



# Enhancing Reflectivity and Reflexivity Among Irish Immersion Teachers Through Action Research

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## **Abstract**

*Reflectivity and reflexivity in teacher education are considered vital processes for cultivating critical self-awareness and continuous pedagogical improvement; however, research examining these processes within immersion teacher education, both initial teacher education and continuing professional development for in-service teachers, remains limited. In the Irish context, immersion programmes aim to foster additive bilingualism through the immersion approach, wherein Irish (Gaeilge), a minority language, serves as the primary medium of instruction in the classroom. This study explores the role of reflectivity and reflexivity within an action research project involving a group of in-service Irish immersion teachers. It focuses on how the teaching and assessment of Irish grammar can be enhanced and gives central importance to the collaborative and evolving nature of the action research process. The study also examines the role of the researcher in influencing participants' development of reflective and reflexive capacities, with particular attention to how their enabling presence shapes professional learning processes.*

**Keywords:** reflectivity, reflexivity, immersion education, action research

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## **Introduction**

Reflectivity and reflexivity are central features of effective pedagogy and are seen as crucial for both professional and personal development (Evans *et al.*, 1996; Kirk *et al.*, 2006; Mordal-Moen and Green, 2014). In teacher education, reflexivity is “an internal dialogue that leads to action for transformative practices in the classroom” (Feucht *et al.*, 2017, p. 234). Teachers bring awareness and agency to the assumptions and beliefs that underlie their practice and decision-making. Reflectivity, meanwhile, is an

ongoing learning process consisting of hindsight, insight and foresight to make conscious choices about future actions (Barnett and O'Mahony, 2006). Although reflection occupies a larger space in the research literature, Bernadette Tobin *et al.* (2024, p. 110) argue that both are inherently linked, and that we must focus on reflexivity as a process “that informs the development of reflective practice”. In short, while reflexivity focuses on underlying values and beliefs, reflectivity is more focused on *future actions* based on these values and beliefs.

In many countries, reflection has become a key component of initial teacher education (ITE), with Oliver McGarr and Orla McCormack (2014, p. 267) referring to its “universal application within teacher education”. A critical component of teacher development is the capacity to reflect not only on their practice, but on their own values and experiences, all of which have an impact on their approach to teaching (Wilhelm, 2013, p. 57). Despite the emphasis on reflection in ITE, the research on reflectivity in in-service teachers is much more limited (Cirocki *et al.*, 2014; Lee and Mori, 2021; Rozimela *et al.*, 2024). As outlined in Cosán, The National Framework for Teachers' Learning (The Teaching Council, 2016), current educational policy in Ireland emphasises the centrality of reflection in the professional development of in-service teachers and the present study explores how reflective practice can be effectively supported through the implementation of an action research approach.

In action research, participants examine their educational practice carefully and systematically, using the techniques of research (Ferrance, 2000, p. 1). This is a cyclical process that requires teachers to engage *in* rather than just *with* education research (Elliott, 2001, p. 565) and in such participatory research Jarg Bergold and Stefan Thomas (2012) argue that both the researcher and the participants are reflexive beings. Not only must the participants and the researcher consider their reflexivities on an introspective individual level, but they must also be involved in a reflexive dialogue with one another throughout the lifecycle of the project (Olmos-Vega *et al.*, 2023; Smith, 1994). The researcher must maintain ongoing engagement between participants and themselves as they play a central role in developing the participants'—in this case teachers'—reflective skills (Larrivee, 2008).

The project outlined in this paper is focused on Irish immersion settings—schools where Irish serves as the primary language of instruction in the classroom—and the well-documented ‘líofa lofa’ (“fluent but flawed”) phenomenon in Irish language education (Ní Dhíorbháin and Ó Duibhir, 2016, p. 5), where students in these settings may be communicatively competent but often display poor levels of linguistic accuracy in both written and oral production. In the Irish context, immersion education refers to a form of additive bilingual education in which Irish is used as the primary medium of instruction across the curriculum. Such settings require particular skills and competencies, among them the need for teacher reflectivity (Cammarata and Ó Ceallaigh, 2020; Mac Corraidh, 2021; Nig Uidhir and Ó Ceallaigh, 2023). In fact, it could be argued that reflectivity and reflexivity may play an even more significant role in Irish immersion settings, as language ideology and issues of identity come into play (Clark *et al.*, 2014). Despite this, little research on reflection has been conducted in the area.

