demanding curriculum***

Lack of time was cited as a further reason why T1 could not consider any time for classroom discussion or any kinds of pupil voice activities.

‘Our curriculum is very demanding. I have to cover the curriculum first’.

Disagreement

I asked her if she tolerated different ideas and disagreement from pupils.

As T1 commented *‘Depends. In any case if they say something while I am teaching I will not listen and shout. But I may try to listen to different views with reasons but they need to justify them to me. But to be honest I’ve never been justified by their views’*.

The quality of relationship between teachers and pupils

T1 answered that in her opinion *'It is crucial to connect to children emotionally at this age. They will learn your lessons when they like you. You are their role model and they observe you all the time. The head teacher always tells us to come to school well-dressed because they first look at you and how you look'*. But she also explained that the current curriculum with its emphasis on core subjects such as maths and science makes it challenging to build a softer and less strict relationship with children.

'You told stories to children and your approach is far too different from mine. Storytelling is softer and sweeter for them than me teaching them multiplication tables. I have to be strict with them most of the time'.

7.1.2 T2

T2 is a female teacher with 22 years working experience of teaching pupils in primary schools. She was present in all of my sessions. She teaches literacy to pupils in the boys' school.

Overall feedback

T2's overall feedback was positive. She said, *'I liked your method of encouraging pupils to work collaboratively with each other. Children like group work'*. She commented that she did not notice any changes in pupils and boys also did not talk about my sessions to her. But she shared her own observation to me that she liked stories but what was interesting for her was observing boys enjoying listening to fairy tales. As she stated, *'I like Nights tales, but I always thought nowadays children may like more modern literature than fairy tales. It was interesting for me to see that these children liked the Nights tales'*.

Desired activity

T2 stated that she found question making useful to apply to literacy sessions.

She said that *‘The question making after listening to the story was interesting’*.

The importance of enabling pupil voice and thinking critically

T2 commented that it is important to enable pupils to have a say inside the classroom but she preferred to limit the conversation to discussion about the lessons and nothing more.

Challenges and limitation from T2 perspectives

- ***Lack of trust relationship***

She emphasized the effect of lack of trust at school, which may prevent pupils from articulating their authentic views. She said *‘even if I as a teacher try to get their views still some of them may not say what they really think or may stay quiet because their families taught them not to open up at school’*.

- ***School’s ethos***

In addition to this lack of teacher’s rights over planning the extra-curricular lesson plans makes it impossible for them to facilitate insightful dialogue. She shared her experience with me that the school ethos does not let teachers discuss anything outside the lessons because once you move on to having a spontaneous conversation with children they may start discussing issues that happen in society, which they heard from their families, and this can be problematic. She said that once in a history session she encouraged pupils to watch a program on the satellite about ‘Cyrus the Great’ and his ‘Achaemenid Empire’ and bring their findings to share in the next class so that during the lesson she could inquire as to pupils views on ‘Cyrus the Great’. But the school ethos demotivated her since as she said *‘Children really*

enjoyed the session, but I was given a notification from the head teacher the next day that I should never do it again’.

Disagreement

When I asked T2 whether she allowed the children to speak their minds and how they reacted when the child disagreed with teacher’s opinion, T2 stated *‘Rarely I let them talk during the lessons and if they want to criticize me I would say sit down and be quiet’.*

The quality of relationship between teachers and pupils

In T2’s view, pupils should have a close relationship with the teacher. *She said ‘I had a pupil in my class whose mother was away and the child used to hug me every morning, then sit on his seat’.*

7.1.3 T3

T3 is a female teacher with 20 years of working experience with both boys and girls in the primary school. She observed all my sessions. She was interested in my approach and was taking notes of my lesson plans during the sessions.

Overall feedback

Her overall feedback was positive. As she mentioned *‘When I told other teachers about your sessions in which you told stories to children, they said that this was a waste of time because of course children like stories just to have fun. But I told them you don’t tell stories so that children are only having fun but in fact these stories indirectly encouraged them to speak their minds about different concepts. For me it was very interesting listening to these girls’ views reflecting our future women’s viewpoints’.*

In addition she shared her own observation in terms of pupils’ positive views for the sessions.

She also added that even pupils did not directly talk about the sessions to her but her observation of the session shows that the children enjoyed the sessions. She explained, *'Children liked your sessions. I could see that they didn't feel tired or bored in your sessions. Although children did not directly tell me anything about your sessions, I remember you used to come on Mondays and one week I forgot you were coming to have a session with the children, but when I went inside the class I saw children painting the black board with flowers for you and they wrote your name on the board saying 'welcome Miss Partovi'. This means that they really liked your sessions and they may never forget the period they had these sessions with you '.*



Figure 9: Painted black board by children for me with a note written 'welcome Miss Partovi to our class'

Desired activity

In response to my question of whether she may use any of the activities in her own teaching, she commented that she would use a beanbag game and drama as well as question making.

She explained *‘The beanbag game was really interesting for me as one problem I have with these children is they don’t want to have eye contacts neither with me nor with each other. Most of the times when I teach, their heads are down’*. When I asked her what the reasons were for children not having eye contact with her while talking to them, she added *‘I don’t know. I believe it is important to have eye contacts with the child because then you can’t build emotional connection with them, so I think this affects their learning if they don’t have any emotional connection with their teachers’*.

The importance of enabling pupil voice and thinking critically

T3 stated that allowing pupils to articulate their thoughts and feelings provided a chance for teachers to get to know the students’ line of thoughts more profoundly and she emphasized the importance of having dialogue with boys in the class. As T3 said *‘I was observing your sessions and I didn’t expect this class to have such interesting views. Over dialogue as a teacher I can get to know what’s really going on inside their minds’ and I think giving space to boys to express themselves is even more important’*. I asked her to clarify her points with a further explanation or give an example, and she replied *‘I remember once I asked children in both boys and girls classes to imagine one day they wake up invisible. I asked them to write down what they would do. Boys’ responses were full of violence; I was shocked to see how 10 years old children can be full of anger. So I think they need to express themselves otherwise they transfer this anger to society when they grow up’*.

She also indicated that drama was a useful approach to encourage pupils to participate more actively. As she commented having drama was not only fun for pupils but she also emphasized the benefit of drama for primary school pupils who have low self-confidence. As she stated *‘drama is beneficial for shy children to speak up. My experience is that whenever I used drama I noticed quiet children speak and take part more than before. We even have a*

child in the class who is quiet because she has a tongue-tie problem whenever she acts out I notice she speaks with no problem and shyness’.

Challenges and limitations from T3 perspectives

T3 did not mention any challenges in terms of encouraging pupils to have a say in her school.

Disagreement

T3 replied that she was open to children’s disagreement and criticism as long as they put forward their different views politely and she added that children were impulsive so she did not take their criticism seriously.

The quality of relationship between teachers and pupils

From T3’s point of view, it is essential to have a friendly relationship with children because teachers are role models for children and they should want them to engage with their lessons.

7.1.4 T4

T4 is a female teacher with 19 years of working experience mainly in boys’ schools. She only observed one session.
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Overall feedback

T4 only observed one session as mentioned although she liked the session from her observation what she did not like was the fact that I did not invite quiet children to participate in the discussion. She said *‘I observed one session and I liked it. But during the classroom discussion you did not push quiet children to participate’*. I shared my view with her, namely that my aim was not to push pupils to having a say if they preferred to stay quiet, and my observation with pupils in this class was that it may be her presence in the classroom that had an influence on some pupils to participate less because children in that class were mainly

disruptive and not quiet.

Desired activity

From T4's point of view, storytelling and question making are desired activities to use in literacy sessions, but are not applicable to a maths class, for instance.

The importance of enabling pupil voice and thinking critically

T4 mentioned that it was important to enable children to think for themselves if only she had free time.

Challenges and limitation from T4 perspectives

- *Lack of innovative teachers*

T4 mentioned that although she thought it was important to enable pupils to be reflective and have a say, dialogic teaching desired teachers who had the same line of thought as mine to be knowledgeable in facilitating dialogic teaching because not all teachers felt comfortable in doing it.

- *Demanding curriculum*

T4 also indicated lack of time and space as a limitation, which made it difficult for any reflection and participation from pupils. T4 mentioned '*it is important to encourage children to think and express their views, but I have to cover twelve chapters of science and 136 pages of Mathematics plus five more subjects over the school time. The current curriculum makes it impossible for me to give them the chance to think and reflect or have a dialogue in the class*'.

Disagreement

T4 explained that she might tolerate criticism from children as long as they provide this with respect, as she believed that teachers were human beings and could also make mistakes.

The quality of relationship between teachers and pupils

From T4's viewpoint, it is important to have an approachable relationship with a child, but teachers also have to be strict to control pupils and make pupils disciplined. As she commented *'they know I like them, but I am a strict teacher. They all know in my class they have to be disciplined. I will tell them off if they don't follow my classroom rules'*.

7.1.5 T5

T5 is a female teacher who has been teaching children for 36 years. She observed all my sessions. She had a positive view on my approach accordingly in the last session; she requested to have a copy of my lessons plans.

Overall feedback

Her overall feedback was positive, stating *'your sessions are useful for children but you need to run these sessions regularly when they start schooling to make any difference. I think this can positively affect children's development if they have been encouraged to develop inquiring minds and learn to listen to each other views'*. Moreover, she said that children liked the sessions *'They liked your sessions asking me whether you will come back again'*.