Considering this gap in the literature and building on the argument that action research is inherently a reflective process, this paper will investigate its impact on the development of reflective and reflexive skills among Irish immersion teachers, with particular attention to the role of the researcher within this process. Consequently, the primary research questions are:

1. How can action research enhance reflectivity and reflexivity among Irish immersion teachers?
2. What is the role of the researcher in enhancing Irish immersion teachers’ reflective and reflexive practice?

As part of the author’s ongoing PhD research on the topic of Irish grammar pedagogy in Immersion settings, teachers in four Irish-immersion primary schools (Gaelscoileanna) were asked to implement a framework for context-based grammar instruction, continually reflecting on all elements of their practice and the beliefs underpinning them. Both the participating teachers and the researcher engaged in continuous self-assessment through structured engagement in interviews, focus groups and workshops alongside the systematic documentation of their reflections in reflective journals.

In this article, the existing literature is reviewed, the role of action research in teacher development is explored and the particular challenges

of the immersion context are considered. The methodology of the project is outlined and the early findings of the ongoing data collection are discussed before their potential implications are examined.

## **Literature Review**

The following section explores a selection of relevant existing literature in the area on reflectivity, reflexivity and action research, as well as reflectivity and reflexivity in pre- and in-service teachers and the specifics of the Irish immersion context.

### ***Reflexivity***

Various descriptions of reflexivity have been offered by researchers, with much of the literature focused on researcher reflexivity (Dodgson, 2019; Olmos-Vega *et al.*, 2023; Watt, 2007). Julie Byrd Clark (2012) understands reflexivity to represent criticality and awareness in action, while Charlotte Aull Davies (2012, p. 4) considers it to be a process of self-reference, a “turning onto oneself”. For Bryony Hoskins and Momodou Sallah (2011, p. 114), honesty and introspection are key elements that require “critical thinking towards your own beliefs and actions towards others”. In teacher education, the importance of reflexivity may lie within its ability to facilitate pre- and in-service teachers as they draw upon internalised attitudes and beliefs to facilitate change in their practice (Lamb and Aldous, 2016).

For the purposes of this article, reflexivity can perhaps be best understood through the simple explanation given by Tobin *et al.* (2024, p. 12) in a reflective diary written by the researcher, as she describes reflexive practice to mean “we question why we do what we do ... to ensure that our actions are consistent with our values”. Throughout the present action research project, teachers are encouraged to consider not just what they are doing, but *why* they are doing it. In this way they may be better able to reflect on their underlying values and consider their impact on practice—both current and future—as reflexivity is harnessed to promote deep professional learning and create sustainable changes in education (Feucht *et al.*, 2017).

### ***Reflectivity***

In education, the notion of reflective practice and subsequent action have been cornerstones in both ITE and professional development for decades (Dewey, 2008; Feucht, 2010; Schön, 1987). Despite this, some researchers argue that the nature and concepts of reflective practice remain poorly defined (Bell *et al.*, 2011). In the context of this research, reflection is viewed as “a process focused on positive, purposeful action that improves professional practice” (Day *et al.*, 2022, p. 437).

Many scholars point to different levels of reflectivity, from surface level descriptive reflection to deep, critical reflection. Reynolds (1997, p. 314) suggests that surface-level reflection is “concerned with practical questions about what courses of action can best lead to the achievement of goals or solutions” while deeper, critical reflection:

involves engaging with individual, organisational or social problems with the aim of changing the conditions which give rise to them, as well as providing the basis for personal change. (Reynolds, 1997, p. 314)

Reflection could therefore be viewed as existing on a spectrum, with one end addressing functional issues related to practice, and the other focused on more critical insights into practice and the individual, organisational and social issues surrounding it (McGarr and McCormack, 2014).

### ***Pre- and In-Service Teachers***

The centrality of reflection and reflective practice in ITE demonstrate its importance, as it is considered to be ‘worth the effort’ (Grigg and Lewis, 2017; Calderhead, 1996; Griffiths, 2000; Macdonald and Tinning, 2003). However, one of the biggest challenges facing teacher educators appears to be engaging ITE students and in-service teachers in deep, critical reflection, as many point to low-level, descriptive reflection from pre-service and in-service teachers (Boulton and Hramiak, 2012; El-Dib, 2007). When researching the engagement of both groups in reflective practice, Judith Harford and Gerry MacRuairc (2008, p. 508) found “transient form of reflection rather than evidence of critical reflection”. Barbara Larrivee (2008) argues that most teachers, pre- and in-service, are unable to effectively engage in pedagogical or critical reflection to improve their

practice without carefully constructed guidance. This highlights the role of the researcher in enhancing teachers' reflective abilities, as they are responsible for the level and quality of guidance provided. Diarmuid Leonard and Jim Gleeson (1999) in the context of ITE, advocate for:

firm support in the forms of advance preparation, [...] manageable mix of teaching periods and time for reflection, and reflective supervision, all integrated into a coherent programme designed to help create a protected and supportive environment. (Leonard and Gleeson, 1999, p. 62)