Desired activity

T5 answered that she liked the different ways of question making the most (pointing towards the 'question quadrant' which is explained in previous chapters). She mentioned that even in religious education she applied this way of questioning which made children more enthusiastic to take part. As she commented: *'Last week when I taught religious education, I*

used your way of inviting pupils to make their own questions and I could see a slight difference in their participation. They were more enthusiastic’.

The importance of enabling pupil voice and thinking critically

T5 also emphasized the importance of encouraging pupils to think for themselves, but she stated that the main responsibility is on the teacher’s shoulder to make this happen. However, she stated that this could not happen easily with Iranian pupils and it needs regular practice.

Challenges and limitation from T5 perspectives

- ***Teacher’s willingness***

She mentioned that the current curriculum was heavy, but from T5’s point of view, the teacher’s role was more important than the curriculum. T5 said *‘its all related to the teachers you can teach these books in a more participative and inquiring way as if teachers follow monologue pedagogy pupils never get the chance to be reflective’*. I asked her if she had enough time to avoid monologue pedagogy and still cover the curriculum. She answered *‘Yes, you can do it, but children have to learn the rules and discipline of being in more participative classrooms. These boys have not learnt to listen to each other. Whenever I want them to take part during the lesson, they all interrupt each other. So after a while I just leave it and get back to my monologue pedagogy style’*.

Disagreement

In response to my question as to whether she allowed children to have different ideas from her, she answered that she was open to criticism and allowed them to express their views.

The quality of relationship between teachers and pupils

It is essential to have friendly relationship with children, but they need to know the limits as well. She answered thus *‘I believe sense of humour is important and children should be praised by their teachers but keep a distance from them, making them understand not to cross the boundaries is also important’*.

7.2 Summary

As presented, the overall feedback of these teachers was positive. They thought that the approach was useful in terms of encouraging children to think outside the box, to increase their confidence in taking risks to speak their mind as well as working more collaboratively. In addition most of them said that from their observation children were happy and engaged in the sessions. The most desired activity for them was the ‘question quadrant’ which gave directions to children to move away from asking more closed question to open-ended ones. Even one of them (T5) mentioned that she tried this activity in teaching religious education to pupils and asking children to write their own questions instead of her asking questions and from her observation there was a slight difference in pupils’ participation’s level in that session. Others mentioned that they would try to approach different types of question making in teaching science, history and literacy. They all considered that building a relationship of trust with children was important and one mentioned that games like ‘Bean bags’ used in my sessions were useful in terms of increasing eye contact between the teacher and children. In her view she emphasized that having eye contact with children was important to build relationships with them.

In terms of being open to accepting disagreement from children, they mainly mentioned that they welcome disagreement as long as children put forward their different views in a

respectful way. In addition to this, in their view it was also important to give space to children to speak their minds and encourage them to think more critically. But some mentioned that the current education system in Iran was demanding, making it hard to build close relationships with children to facilitate space for them to speak their minds. I will reflect in-depth on these challenges in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8: REFLECTION ON FINDINGS

In this research the phenomenon of pupil voice has been studied with children in order to avoid any taken for granted knowledge and oversimplification of research about children's voice. It seems that in the real world scenarios the concept of 'pupil voice' emphasizing on children's rights to have an active role and have a say in matters affecting their school lives, have been neglected by adults in different educational settings. Reflecting on the findings suggest that in fact, different factors are involved in restricting the voices of pupils to be heard. Hence, in this chapter I will begin with the existing agenda namely school councils designed for pupils to have a say in their school community. Afterwards, I will discuss the current constraints that I faced during the fieldwork, in which they restrict the practice of pupil voice in particular in Iranian schools. In addition to this, I will illuminate the limitations and challenges experienced by children to voice their opinion publically during the current study in order to identify further suggestions for the future studies in the conclusion chapter.

To be noted is that, although in line with the aims of this thesis the main focus of discussion will be on Iranian schools as the main focus of this study, to provide a more realistic picture I will also combine my discussion of the findings with the findings from English schools to support my point of views within a broader context, as well as to add confidence to my reflection on findings when it is applied.

8.1 Current 'Pupil Voice' practices in these case studies

8.1.1 School councils

School council as Michael Fielding (2001, p.49) explains is a recognized forms of pupils engagement, which aims to develop a more 'authentic collective voice' of pupils. Findings suggest that the only way apparently provided for these children to express their opinions in

their school community is school council, which also it seems fail to provide a real platform for these pupils to have an active role in their school community. This is reflected in pupils views where the majority of them found ‘school council’ to be tokenistic and useless in terms of reflecting their views. As one said:

We have a school council but they don't do anything for us. They just ask us to give our opinions but they never approve what we say.

This is even echoed in comments by children who are representative in their school council. As Amir said: *‘I am a school councillor. I told them what children want. I did my responsibility but they didn't take it seriously and they have only changed a very few things for us. I would say almost nothing has changed’*. This view ties in with Fielding's view when he commented (2001, p.49) that, adults occasionally just hear children's comments rather than listen to what they have to say. Thus, school councils are tokenistic, because adults do not want to take children's comments seriously (MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). I inquired of the head teachers regarding the essence of ‘school council’ in primary schools, and also the selection of students in school council. They all had a positive view on having the school council, but the majority of them thought the selection should be from older children over year five as they thought for younger pupils it is another way of wasting time. As one male head teacher said;

‘I think the underlying philosophy of existence ‘school council’ in primary schools is totally wrong. Primary school children's brains have not completely developed to be able to think critically and to reason. These children only want longer PE sessions and less maths, which is irrational and childish’.

In the other cases, other head teachers had a more positive attitude towards the essence of school councils and took pupils views seriously to make them feel that they belong to their school community. In response to my question asking in which aspect of school life they would ask pupils views, their response was mainly focused on enquiring about pupils opinions about school food, school prizes and school trips. In addition to this, the majority of English pupils found the 'school council' useful and had a positive impression towards the existence of school council in their school community but from their responses the school council is limited to discussion of pupils desires about school facilities or raising money for the school. *'We have school councils and it is useful. If we need anything like new toys, they get the equipment for us'* (Emma).

In fact, not all students hold the same power. Some voices seem to be more articulate than others and normally they are the ones who have been selected as representatives on the school council to speak on behalf of others. Whose decision is involved in the selection procedure? Children? Or adults? Is the school council another way to silence children's voice to serve adults voices through the adults selected representative? To what extent do selected children represent children's voices and not adult's voices? The findings suggest that in Iranian schools the representatives of school councils are selected by adults, not the children themselves.

*I always wanted to be a representative of school council but **they** never let me be even only for a few days. I want them to be fair. Why should one of my classmates be part of school councils for weeks but not me? This is not fair* (Parsa).

Findings show that in this study, school councils are either taken as tokenism and just tick the boxes or are mainly limited to opinions about the school equipment. As discussed before

(chapter two) school councils represent *authoritative* voices, a voice that speaks on behalf of children. But the question is, do school councils exist only to promote *authoritative* voice and *consumer* voice? Fielding (2001, p.49) argues that school councils may not facilitate a democratic form of engagement for students but at least it can help to make pupils more engaged. Thus, it is unlikely that school councils are an ideal way of eliciting pupils' views and practising democracy in schools. However, the question is, why would teachers rely on school council to get to know the students views? And what are the barriers stopping teachers from listening to their own students inside the classrooms? This view also reflected in the student's remarks in Fielding's research as well when one student criticised teachers for neglecting children's views inside the classroom when she said 'I think it's sad that we have had to give this group just to voice our opinions. Don't teachers realise we've got opinions?' (Fielding, 2001, p.101) In the next section I will reflect on some of the barriers which emerged in this research in order to reflect on potential barriers stopping the student voice inside the classroom.

8.2 Existing obstacles to restrict 'pupil voice'

8.2.1 Classroom settings

From my observations in five different private schools in Tehran, a typical Iranian primary classroom is seen as a square shaped classroom with very little or no displays of children's own work. Pupils were sitting either in pairs on benches or on individual chairs in linear rows facing the black or white boards. The teacher's desk is mainly located in the front and in some classes' the teacher's seating is in at a higher level than the students. This form of classroom recalls Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* as referred to by Foucault (1991, p. 200) which allows children be watched all the time by the teacher, so that they learn to survey themselves and police their own actions according to the teacher's rules. Because of the

dominant lecture-based pedagogy in Iranian schools, most of the Iranian teachers act as ‘the sage on the stage’. In fact this means of arrangement gives teachers more control to observe children, as well as distinguishing teacher’s superiority to children. At the same time, this means of arranging the classroom may have an influence on making pupils more passive listeners, who feel unable to participate and co-operate. Thus the dynamic of the classroom is shown below;

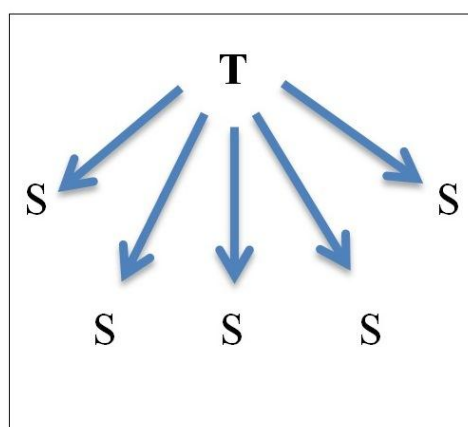


Figure 20: the dynamics in an Iranian classroom

This problem was mentioned by the classroom teacher (T1) ‘*Our classroom settings prevent us from doing group work, but also our culture emphasizes keeping one’s thoughts within oneself and not sharing. I can see that when children want to write, they put their pencil case in between or try to hide their work, so as not to allow their classmates to see their work. We don’t trust each other. We think sharing means losing our ideas and once we share ideas, others will steal and copy our work*’.

To provide a clearer picture, the following pictures display the above descriptions of the classrooms. I took these pictures from the primary schools in which I collected my data in Iran. The first picture illustrates the place of the classroom teacher, which is located at a

slightly higher level than the pupils. The other two pictures portrayed the arrangement of the settings inside the classrooms.



Figure 11: Iranian primary school classroom 1



Figure 12: Iranian primary school classroom 2

Considering the fact that as a qualitative researcher I kept the setting as natural as possible, I bore in mind that the right kind of physical arrangement was essential in order to provide classroom discussion. The small size of the classrooms and more importantly the traditional lecture-based physical arrangements made it difficult to invite pupils to participate actively in whole-class discussion or any kinds of physical movements. Therefore, I started by re-arranging the physical setting for my sessions, pushed the desks back and placed the chairs into a half circle.

8.2.2 Community (WE) versus Identity (I)

The observational findings suggest that the effect of collectivist culture can affect children's identity. An example can be given is when children introduced themselves in my first sessions. In fact, we live in a collective society in which, as Hofstede (1997) states the interest of the group is more important than the interest of the individual. He continues that in such as society people are combined into strong, interconnected *in-groups* throughout their life to protect their obedient loyalty (cited in Jandt, 2010, p.164). When I asked them to write their names on the label to stick it on their shirt, they were all asking me 'Do I need to write only my first name?' as the culture of calling family names instead of the child first name is common in Iranian primary schools. This was more obvious to me when we were playing the beanbag game in the first session, in which I noticed they passed the beanbag to each other, calling them by their family names not the first name. One more example was during the classroom discussion where in response to my question asking them individually 'what do you think?' they used to give their statement using this sentence in Farsi (ما فکر می‌کنیم) which in English translation means 'WE think' instead of 'I think', so in response to my question when individual pupils wanted to express their ideas instead of saying 'I think' they would say 'We think'. This reminded me of *Anthem* written by Ayn Rand (2012), who

responded to the collectivist system, central to the Soviet Union. The story character is called Equality 7-2521 who constantly refers to himself and others in the plural (WE). At the end of the story he asked himself;

What is my wisdom, if even the fools can dictate to me? What is my freedom, if all creatures, even the botched and the impotent, are my masters? What is my life, if I am but to bow, to agree, and to obey?

But I am done with this creed of corruption. I am done with the monster of “We”, the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame. I am. I think. I will

Ayn Rand (2012, p.72&75)

Another example is that after completing the story of Aladdin and his magical lamp I did the last activity asking them to put on the magical lamp puppet on their finger and tell the class what they would ask for if they had a magical lamp. In the Iranian classroom most of the children’s wishes were followed by a wish for their family because in collectivist society, ‘children learn to think in terms of “we” (Hofstede et al, 2010, p.113). ‘We’ refers to the *power of the group* and the first group in children’s lives are their family. According to Hofstede et al (2010, p.91):

The “we” group is the major source of one’s identity and the only secure protection one has against the hardship of life. Therefore, one owes lifelong loyalty to one’s in-group and breaking this loyalty is one of the worst things a person can do. Between the person and the in-group, a mutual dependence relationship develops that in both practical and psychological.

8.2.3 Current epistemology of knowledge

Iranian teachers indicated different reasons but mainly they mentioned that more enquiry-based practice requires **innovative teachers**, and they are not trained in that way. Moreover, they do not feel confident and comfortable in delivering the lesson in a more enquiry-based

practice. In addition to this they mentioned that enquiry is reciprocity practice and requires nurturing the **culture of trust** and **mutual respect** which is not nurtured in school. Moreover, other factors such as **demanding curriculum**, **school ethos** as well as **physical setting** also restrict them to put it forward. In order to listen to the voice of the child, the role of the teacher is undeniably significant. What teachers see as obstacles are, of course, important to take note of as these barriers indeed restrict the child's voice from being heard but equally importantly, it is essential to point out that pedagogies are influenced by the conception of the child and what childhood entails (Murrells, 2013, p.249). In fact, the ways in which teachers perceive knowledge, and education as well as the child have an important effect on their practice.

This is reflected in one teacher's view, who stated that: *'it is all related to the teachers You can teach these books in a more participative and inquiring way and if teachers follow a monologue pedagogy pupils will never get the chance to be reflective'*. In fact, teacher's line of thoughts can either lead them to provide space to listen to the knowledge the child may bring inside the class or as Murrells (2013, p.245) indicates their 'hearers prejudices' hold teachers back from listening to the voice of their students and they do not hear their views. Undeniably, traditional teacher-centred practice regardless of the cultural differences and educational settings fails to provide pupil voice in the classroom. This is reflected in the findings when both English and Iranian children said;

We get to take part in your sessions. We normally just sit down and listen to the lesson we do not really take part (Star).

We could say what we really thought and talked about our ideas in your class. In other classes we are not allowed to do this and they don't allow any time for us to speak our minds (Amir).

As discussed earlier, developmental psychologists such as Piaget disregard children's individual capabilities and their lived experiences. They establish the universal discourse of the concept of childhood, centring on the biological aspect of being a child, and they see children's maturation as a series of stages. Educators' pedagogies have also been affected by the view of seeing children as primarily measurable, and as objects. In this view, teachers 'distance' themselves both from the children they work with and their own sense of childhood (Matthews, 1994, p.66). The above examples from children indicates that as long as teachers neglect the child as a 'subject' to treat them as objects sitting at their desk, it is impractical to believe that children really can have a voice in their classroom. Teachers mainly focus on rote-learning and closed questions about the lessons which profoundly reflect how they perceive the concept of the child in their pedagogy. Therefore, as Murriss (2013, p.249) points out, the teacher as an authority figure may present a barrier to the voice of the child even if some space is made to listen to such voices.

The epistemic authority creates what Miranda Fricker (2007) called 'epistemic injustice' in the classroom. Fricker (2007) defined 'epistemic injustice' in two forms 'testimonial injustice' and 'hermeneutical injustice'. Testimonial injustice occurs when a prejudice (age, gender) of the speaker makes the hearer give low credibility to the speaker's view (Flicker, 2007, p.10). An example will be that children's views are mainly considered as immature or unreal by teachers because the speaker is a child. Holding this view may systematically silence children by school staff as one important prejudice is their age which create a credibility deficit for children in order to be heard and taken seriously. Hermeneutical injustice is 'the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource' (Flicker, 2007, p.155). In this view, children's ability to make sense

of their own experiences and find a deeper meaning is underestimated by teachers, so children's views on different aspects of learning and teaching are neglected as in the teacher's eyes this is irrelevant to bring into the 'real' work in the classroom (Murriss, 2013, p. 248). As one child stated to me: *'In other classes we don't think, we just write a lot. But you were encouraging us to think'*.

In short, to make pupil voice happen, an ontological and methodological paradigm shift is needed in teachers' practice to perceive educating a child as a 'co-constructive' process between teachers and pupils (Murriss, 2013). This view follows Bruner's (1997) constructivist theory of learning in which knowledge is not transferred from a 'teacher' to a 'learner', but both practising organisms play an active role in making meaning, so meaning is not transferred but produced (Bruner, 1997, p.19-20). In this view the construction of knowledge is not hierarchal or one way, but co-constructive (Biesta, 1994, p.311-312).

8.2.4 Power relationships

Lawler (2008, p.55) states that in most scenarios, 'power has conventionally been theorized as a prohibitive, denying force, working from the "top down"'. As mentioned in the literature review Foucault states that power has been exercised in two ways which he called 'juridical or law-like' or 'regulatory or normalizing' power. In addition to Foucault's view, Fricker (2007, p.14) argues that power is a 'practically socially situated capacity to control others' actions'. In her view power can be exercised either actively or passively. As explained before, adults can use their power actively to reward a child or punish her. Passive power is the belief that even if teachers do not punish or reward students their presence will have an influence on the way children behave and respond. In Iranian education both types of power have been exercised in school communities by teachers. An example of this is when Kasra in response to define a good teacher said,

A good teacher is someone who is kind and treats me well. Don't smack on my head'. And when I asked him what happened he replied while staring at my voice recorder 'today my teacher smacked my head. Miss, please don't tell anyone.

Corporal punishment has been prohibited in Iranian school since 2000, but there is still not enough evidence that all teachers follow this rule and children are not being punished physically at school by teachers all around the country. One example is the release of the report of corporal punishment at one school in Iran which resulted in death for one child who was punished by his teacher severely in 2010 (BBC, online). During the time I spent in school in Iran, there were many times that I saw pupils especially boys standing outside the classroom to get punished. Physical punishment is banned in Iranian schools but punishment in the form of yelling at children, sending them out, and insulting them in front of others may still be observed inside the primary schools. Even in my class there were a few boys who were disruptive and when I consulted the head teacher as to how to solve this problem, his suggestion was to send them outside the classroom so they learn to obey next time.