Research by Katrin Poom-Valickis and Samuel Mathews (2013) found that this goes beyond merely providing participants with structured lesson reflection templates to complete, as such an approach did not guarantee critical reflection—most accounts were still categorised as descriptive. A significant challenge, therefore, involves facilitating teachers as they develop *critical* reflective skills. The emerging consensus is that interventions must be multifaceted and strategically constructed to create authentic dialogue (Dobbins, 1996; Spalding and Wilson, 2002; Thorpe, 2004; Trotman and Kerr, 2001). For many researchers, the idea of individualistic reflective practice is outdated, with calls for more collaborative approaches to reflection (Lin *et al.*, 2014). Linda Finlay (2008, p. 7) suggests that placing the onus on individual teachers to engage in reflective practice without meaningful collaboration is a significant weakness. It has been suggested that this could take many forms: using web blogs (Xie *et al.*, 2010), online communities of practice (Daniel *et al.*, 2013) and peer review (Lamb *et al.*, 2012).

Some consider the social aspect of reflection essential, as it can be significantly promoted through interaction with others (Christ *et al.*, 2014; Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005). Harrison (2002, p. 257) views talking with others as a “valuable professional activity”, a stance also taken in the Teaching Council of Ireland’s Cosán framework, as they suggest that “all teachers are entitled to dedicated space and time for individual and collaborative learning and reflection” (The Teaching Council, 2016, p. 8). For this reason, it appears that the researcher’s role in enhancing teachers’ reflectivity extends beyond simply providing individualistic activities to creating active, engaging communities of learning, where teachers have the opportunity to reflect collaboratively.

### ***Irish Immersion Context***

The Teaching Council of Ireland gives centrality to reflection in Cosán, which states that:

Reflective processes will also facilitate teachers in considering the complex ways in which their learning can benefit their students (not just in terms of student learning outcomes, but more broadly in terms of their levels of motivation, interest, engagement, and enjoyment, etc.), school culture, and the wider school community. (The Teaching Council, 2016, p. 10)

In the Irish immersion context, ‘Core Competencies in Irish-Medium Education’, a recently published framework for learning and professional development for practitioners, again highlights the importance of reflective practice, as the framework is described as a resource to “support professional reflection and improvement of practice in Irish-medium education” (Nig Uidhir and Ó Ceallaigh, 2023, p. 6).

In the present study, the particular area of practice addressed is Irish immersion students’ grammatical accuracy. Longitudinal studies highlight that students’ Irish language production skills often fall short of linguistic norms, particularly in grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity, complexity and sociolinguistic appropriateness (Walsh, 2007; Ó Duibhir, 2018), the previously noted ‘lófa lofa’ phenomenon (Walsh, 2007). A significant challenge in immersion education is balancing content and language instruction, with a growing body of recent studies showing that teachers in immersion settings find it difficult to attend to both content and language simultaneously (Tedick and Lyster, 2019; Tedick and Zilmer, 2018; Ó Ceallaigh *et al.*, 2017; Cammarata and Tedick, 2012). Research by Aisling Ní Dhíorbháin and Pádraig Ó Duibhir (2016; 2022) shows that in the Irish immersion context, teachers’ beliefs about the importance of grammatical accuracy do not always align with their practice, while a study carried out in Finnish immersion settings shows similar conflict between beliefs and practices, with less than half of participating immersion teachers explicitly teaching grammar despite placing a high value on its importance (Nyqvist *et al.*, 2025, p. 182).

### ***Action Research***

The term ‘action research’ was first coined by Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) in the 1940s to describe work that did not separate investigations from the actions needed to solve an identified problem, and in the context of education, encourages teachers to become continuous learners within their classrooms and schools as they engage in a cyclical process reflection and action (Elliott, 2001; Mills, 2003). Stephen Kemmis (2009, p. 463) describes it as a way of working that “changes people’s practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice”.