In fact, Iranian education pedagogy as explained in the literature review follows the behaviourist theory of learning developed by Skinner. In behaviourist theory, learners are seen as a 'Tabula Rasa' or 'blank slate' and their behaviour towards learning is shaped by teacher's positive or negative reinforcement and punishment. This approach is called 'operant conditioning', which implies the use of rewards or punishment in the teaching practice (Yousefi, 2010, pp.30-35). In order to keep discipline and the ethos of the class it is common to see teachers conditioning children's behaviours either by punishing them through threatening and banishing them from the classroom if they continue to distract the class. Equally they may reward them with a point cards so that they will receive a point card to get a prize if they stay quiet. In one of my boys' class the teaching assistant brought me the point

cards and asked me to give them out in order to make them quiet. I refused to use the cards, and she said *'it's up to you, but they will never stay quiet if you don't give them points'*. During the period I spent in different schools, these attitudes were more noticeable in boys' schools than girls. This is one reason that teachers were claiming that working with boys was easier than working with girls because even if they could be more disruptive, it was easier to shout at them and control them. As one of the head teacher in a boys' school told me

It's easy to shout at boys and tell them to stop being annoying; telling them you are a man, so act like a man. But with girls they are more fragile. If we shout at them they may not want to continue coming to school anymore.

As discussed previously the form of the classroom in Iran with the teacher seating at a higher level than students recalls the figure of the *Panopticon* a physical setting serving as a means of regulatory power over students. Once teachers neglect the child's view 'epistemic equality' is absent as teacher's only look for what is desirable and normal in the school ethos. A normal class was described by one head teacher:

Head teacher in Girls school: 'in our school system we consider it to be a normal class when all children are sitting quietly. When we hear children talk together, exchange ideas in groups we will give a knock on the classroom door to give notification to the classroom teacher because other teachers may complain that they need silence to teach their lessons'

In fact, *'normalizing or regulatory power'* forges soft discipline but can create anxiety (Foucault, 1980, cited in Lawler, 2008, p.58). This pressure can also be observed in the way that children express their opinions at school as either they stay quiet or they only express allowable opinions regarding the school regime even when they are actually not being watched by school staff. Anxiety and fear can affect the relationships between school staff and students as reflected in pupils' views when 77 pupils in Iranian classrooms mentioned that they would stay quiet if any issue made them unhappy at school. Also it is reflected in

teachers' view that there is a lack of trust in the school community, where one teacher said *'even if I as a teacher try to get their views still some of them may not say what they really think or may stay quiet because their families taught them not to open up at school'*. Accordingly, the feeling of fear to speak one's minds may forge 'docile' students who never challenge the information given to them or discover alternative ways of thinking and perceiving the world around them (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.16 and Murriss 2013, p.251).

This anxiety awareness is not limited to students. After I had completed my data collection in her school, one head teacher said: *'Miss Partovi, children liked you and enjoyed your sessions but I feel relieved you are leaving my school'*. Another head teacher told me that she took the risk to have me at her school and when I asked her the reason she explained as below;

The education system is so closed and centralized here. Head teachers who are willing to take risk to be innovative are really rare because you will be fired easily'

I asked her whether she as a head teacher wanted to follow different system which gives space for children to have a say. She answered:

'Yes, but the problem is children's ideas may be considered as 'taboo' in this system and even as a head teacher if I want to open up the space for them, I don't have so much power. The system is discouraging teachers from a way forward. We don't have the culture of listening to the child's views' (Head Teacher, girl school).

In fact, schools are public institutions; hence politicised and thus formal education is seen as a powerful way that state can translate its firm values into action with leaving no room for its students to have an active role in their school community. As Kelly (1995, p.xvi-xvii) states:

Totalitarian government has always placed great emphasis on the control of education, and especially of the curriculum, and have used that control to seek to ensure the production, the training, even the indoctrination of a compliant and obedient citizenry.

The above extract is a good example which reflects the extent to which the element of power can silence not only children but adults in position. Undeniably, education in Iran is centralized and according to teachers' responses, it seems that the system is also training 'docile' teachers and these teachers also practice their power to educate 'docile' students so there is a cycle of shocking ignorance in education which can result in having a mass of unreflective and egocentric people who only think black and white. This point is reflected in Ann Margaret Sharp's (2007) view when she states 'Most children are brought up with appalling arrogance. The fault is not their own but the education they had'. This statement from Sharp is about mainly American children, nevertheless my observations from Iranian classrooms support this as the system of teaching promotes a 'monological' form of communication between teacher/pupil which is concerned with only *the correct answer and* 'each pupil intervention is independent of others. Pupils find it difficult to justify their opinions' (Daniel, 2006, p.139).

8.2.5 Absence of Childlike adults?

Your class was a happy class. Other teachers are very strict. We don't even breathe in other classes. We are mainly very quiet (Hedieh-Ir)

Your sessions were different. Because we normally doing maths and literacy. In your session we do things I like (Nikita-Eng)

Authoritarian practice believes that once teachers open the space for the child to have an active role through innovative approach this is not 'real' work but 'childish' and a waste of time.

'You told stories to children and your approach is far too different from mine. Storytelling is softer and sweeter for them than me teaching them multiplication tables. I have to be strict with them most of the time' (T1).

Voice and relationships as mentioned before are closely interlinked. As the above extracts show, teachers can be amazed to discover how distant they keep themselves from their students. Some acknowledge the importance of authentic views that children can offer but the fear of losing authority interferes in building collaborative thinking space in their classrooms.

Murris (2013, p.252) explains that teacher's reluctance is 'connected to their self-identity as an epistemic authority'. In some teachers their eyes children's views are 'unusual, sweet, perhaps foolish and harmless'. Moreover, storytelling and game-like activities are possibly a waste of time. However, as one teacher who was observing my sessions also stressed the importance of the role of the stories in bringing the creative and critical voices of children.

When I told other teachers about your sessions in which you told stories to children, they said that this was a waste of time because of course children like stories just to have fun. But I told them you don't tell stories so that children are only having fun but in fact these stories indirectly encouraged them to speak their minds about different concepts. For me it was very interesting listening to these girls' views reflecting our future women's viewpoints (T4).

Children enjoyed listening to the stories and I could hear repeatedly that children like stories that contain magic. As Professor Yvonne Kelly of University College London also mentioned stories containing magical content are actually important for children's imaginative development and he argues that bringing storytelling inside the classroom can create *intimacy* and a *bonding experience* between the teacher and children (BBC, online).

Partoo said: *A good teacher is someone who is kind, and motivates children to love studying.*

Mon: What would you do to motivate children to like studying if you were a teacher?

Partoo: *I would teach them lessons but I will also play with them.*

Kimia: *'I will change teacher's uniforms. I will ask them to wear more colourful uniforms, so then they smile more'.*

The evidence in my study supports the view that these children like a childlike adult since it is not an untypical response to hear from them that they actually like the teacher who plays with them, likes colours and smiles more often. Childlike adults (not childish) can build up new forms of relationships. As Walter Kohan (Cited in Murris, 2013, p.258) comments on child educating ‘as not this (physical) child in the world, but also the child I (adult) still am’. This view is reflected in children’s view with both Iranian and English children stating:

A child knows better how to connect with children (Nahal)

It is a good thing because younger teachers and kids know more fun stuff (Alex)

When I asked them if they thought it would be a good idea to swap places with teachers some of them indicated that many adults have forgotten children’s interests are different from adults and what it means to be a child.

8.3 Challenges experienced in this research by children

8.3.1 Talking about opinions and feelings publically

Encouraging children to have a say publically can have positive effects on the concept of pupil voice. From the positive aspect, I could observe that when some children were actually expressing their views with good reasons for their statements, others children listened to their comments and they actually agreed with their views. The child who shares views feels valued for being heard by their classmates as he/she could experience the fact that others have taken her/his views seriously. At the same time children learn from each other and sharing views actually can develop ‘self-correction’. Although some of the children find publicising their thoughts challenging they also claim that they get to know their classmates thoughts and that this is interesting for them since the traditional way of teaching gives little access to children to get to know their classmate’s ideas and thoughts. One of the benefits of facilitating pupil

voice inside the classrooms is ‘a growing awareness of what is going on in the minds of other students with respect to the topic at hand’ (Splitter and Sharp, 2005, p75).

However, according to the findings, the proposed framework, expressing views publically was challenging for some and this can be explained by the way that the classroom discussion was the most enjoyable element only for a few.

<p><i>We never had this kind of sessions at school that a teacher was asking about our opinions.</i></p> <p><i>No one knew what to say’ (Hirad)</i></p>

As the above extract reveals, teachers in these Iranian classrooms do not share their power with students to foster pupil voice, so obviously children are actually unfamiliar in expressing views with reasons. In fact, authoritarian pedagogy discourages dialogue and a plurality of views from being heard in the classroom. As mentioned before, pupils in this kind of learning environment usually turn out to be obedient, holding a *pedagogic* voice whereby it is difficult for them to think for themselves or to have an independent say as someone always tells them what to say and believe. According to Gerald Adams (in Hannam et al, 2009, p.26-27) these children may develop a ‘foreclosed’ identity which makes it hard for them to question and have individual views as they conform to the existing of expectations of adults who are important to them.

In addition to this, publicising views inside the classrooms may silence some voices as not all voices hold the same power in the class. Some children are more articulate than others and capable of giving good reasons. Hence, these groups of pupils may dominate the dialogue which results in silencing other voices that are not confident enough to share views. In fact rebalancing the power relationship between me and the students was crucial in order to build

up the trust relationship as Garrison (2004 cited in Gallagher and Ntelioglou, 2013, p.106) argues that:

Instead of attempting to construct safe spaces in their classrooms, it would be better if teachers sought to grow in relationships with their students by rendering themselves vulnerable and at risk without necessarily requiring their students to do the same.