Perhaps the most important aspect of action research is that practitioner research requires participants to engage with knowledge that is both theoretical and practical (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2006). This necessitates critical reflection on theory and practice but also insists upon ongoing and evolving action as a key part of the process (McAteer, 2013). Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (2002) describe a graphical representation of this process as a spiral increasing in diameter and giving rise to other spirals along the way, recognising the ever-evolving nature of the process.

This cyclical nature of action research aligns neatly with Cosán’s statement that “cycles of planning, evidence gathering, reflection and ongoing learning are career-long processes” (The Teaching Council, 2016, p. 21). Hicks (2005, p. 205) further emphasises the importance of the process as he states that “the point of the journey is not necessarily to arrive, but to make the most of getting there”.

Action research supports the development of reflective practice in many ways, as it requires regular critical reflection and collaboration with the aim of transforming practice. In fact, Mary McAteer (2013, p. 2) posits that “all models of action research are deeply rooted in the notion of reflection”, while Jan Robertson (2000) also suggests that reflexivity is integral to an action research process. Teachers’ reflections, which may relate directly to the practice itself or to the deeper experiences and values they have, are ongoing and guide the next cycle of each project with the aim of continuously fostering learning and improvement.

A significant challenge in such a process is the need for both researcher and participant to remain open to feedback and responsive to emerging

needs that may relate to pedagogy or broader issues. It is arguably the responsibility of the researcher to support participants wherever possible, a role that requires reflection and reflexivity on the researcher's part as their own assumptions and perspectives may be challenged. Providing participants with a platform to air their thoughts, opinions, experiences and concerns is a necessary element of action research (Wellington, 2015) and may also bring to light issues not considered by the researcher, such as challenges related to teacher confidence and knowledge. When engaging in reflective practice it is vital that teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on and share both positive and negative experiences. Michael Thomas and Katrina Liu (2012, p. 305) found that pre-service teachers sometimes use online reflections as an opportunity to showcase or "sunshine" their practice by using particular buzzwords, down-playing negative experiences and shifting the blame for problems and responsibilities to others. Oliver McGarr and Anne Berit Emstad (2022) caution those working with pre- and in-service teachers to be aware of the potential for reflection to become a form of self-monitoring and mitigate this through emphasising authentic reflection as a means for learning.

Informed by the theoretical foundations discussed in this section, the following section details the research design and methods employed in the broader research project.

## **Methodology**

This section outlines the methodological approach adopted to address the research questions formulated in the introduction. It describes the research design, participants and data collection procedures, as well as the analytical framework employed. The methodology was selected to ensure both the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, while also remaining responsive to the study's contextual and pedagogical setting.

An action research approach was chosen to investigate the potential of a context-based framework for teaching and assessing Irish grammar in Irish-medium schools to improve grammatical accuracy. It is an approach that emphasises ongoing collaboration, communication and feedback throughout each cycle of the project, something that requires reflexivity from all those involved as they continually reflect on the values, beliefs and experiences that underpin their engagement with the process.

As action research stresses the centrality of practice, practitioners can feel empowered and hopefully avoid the ‘Moses Effect’—a phenomenon described by Johnson (2008, p. 20) as a one-way flow of information from researcher to teacher, which disregards teachers’ values, their opinions and the problems they face daily. As reflectivity and reflexivity are core elements of action research, it is crucial that teachers’ values, experiences and beliefs are not only included but examined and understood as the basis for practice.

As a result, this research is situated within the socio-constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm assumes that knowledge is co-constructed by all of those involved in the process (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Punch, 2009). Socio-constructivism moves a step beyond this and acknowledges the active role of the researcher in discovering and constructing meaning and understanding (Kim, 2014). The researcher is, in many ways, a “passionate participant” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 112) who uses their own values and assumptions to guide the process.

### ***Project Framework***

The framework designed for this project aims to address the earlier discussed issues of grammatical inaccuracy through a focus on the ‘Contextualisation, Awareness, Practice, Autonomy’ (CAPA) model (Tedick and Lyster, 2019) and an explicit-inductive approach (Ní Dhíorbháin and Ó Duibhir, 2016). The CAPA model centres on teaching target language features in-context, providing opportunities for learners to develop their own awareness and understanding of these features, and facilitating output of these features through regular practice. It is broken into four steps: Contextualisation, Awareness, Practice and Autonomy (See Table 1). Initially, participants used a history lesson of their choosing to provide the context for the introduction of the target language feature, with teachers encouraged to choose history lessons and language features that were appropriate for their unique context. These choices were guided by the curricular content and learning objectives set out by The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the state body responsible for curriculum development and assessment in the Republic of Ireland. In this way, students learned grammar in context rather than

isolated grammar lessons and were actively engaged in identifying grammar rules associated with target features.