Thus it is important when fostering pupil voice to give a chance to children to be heard and seen in what Hannah Ardent called the ‘public sphere’ (Passerin d’Entrèves in Mouffe, 1992, p.146). In this space identities are unveiled and everyone can speak without the fear of being judged not only by teachers but also their classmates. They should also listen to others’ views, and welcome a diversity of opinions as well as search for areas of common agreement. In fact when the space is not ready to accept and welcome different views, frank opinions may unsettle norms and can bring discomfort and anxiety to the group (Gallagher and Ntelioglou, 2013, p.106). This is reflected in Sevda’s view, who told me she found expressing her views frankly hard.

I felt uncomfortable seeing my classmates got upset because they didn’t like my comments. I don’t like making my friends upset. I found it hard to say what I really think (Sevda)

Moreover, it was not untypical to hear from Iranian pupils that ‘Miss, it is not nice to share your feelings’. In fact, fifty six pupils told me that sharing feelings is not important and if they want to they share their views they prefer to just say their opinion without any emotional influence. In fact, there is a gap in the existing curriculum focusing on the personal, social and emotional aspects of learning as mainly hours of school days devoted in learning numeracy and science. As one teacher also said ‘(...) I have to cover twelve chapters of science and 136 pages of Mathematics plus five more subjects over the school time. The

current curriculum made it impossible for me to give them the chance to think and reflect or have a dialogue in the classes’.

Lipman (in Hannam et al, 2009, p.15) said that ‘we need to make emotions more intelligent and reasons more emotional’. In fact, reasoning with the absence of emotion can actually silence many voices in particular, feminine voices (Field, 1995). Genevieve Lloyd (cited in Field, 1995) provides a comprehensive analysis of ‘how reason has been defined by its very exclusion of women/femaleness/ the feminine’ meaning that femaleness is contract to being reasonable. An example of this is given in the literature review, women are considered as being too emotional to be considered as rational competent people who can decide, that it is fair-minded to make a judgment since reason has been defined to control emotions and passions to accomplish the ‘true’ knowledge. According to Field (1995) for women to attain ‘true’ knowledge they need to reconstruct themselves as more masculine by excluding their emotions while giving reasons.

My aim was not so much to encourage children to give ‘uncontaminated’ reason and I was trying to encourage them to experience reasoning and have a reasonable attitude towards each other. The proposed pedagogy also invited children to care for each other. This was reflected in this child’s view that she seems to compromise her views to protect her friends. Foushee et al (1979) and Hoffman (1977 cited in Jose, 1989, p.700) stressed that ‘girls and women are more strongly socialized to affectively care about others than boys and men’. Findings in this study suggest that girls seem to take a more caring attitude towards each other when speaking their views. Writings about gender and education also support this finding (see for example Nodding, 2013). However, the question remains, would not excessively compromising lead children in particular girls to lose their authenticity? This was one reason why I slightly emphasised on giving reasons, while stating statements and disagreeing with each other’s

comments to avoid excessive compromise. Although the language of reasoning is hard for children but evolving a capacity for good reasoning empowers children in such a way as to learn the necessary skills to build sound arguments to fight for what they think is right (Hannam et al, 2009, p.5). The essence of stress on reasoning and divergence is I think particularly important for girls to reconstruct the view of masculine society which stresses 'being responsible, decisive, and ambitious is for men; being caring and gentle is for women' (Hofstede, 2010, p.159).

In addition to this, disagreement requires a more democratic public space which should be a safe and non-judgmental place where children can build up a relationship of trust with each other and the teacher can express their thoughts and ideas without fear of others not only listening but understanding others views 'to see how it sits with their own way of thinking about the issue being discussed' (Hannam et al, 2009, p.7). Arendt (Passerin d'Entrèves in Mouffe, 1992, p.146-147) stressed the importance of distinguishing between the shared space itself and participants' inner personal values. Thus all attendance acknowledges that not everyone coming to this space should necessarily hold the same values as others. For this reason, I sought to encourage children to listen to each other's ideas and agree/ disagree with each other's comments without judging each other when making statements.

Furthermore, some children told me that they found it difficult to air their views because they considered that their thoughts and feelings were private.

I don't like sharing my personal thoughts in front of my classmates. My thoughts are mine. They are private (Ashkan, a boy)

I don't want to say what I think in the class. I only say to my parents (Sana, a girl)

In fact children's privacy is important and as mentioned before in this study the silence of children is accepted as their personal choice, but children's silence can also be argued in a way that in collectivist societies, children's personal identity 'I' is not distinct from their family group so publicizing the individual view seems to revealing their family's views because they always think of themselves as 'we' and the interest of the group is in their own interests (Hofstede, 2010, p.90-91).

8.4 Summary

In this chapter I have sought to focus on the salient challenges which limit voice in primary classrooms. As Kelly (1995, p.xv) states 'Democracy is an ideal construct. In its ideal form it has never existed and almost certainly never will exist'. This is not a thesis about democracy and politics intended to preach revolution. Rather it has attempted to focus on the concept of 'pupil voice' from an education lens throughout the thesis even if voice is bound to be associated with democracy. In fact, it is unrealistic to look for ideal democratic practice in an anti-democratic society such as Iran. However, it is suggested that it requires more democratic space to nurture pupil voice in terms of facilitating basic democratic principles such as individual rights to have a freedom of speech and thoughts, and detached forms of practice such as 'school council' are impractical . In fact the use of stories within a community of enquiry can create this space for public speech where pupils feel that it is fine to disagree or agree with each other's comments (Neelands, 2007). Hidden factors such as the physical setting, collectivist identity, epistemic injustice and the power inequality between individuals indirectly silence the voices of children. I have tried to address these factors and their effects on eliminating the child's voice in this chapter. I have also tried to discuss pupils' experiences of having a say publically in order to reflect on the point that facilitating the voice publically may silence some other voices and needs further consideration to

rebalance this tension inside the classrooms. Teachers need to develop relationships with pupils to create the dynamic of a public place where as Hannah Arendt (Young, 2000, cited in Gallagher & Ntelioglou, 2013, p.106) said:

The place is not a place of conversation among those who share language, assumptions and ways of looking at issues...the public consists of multiple histories and perspectives relatively unfamiliar to one another, connected yet distant and irreducible to another.

In the next chapter I will summarize my key findings to give suggestions for further study in this field.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 Summary of the key findings

In this study I have sought to reflect the voices of 9 to 10 years old primary school children in Iran and England. As discussed in chapter 2 in a collective and religious society such as Iran, concepts of ‘children’s rights’ and childhood are difficult to define. The ambiguous situation in relation to defining children and locating their rights influenced their place within the education settings. Furthermore, the dominant education system is centralized and deliberately treated as the business of the government. Thus, formal education is seen as a way that state can translate its firm values into action leaving no room for its schoolchildren to have an active role in their school community. In such a system hierarchical and power relationships can influence children’s autonomy and may only develop their pedagogic voice or literally schooled voice. Marginalising alternative voices in children such as critical and creative voices may lead to them become egocentric people and dogmatic thinkers who are not willing to see the whole picture but only think in black and white (Sharp, 2007).

Therefore, the vision of pupil voice in this research sought to listen to both the collective and individual voices of primary school children in order to nurture their creative and critical voices and limit the effect of censorship and the development of their submissive voice in them. As argued before, voice and relationships are suggested as closely interweaved. The decision of listening to collective voices of children before undertaking the interviews was made as gaining Iranian pupils’ views directly in the first place without building relationship of trust with them was likely to cause feelings of insecurity and create paradoxical experience for children.

To facilitate this vision of voices of children, this research drew on three Articles of UNCRC: Article 12 with its emphasis on children's rights to express their views, Article 3 which relates to children's interests and Article 31 with a focus on the essence of play for children (Unicef, online). Therefore, an attempt has been made to gain their views not in a mechanical way but through age appropriate interest such as stories and within game-like quality activities. Therefore to enable the classroom enquiry the discipline of community of enquiry was adopted as my pedagogical approach with the use of stories of *one thousand and one nights* as a provocative element to create many voices with multiple opinions. Within this pedagogical framework the child's voice was placed in the centre and it was aimed to encourage children to be inquiring persons with creative and critical voice to explore their own thoughts and experiences through the use of stories.

This research has suggested that children regardless of their gender and nationality enjoy listening to the selected stories of the *Nights*. This was demonstrated by their responses when 41 Iranian pupils and 31 English children told me the most enjoyable elements of the sessions was the storytelling. Children mentioned different reasons when they talked about their views on the stories. Findings suggest that the stories have the potential to invite children to think big, and ask questions that can shift between metaphysical, logical or ethical concepts. The findings of this research suggest that using stories such as the *Nights* may enable voice in four ways which I summarize below:

a) Unmasking the current needs of pupils indirectly

I argued in chapter 4 that children may have a lack of desire to talk about their conflicts and concerns openly inside the classroom. However, this study suggested that once the story gains children's attention, they begin connecting to it. Thus, stories like raw ingredients create a platform for children to present their ideas first in terms of the symbolic concepts

inside the story then in terms of more general concepts which might reflect their actual desires and deficiencies either at a classroom level or within wider society.

b) Inviting children to ‘go visiting’

Findings reveal that children are not passive listeners while they listen to the stories but they visit all the characters in an imaginative journey. Hannah Arendt called this activity ‘*going visiting*’ (Sharp, 2007). By going visiting children imaginatively enter the worlds of different people with diverse views and figure out others views. Thus, the child actively distances herself from the familiar views to uncover different and unfamiliar perspectives in order to reach equality between ‘self’ and ‘the other’ by ‘making oneself an “other” to oneself’ (Sharp, 2007). This imaginative visiting helps the child to escape narrow-mindedness and dogmatism by helping her to understand that not only characters in the story think diversely but also they feel differently from each other on occasions.

c) Offering enchantment and sense of wonder

The findings reflect the fact that the *Nights* stories produce astonishment in their listeners. Wonders open imaginative possibilities not in a direct functional way, but from a different perspective with a different logic which brings joy to children. For example for children magic is like a power to change the ordinary to the extraordinary. For example, the ‘magical lamp’ functioned as a symbolic metaphor which gripped children’s interest and led them to pause and to think for themselves, asking what they would wish for if they had a magical lamp like Aladdin. Therefore, stories in this way may help children to think more creatively for themselves.

d) Create moral dilemma to develop moral reasoning

The findings in this study suggested that stories bring a plurality of perspectives and offers moral dilemmas in relation to the stories characters. Stories such as *Nights* invite children to make choices not in a straightforward and didactic way but to present circumstances for them which perplex them. Lead them to pause, reflect and make choices between two rights which pull in different ways. Moral dilemmas created by stories can develop moral reasoning and help children to adjust and transfer moral issues to their own experiences so as to reconstruct their own meanings.

Pupils experiences of having a ‘public voice’

As mentioned in the literature review, children are ‘expert witnesses’ when asked about different aspects of their school life. Therefore, to gain children’s ‘live’ voices and experiences about my sessions I aimed to probe their experiences in-depth about the sessions they had with me. Pupils’ experiences of the sessions were positive. This was reflected in their overall feedback with 81 Iranian pupils and 41 English pupils answering yes to my question when I asked them if they liked the sessions. However, the experience of having a public voice for the majority of children was challenging. Therefore the public domain was a new experience for these children in particular for Iranian children where the system of teaching follows monologic pedagogy. Giving reasons for statements as well as welcoming diversity of ideas invites disagreement whereby children found it difficult to disagree with their classmates. In short, in particular for Iranian children sharing views and expressing feelings was challenging as opinions and feelings were shaped by their culture, considered mainly private for them.

However, the implication of public voice was considered useful in this study.as according to Hannah Arendt a ‘public sphere’ such as a classroom is a ‘space of appearance’ where all children can be seen and heard by everybody (Passerin d’Entrèves in Mouffe, 1992, p.146). Also, it is a place children can share their experiences, and identities are disclosed which make self-correction possible. In this space while maintaining their own individual identities, children begin to ‘go visiting’ different ideas in order to leave behind familiar views and welcome foreign thoughts. This imaginative travelling invites children not to blindly adopt others views but to wear spectator lens. As findings revealed that children begin making connection s with what they already know (their familiar thoughts) and new thoughts stemming from the story, each other’s comments and their individual reflections. This process involves the perplexity or ‘epistemological modesty’ which means ‘a more modest view of what we (really) know’ (Murris, 1997, p.333). Therefore the stress moves from giving only right answers and problem solving to allowing children to ask their own questions which results in as Murris (1997, p.333) suggests in ‘problem finding’ or ‘questioning of what hitherto has been taken for granted’. This is important to note, as the study tried not to underestimate the value of silence in children in order to force them to speak their minds. In fact staying quiet for children was acknowledged as their choice and their right. Essentially the acceptance of the silence of children was seen as a way to shift the power to them so they felt that staying quiet was their personal choice without feeling excluded in their class.

Moreover, the findings suggest that programmes such as school councils which seek pupils’ views in detached and general ways may only promote authoritative and consumer voices in children.This is to say that pupil voice needs to be interwoven with children’s daily classroom routine. However, voice will not happen without building reciprocal relationships

as it was found that the pupils did not have a close relationship with their classroom teacher(s) and if they wanted to talk to them, the conversation was mainly limited to asking questions about the lessons. The weakness of the relationship of trust between teachers and children was reflected in the findings where 77 out of 81 Iranian pupils said that they would not talk to their teachers about their issues at school, the majority of them said that they talked either to their family or close friends because they were closer to them and they could trust them. In fact, teachers need to develop relationships with pupils to create the dynamic of a public voice. This requires reconstructing the teacher's belief about the concept of child and childhood. Hierarchical relationships create *epistemic injustice* with prejudices such as age of the speakers lessening the credibility of their words (Flicker, 2007). Therefore, a shift in teacher's belief may result in epistemological and ontological shifts in their practice. If this happens, the public space of classrooms may shift from a place of instruction to a place where a more expansive approach of education is possible (Haynes, 2002).

Undeniably transforming traditional classrooms into a community of enquiry is not simple and in fact is a slow task. However, according to Neelands (2007, p.308) 'this space can be created and exist even in places which are not democratic, as the history of censorship demonstrates'. This space is required in places such as the Iranian classroom where the voices of children are ignored and schooled. It is even more needed to bring pupil voice inside the classrooms and create classrooms which allow children to experience and model the processes of being heard and seen (Neelands, 2007, p.308). At the beginning undeniably within this process listening to different views of oneself naturally bring feelings of discomfort in relation to which children also mentioned that it was awkward for them to disagree or to express their diverse ideas publically to others. However, the public domain provides multiple voices which in Arendt's view is useful in terms of forming a more valid

opinion for oneself by understanding how the world looks to their classmates and how he or she (the child) looks to them (Mouffe, 1992, p.163 & Sharp, 2008). Children need to practice vocalizing their thoughts to develop their tolerance for self-correction and respect for a diversity of ideas. This process also benefits teachers as well in recognizing children's lines of thoughts. One Iranian teacher shared her view:

I remember once I asked children in both boys and girls classes to imagine one day they wake up invisible. I asked them to write down what they would do. The boys' responses were full of violence; I was shocked to see how 10 years old children can be full of anger. So I think they need to express themselves otherwise they transfer this anger to society when they grow up.

Obviously this is small scale research, but it seems that employing strategies such as the use of stories within a community of enquiry to encourage pupil voice inside the classrooms may have a transformational potential to nurture children's critical voice but also their creative voice. This could happen as they start to reflect on the assumptions they make and find connections between different ideas to explore alternative views or to change views. Accordingly, a few implications have also been observed by head teachers and teachers which can add confidence to this view. For example, one head teacher told me that she observed a slight difference in disruptive children's attitude attending my sessions. One further teacher (T5) mentioned that once she changed the view of only transferring knowledge to children into a more participatory and inquiring process while teaching religious education there was a slight difference in children's engagement. Another teacher (T1) told me that she could hear children reflecting that they need to think and give reasons for their statements.

9.2 Limitations of my research

9.2.1 The pressure of time

Time spent in classrooms was limited due to the issue of accessibility. I was not able to gain permission from individual teachers for more than 6 hours to run my sessions with children. Developing inquiring minds in children to nurture their critical and creative voice, improving the culture of listening skills and tolerance for different ideas and self-correction requires a longer time and regular basis in practice to become a way of life, children come to realize that they can ‘remake their view of the world into something more reasonable, rich, textured, expressive, unique and meaningful, a work of art’ (Sharp, 2007, p.306).

9.2.2 Risks involved

This form of participative pedagogy is risky for the facilitator and requires careful consideration in terms of participants and the researcher’s safety and well-being. This is because topics of discussion are not set by the teacher beforehand and opinions are open to question. In addition to this, thinking dialogically can challenge tradition and deep-rooted ideologies because the process of thinking together allows to ‘gather up the fragments of broken traditions and old world views and reassembling them anew, imaginatively creating a new world view that all can share to some degree’ (1994 Young-Bruehl cited in Sharp, 2007, p.305). In particular in a closed society such as Iran, any discussion about religion and politics are taboo and can create tensions and contradictions for children and the classroom teacher. Controversial topics may be problematic for the teacher and may lead them to panic in terms of how to deal with these issues inside the classroom. Therefore, if these topics arise inside the classrooms the fear of potential consequences can actually limit or eliminate some voices. This was the main concern in this research which made me anxious a few times and led me either to ignore the questions or pull the discussion into a safer direction to protect the

children and myself. In addition, on occasions children started discussing too personal issues inside the classroom which made it difficult for me to make any statement on their views. For example one child started talking about her mother's anger towards her and brought family issues inside the class. On a positive note, this can explain the fact that children found the space safe and non-judgmental to open up and bring their private issue inside the public domain, but the distinction required clear principles by which children understand that sessions are not a form of therapy and thus are not designed to facilitate therapeutic voice.