<b>Contextualisation</b>	Students were introduced to the target grammar feature in the context of another subject (history). Enhanced input (Lyster <i>et al.</i> , 1997) was used to draw learners' attention to the target feature.
<b>Awareness</b>	Students' awareness of the target feature was raised, and they adopted an explicit-inductive approach where associated rules were discussed and identified collaboratively. Students were encouraged to devise a song, rap or rhyme to commit the identified rules to memory and create an effective recall cue (Setia <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Wallace, 1994).
<b>Practice</b>	Students were given opportunities to produce the target feature in context, both in oral and written form.
<b>Autonomy</b>	Students were facilitated in using the target feature more autonomously throughout the school day.

**Table 1: Project Framework Utilising Tedick and Lyster's (2019) CAPA Model**

### ***Participants***

Participants were selected using purposive sampling methods due to the nature of the research study. Teachers were selected from Gaelscoileanna within a certain geographic area. This area was chosen for logistical reasons, as participants were required to travel to attend a series of workshops. Direct contact was made with the schools to invite principals and teachers working in the senior classes (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> class)<sup>1</sup> to take part in the study. Information about the research, including its aims and ethical considerations, was shared and participation was entirely voluntary. As such, the sample was self-selecting; only those who chose to engage with the study following the invitation were included. A mix of urban, rural, DEIS<sup>2</sup> and non-DEIS schools were sought to ensure the participants reflect the diverse nature of the education system within Ireland. Unfortunately, due to the geographic constraints and the low number of rural Gaelscoileanna in the region, only urban schools participated in the study. The table below (Table 2) outlines the details of those who participated in the study.

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<sup>1</sup> Students typically aged 10–12 years.

<sup>2</sup> DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is an Irish national policy framework that provides additional supports to schools serving communities with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Participant Codes	Years of Teaching Experience	Years Teaching in 5 <sup>th</sup> /6 <sup>th</sup> Class in a Gaelscoil	Class Level	Sex	School Context	Participants' First Language
M1	19	3	5 <sup>th</sup> class	F	Urban non-DEIS	Irish
M2	15	8	5 <sup>th</sup> class	M	Urban non-DEIS	Irish
M3	7	3	6 <sup>th</sup> class	F	Urban non-DEIS	English
M4	5	2	6 <sup>th</sup> class	F	Urban non-DEIS	English
B1	8	8	5 <sup>th</sup> class	M	Urban non-DEIS	English
B2	19	2	6 <sup>th</sup> class	M	Urban non-DEIS	English
R1	8	4	6 <sup>th</sup> class	M	Urban non-DEIS	English
MN1	13	9	6 <sup>th</sup> class	F	Urban DEIS	English

**Table 2: Overview of Study Participants**

### *Data Collection*

The data collection phase of the project was carried out over the course of nine months, from September 2024 to May 2025, and comprised two cycles of intervention and reflection. Data were collected in the form of interviews, focus groups, reflective journals, lesson observations and workshops, and data collection was ongoing at the time of writing this article. A wide range of data collection methods were employed to capture a more complete picture of teachers' progress and to facilitate critical reflection through a multifaceted approach (Dobbins, 1996; Spalding and Wilson, 2002; Thorpe, 2004; Trotman and Kerr, 2001). Employing a diverse range of methods also allowed teachers to engage in both individual and collaborative reflections. Cosán outlines the importance of engaging in

both, with Charlotte Danielson (2015) arguing that the value of collaborative reflection lies in

The role of the other [...] in professional conversations is critical; they supply the mirror, the sounding board, the sympathetic (and indeed sometimes challenging voice). (Danielson, 2015, p. 5)

The data collection process is outlined in Appendix A. Data collection was conducted through the medium of Irish, and all participant quotations presented in this paper have been translated into English by the author.

### ***Analysis***

At the time of writing, the final interviews had not been conducted and reflective journals not completed. As a result, the analysis described here relates to data gathered during the initial and middle stages of the project.