9.2.3 Classroom teacher's intervention

The issue of teacher intervention which resulted in changing the dynamics of discussion was not limited to the Iranian schools. In one of the English classrooms after completing the story of the *Nights* there was a group discussion about the story and children first started talking about the King Shahriar. All the children agreed that the king was wrong; having power does not mean that he has the right to misuse it to kill everyone. When Hardy said 'I like power because I can do everything I want, in response Nikita said 'but you might hurt people's feeling'. Then children started talking about the queen and trying to understand why she did not like the king. I asked them what would make them not like others. One of the boys said 'the characteristics of the person'. Lya continues thus: 'when people get on your nerves'. At this point Ben said 'people have different colour, some people may not like them because they have different colour'. I asked him to explain his point further. At this point the classroom teacher interrupted me asking Ben 'what do you mean? You don't like people because of their colour?' The child said 'No, I didn't mean that'. Again the classroom teacher insisted that 'it sounds to me you said you don't like people with different colour', to which the child repeated 'No'. Two of the girls got involved by saying 'no he said some people don't like others because of their colour'. Children lost their motivation for further discussion

and all stayed quiet, so I had to stop my session early. Controversial topics can create anxiety for teachers and raise the question about whether teachers should challenge these views inside the classroom or resolve them in a didactic and authoritarian manner so as to reject them in the first place. This is to suggest that self-correction requires more democratic and open enquiry but children should also be aware that respect is a crucial part of this process. This is why ground rules must be established by children for classroom discussion.

9.3 Contribution of the thesis

Despite its potential limitations, the present research contributes in different ways to the education field. The existing literature shows that pupil voice has not been researched within Iranian pupils in Iran. Moreover, as discussed before, the Iranian education system mainly focuses on imparting knowledge with its emphasis on propositional knowledge. Therefore, this study is a starting point not only in terms of placing greater emphasis on listening to pupil's views and experiences, but also inviting them to escape self-censorships and narrow-mindedness. In addition to this, this thesis has aimed to present their voices alongside their English pupils' counterparts in one thesis. The inclusion of English schools aimed to deepen the researcher's understanding of the concepts as well as to better reflect my findings in Iran. Indeed, reflecting on the findings shows that despite the differences between the two education systems; the differences were not significant in terms of Iranian and English pupils' responses in this study. In fact, the lack of participatory pedagogy and the absence of child's voice in daily life of the classroom emerged in both Iranian and English cases. This view echoed in findings when they mentioned enabling a happy environment, where they can participate, listen to the stories and play games was a distinctive element of the sessions. Iranian and English pupils both claimed that opportunities for them to play an active role in their classroom and school community were limited. Indeed, school councils mentioned as

the main pupil voice strategy in these case studies was considered ineffective to represent individual pupils' views. Therefore, to evade any exclusion of views, I interviewed 81 Iranian pupils and 41 English pupils individually. The rationale for interviewing every single participant in this study was to acknowledge their unique experiences and their significance as opposed to including only a representative voice. These representative voices might be unreliable in particular where they are mainly selected by adults in order to actually mirror adults' views rather than those of the children as is shown in Iranian cases. Therefore, this study has sought to deepen an understanding of the significance of the each individual voice and the insights which might offer in the discourse of pupil voice practices. Moreover, my concluding reflections offered here are that the Community of Enquiry approach within different educational settings has the potential to provide a creative and critical voice to pupils inside the classrooms. Indeed, it can transform a classroom into a 'space of appearance' where all the children can be seen and heard (Passerin d'Entrèves in Mouffe, 1992, p.147). It is an adoptable approach which enabled pupils not only to explore multiple opinions in characters in stories, but also to become familiar with their classmates lines of thought, to embrace alternative views and to practice self-reflection by giving reasons for their assumptions.

9.4 Recommendations for further research

One Iranian head teacher during this research told me that *'research about voice and encouraging children to think for themselves only works 20 years later in this country, right now it is impractical'*. I disagree with him and would refer to Amartya Sen's point when he explained his view on a poll taken in India where male participants generally expressed dissatisfaction with their circumstances while female participants were mainly happy with their situation. As Sen explained:

The women had been trained to be uncomplaining and to think of themselves as content, but their consciousness ought to be raised so that they become aware of their insufficiencies, so as to realize their potentialities for a better life (cited in Friquengnon, 1997, p.48)

The above point can be made in respect of children's rights. Children need to be given the right to be heard and seen but in fact without passionate adult support and their profound belief that 'children are people too' the potential of pupils' voice cannot be fully realised (Fullan,1993). Therefore future research would need to explore this further. A few possible research questions might include: What proportion of teachers is aware of the existence of UNCRC and Article 12 in Iran? What are Iranian teachers' understanding of children's rights and pupil voice? What are the main underlying beliefs of teachers about children and the concept of childhood in Muslim societies? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having single-sex schools at primary level? To what extent can this separation affect children's voice and participation in their future life?

9.5 Last note: grouping of Article 12, 3 and 31 of UNCRC

One element that children in particular in Iran and even in England mentioned was the element of joy in my sessions as they repeatedly told me they liked that fact that I played with them and told them stories. A lack of play and playful pedagogy is noticeable in the current education system in Iran at the primary level and this limit the child's voice because the pedagogy used for children should intrigue their interest and not simply serve the interests of adults'. In Kohan's words educators need to prepare themselves:

to listen to a different voice—to a different form of reason, a different theory of knowledge, a different ethics amid a different politics—to a voice which has been historically silenced, due to the simple fact that it emanates from a people stigmatized through being forced into a "non-adult" social space' (Kohan, 1999, p.7).

Therefore this study suggest that Article 12 without relating to Article 3 with its emphasis on children's interests and Article 31 which stresses the importance of play for children may actually reinforce the adults voices rather than empower the voices of children. Therefore the research suggests that these three articles of the UNCRC should be considered in parallel to make children's voice happen.

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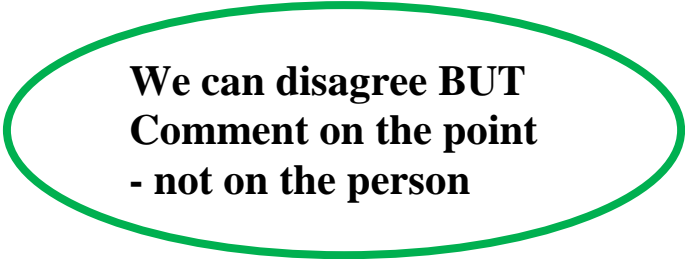
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ground Rules Poster



Only one speaks at a time



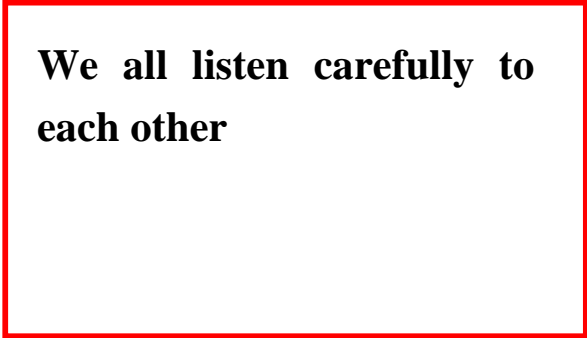
**We can disagree BUT
Comment on the point
- not on the person**



Our Rules for Dialogue



**We Give Reasons
for What We Say**



**We all listen carefully to
each other**

Appendix 2: Question Quadrant Poster

Right answer(s)

Many possible answers



Listen to the story
Answer is in the story



Listen to the story
Imagine the answer



Go and find out
Ask an expert



Inspired by the story
(Moving away from the book)



Appendix 3: Lesson Plans

SESSION ONE		
Date:	Time	Group: YEAR 5
	ACTIVITY	TIME
Introduction	<p>Tell children that they are going to warm up their brains for thinking.</p> <p>To children: In this session I am going to ask you to think hard, say what you think and give a reason and listen very carefully to each other. I will be asking you to ask questions to which there are no easy answers – no right or wrong answers.</p>	5 min
Warm-ups	Passing bean bag’ game: as active starter. They pass to each other randomly one at a time and say the name of the person they are passing to. Then repeat same order, and then repeat but backwards. The game is about taking turns, calling the name of the person they are talking to.	10 min
Stimulus	<p>Ask Children: Whilst I am telling the story, think about anything that you find puzzling or unusual in the story. What does the story make you think of? I am not looking for obvious ideas in the story. What questions would you like to ask that would be difficult to answer?</p> <p>-Start narrating: Once upon a time</p>	8 min
Thinking time	<p>Ask them to close their eyes and think about the story for a minute.</p> <p>After a few minutes take some first thoughts from groups. Perhaps scribe on board.</p> <p>Anything the story makes you think? Or think about? (Brainstorms)</p>	2 min
Explaining question making	Explain the question quadrant	10 min
Question making	<p>Groups of 3 pupils share their thoughts on the stimulus and any issues or problems it raises.</p> <p>Ask children: To formulate questions in threes at this stage (they’ve done first thoughts now). To ask any questions about the story that they think would be interesting to discuss and that don’t have an easy answer but need them to think carefully about.</p> <p>Question games: Ask children to make questions as much as</p>	10 min

	they want in their group and display their questions on the board.	
Displaying questions	<p>Talk about the questions and define their types and talk more about what we do mean by philosophical questions</p> <p>Read through the questions and ask anyone if there are any questions they don't understand. Ask if any of the questions link together or are about the same thing. Answer the closed questions and tick them and leave the open ones if there is any.</p>	10 min

SESSION 2		
Date:	Time	Group: year 5
Introduction	Ask them to sit in circle and ask each individual child to say what they remember from the previous session. What part of the story they like most or didn't like? Telling children that we are going to have some games and then storytelling time. Afterwards we are going to work on our questioning skills as we did last session We are going to work hard and warm up our brains.	5 min
Warm-ups	Ask them to stand up and stand in a line considering their heights. Then make a circle and start playing bean bag game backwards while standing. Stand up/ sit down game: Each child will stand up in turn if 2 or more people stand at the same time they all have to sit down and start again. Then try to sit down in the same way	10 min
Stimulus	Remind them the about part 1 of the story from last week. Then asking them to listen well to the rest of the story and after finishing the story we are going to work on questions making	8 min
Thinking time	Ask them to think for themselves for a minute then talk to a partner about anything they found puzzling, interesting, and curious? Is there anything they didn't understand?	2 min
Question making	Explain the question quadrant again to them and four types of questions. Summarize the questions from the last session and ask children to write on their own questions. Last week questions: some examples Child: Why did the king kill the maids and slaves? Child: What didn't the queen like about the king? Child: Why did the queen pick the slave over the king?	10 min

	Child: Why did the queen want the king to die? Child: Why did he get a girl and kill her the next morning?	
Displaying questions	Read through the questions and ask anyone if there are any questions they don't understand. Ask if any of the questions link together or are about the same thing. Answer the closed questions and tick them and leave the open ones if there is any. Display all the open-ended questions and try to make connections between them and finally the possible concepts	8 min
Question choosing	Choose one question for discussion	2 min
Making rules for Dialogue	Show them the community rules boxes	2 min
Dialogue	Start the dialogue encouraging them to use (I agree/ disagree because.....)	10 min
Evaluation	Display 3 community of enquiry building blocks: We made our own questions We connected our questions We gave reasons for our ideas using agree/ disagree	3 min
NOTES		

SESSION 4		
Date:	Group:	
	ACTIVITY	Time
Introduction	To children: In this session I am going to ask you to think hard, say what you think and give a reason and listen very carefully to each other. I will be asking you to ask questions to which there are no easy answers – no right or wrong answers.	5 min
Warm-ups	<p style="text-align: center;">What would you rather find? A magic sweetie bag that is always full A magic book that talks to you A magic carpet that can take you anywhere</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Because.....</p> <p>Place three hoops around the room with each choice and ask them to move to their preferred choice and discuss with people who have made same choice. As a class ask for reasons why from each group, then ask if anyone would like to change their mind.</p>	10min
Stimulus	<p>Talk about Scheherazade and asking them what they would remember of her from the last stories.</p> <p>Introduce the story: Does anyone know the story of ‘Aladdin and his magical lamp’? I am going to tell you the other version of the story different from the Disney one, which you may not know.</p> <p>-Ask Children: Whilst I am reading the story, think about anything that you find puzzling or unusual in the story. What does the story make you think of? I am not looking for obvious ideas in the story. What questions would you like to ask that would be difficult to answer?</p> <p>Narrate the story until the moment he found the lamp and he started changing his life.</p> <p>Tell them that I am not going to finish the story , but up to this point I would like you to close your eyes again and think about the story for a minute</p>	8 min

Thinking time	<p>Ask them to talk to a partner about anything they found puzzling, interesting, and curious? Is there anything they didn't understand?</p> <p>Anything the story makes you think? Or think about?</p> <p>(Brainstorms)</p> <p>What do like /dislike about this story? Why?</p>	5 min
Question making	<p>Groups of 4 pupils share their thoughts on the stimulus and any issues or problems it raises.</p> <p>Ask children: To formulate questions in their group at this stage (they have done first thoughts now). To ask any questions about the story that they think would be interesting to discuss and that do not have an easy answer but need them to think carefully about.</p> <p>Write down all the questions with children's names on the flip chart sheet.</p>	10 min
Displaying questions	<p>Read through the questions and ask anyone if there are any questions they do not understand. Ask if any of the questions link together or are about the same thing. Answer the closed questions and tick them and leave the open ones if there is any.</p> <p>Try to change their questions to thinking ones.</p> <p>Showing the examples from the last sessions.</p> <p>Add my own questions if needed. Example; What will the magic lamp do for Aladdin?</p> <p>What kind of person he is now with having the lamp?</p>	10 min
Choosing questions	They can vote for two questions perhaps.	2 min
Building the discussion (Dialogue)	<p>Explain the Dialogue Rules to them.</p> <p>Classroom discussion</p>	10min
Last activity	<p>Ask children to sit in a circle and give them a finger puppet of magical lamp and asking each child to talk about their wish within the classroom and say why</p> <p>'If I had a magical lamp, I would ask for.....</p> <p>Because.....</p>	5 min
Evaluation	Ask them to change places if they think they listened well, they could think of a question, they could give a reason.	1 min

SESSION 5 & 6		
Date:	Time	Group: YEAR 5
INQUIRY ELEMENT		TIME
Introduction	Tell children that in this session we are going to listen to the new story from ‘Arabian Nights’ but this time we all are getting involved and everyone has a part in the story.	5 min
Warm-ups	Introducing the characters before telling the story Share the space. Explore the space with their body. Walk through the space and change speed while walking. Count to ten and they should freeze, for the second count they must remain frozen for 10 seconds and then repeat. Ask them now to walk but this time ask them to freeze into a shape inspired by the characters of the story: the king, the queen, a bird, a tree etc.	10 min
Stimulus	Give each child a numbered card with a sentence written on it and tell them I am the narrator (Scheherazade) and we all are going to act this story out together. Work on the story until the moment in the story , invisibles enemies the voices then ask the classroom teacher to join and ask children to say something to urge him turn around. Carry on telling the story.	30 min
Thinking time	Ask them to close their eyes and think about the story for a minute. After a few minutes take some first thoughts from groups. Anything the story makes you think? Or think about? (Brainstorms)	2 min
Question making	Groups of 3 pupils share their thoughts on the stimulus and any issues or problems it raises. Ask children: To formulate questions in threes at this stage (they’ve done first thoughts now). To ask any questions about the story that they think would be interesting to discuss and that don’t have an easy answer but need them to think carefully about.	10 min

	BREAK	
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Activity	Stand up sit down- cooperative activity	10 min
Displaying questions	Read through the questions and ask anyone if there are any questions they don't understand. Ask if any of the questions link together or are about the same thing. Answer the closed questions and tick them and leave the open ones if there is any.	10 min
Voting for the question	Vote with eyes closed. They can vote for two questions perhaps.	5 min
Dialogue	Explain the Dialogue Rules to them Whole class discussion	15 min

Appendix 4

Semi-structured interview questions with pupils

Workshops

Did you enjoy the sessions?

What did you like the most?

What didn't you like?

Did you find the workshops different from what you normally do in the classroom?

Pupil Voice

Did you find it easy to talk about your opinions and feelings in the classroom?

Did you find it difficult to disagree with other people's opinions?

Do you think it is important to talk about your feelings and thoughts? Why?

What activities do you do in the school so that you can share your opinions?

Do you have school councils?

If you are unhappy about anything in the school, what do you normally do? Who do you normally go to? Do you feel you can do anything about it?

Learning

What helps you to learn best – how do you prefer to learn?

If there was one thing you could change about the way you are taught, what would it be?

Do you find your school work interesting?

Interests

What do you think you are particularly good at and why?

What are your interests / hobbies out of school?

Relationship with Teachers

Can you complete this sentence?

In my opinion a 'good teacher' is someone

who.....

If you want to say something when you feel unhappy who is the first person you go to talk to?

The teacher, friends, family

Do you think if you want to talk about your thoughts and feelings the teacher/ adult is listening to them?

Do you find it easy to talk to your teacher about your thoughts and feelings?

Critical thinking

Let's pretend **children could swap places with teachers**. Is a good/ bad thing? Not sure?

Follow up questions from workshops

Think about King Shahriar in the story, Should we always punish people if they did something wrong?

Which character or story did you like the most? Why?

Appendix 5

Semi-structured interview questions with Iranian classroom teachers

1. After observing the session, as a teacher what is your overall feedback on my sessions?
2. Did children say anything to you about my sessions and have you noticed any changes in them?
3. Have you found the workshops useful for children in terms of enabling them to think critically and basically giving them voice?
4. Would you consider applying any of the activities in your own practice?
5. Have you noticed any effects or changes on children during the time I did the workshops?
Are you going to apply 'philosophy for children' approach in your practice?
6. Do you think it is important to encourage children to express their views?
7. In which ways do you encourage pupils to talk about their opinions?
8. Do you think is it important to encourage pupils to think critically? And why?
9. In your views what are the challenges you may encounter while promoting voice?
10. How do you facilitate an inclusive learning environment?
11. What do you think about the quality of the relationship between teachers and pupils?
12. Do you feel comfortable enabling children to disagree with the statements? Or if their opinions are different from yours, how do you deal with this?

Appendix 6

Letter of Consent

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Monireh Partovi and currently I am doing my PhD at the University of Warwick. My PhD project is about 'Pupil Voice' and the aim is encouraging children that they have a voice in the class and their voice is important to be heard. I am going to conduct six workshops once a week, using stories within the 'community of enquiry' programme for the next six weeks. Following that I would like to interview the children and the classroom teacher about what they think about the workshops.

To collect my findings I would like to use a video and voice recorder during the research. All names and places will be anonymised and data will be stored and backed-up in a separate hard drive and will be password protected by myself and stored safely while conducting the research. After completing the research all the data will be destroyed in order to prevent any misuse.

I need to get parental permission for children to take part in my research, so I would be very grateful if you could please sign the slip below and return it to the school to say you are happy for your child to take part.

Yours Faithfully,

Monireh Partovi

Doctoral Researcher

Warwick Institute of Education

I, parent / carer ofin Y5 give permission for my child to take part in the research about 'Pupil Voice' conducted by Monireh Partovi for University of Warwick.

Signed.....

Date.....