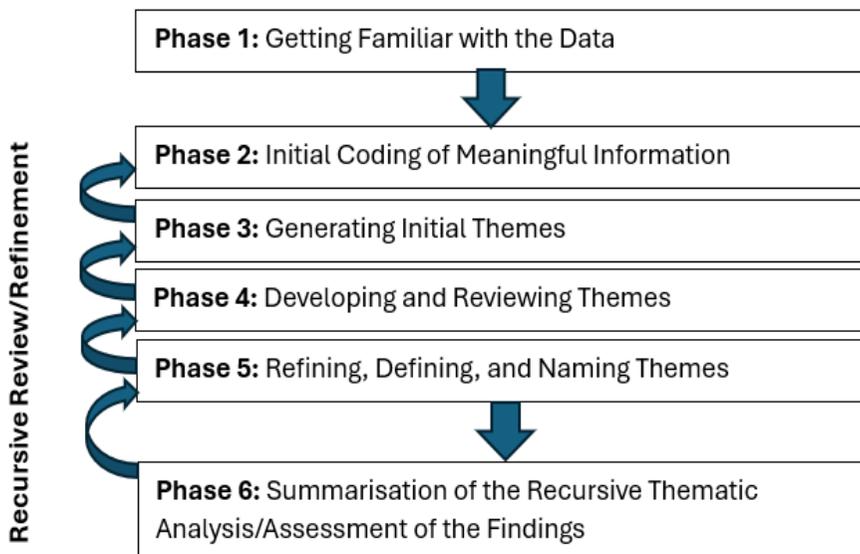
Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was used to analyse the collected data, as it considers the researcher's active role in producing knowledge (Anzul *et al.*, 2003). This aspect of RTA aligns with the socio-constructivist paradigm of this research, and the active role of the researcher. RTA focuses on "the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (Braun *et al.*, 2019, p. 594). In a somewhat similar manner to action research itself, RTA is an evolving process, with the coding process considered to be flexible and organic. This contrasts with traditional Thematic Analysis (TA) which relies on the "emergence" of themes. Rubin and Rubin (2011, p. 226) suggest that during analysis, you "discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews" and while it is true that themes became apparent during the course of the analysis, such an outlook implies passivity in the analytical process. Some researchers argue against the notion that:

themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them. (Ely *et al.*, 1997, p. 205)

In carrying out the analysis, the six phases laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006) were adhered to. Figure 1 (Vargis, 2023) demonstrates the recursive approach required when carrying out RTA.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Before the commencement of this project, ethical approval was obtained. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the outset of the project and all data collected were pseudonymised so that neither schools nor participants could be identified.



**Figure 1: Overview of Braun and Clarke's (2006) Reflexive Thematic Analysis Process**

### *Researcher Positionality*

It is important to note that the researcher of this project has a background as a teacher in an Irish immersion setting. This is unsurprising, especially when one considers, as Uwe Flick (2022, p. 106) notes, that research

questions usually arise from “the researchers’ personal biographies and their social contexts”. The lens through which a researcher views the world typically shapes their study, from the initial question to the research design and final analysis. The importance of researcher reflexivity cannot be understated, as they must constantly challenge their assumptions and values and consider how they impact on decision making at each step of the process. A journal was maintained by the researcher throughout the process to capture their evolving understanding of the project and their own views as the research progressed.

## Findings

### *Evolution of Reflectivity and Reflexivity Over Time*

At the outset of the project, teachers’ reflections appeared to be mostly descriptive and surface level, with a focus on the procedural aspects of the intervention. The interview questions and journal prompts at this stage were largely centred on the practicalities of the approach—what lessons they had taught, the challenges teachers had encountered and what success they had experienced. Although these prompts were effective in encouraging teachers to reflect, the focus was on specific practical actions to be taken and rarely facilitated critical reflection. These procedural questions elicited responses that tended to relate more to pragmatic issues such as time management and access to resources, rather than deeper issues related to values and beliefs. However, in many instances, it led to an increased awareness of their practice as teachers began reflecting on the efficacy of their approaches. For example, some participants made the following remarks:

*“I’m photocopying pages here and there so it’s very mixed up to be honest. As I’m saying it out loud it’s not great really at all”.*  
(Participant B2: Interview #1)

*“I feel as I’m talking now, I’m throwing things at them, sort of throwing things in front of them, and what’s the right structure?”*  
(Participant B1: Interview #1)

As teachers became more aware of their particular practices, they also began to reflect on the *why* behind them. For many, they referenced their own perceived weakness in both language and pedagogical knowledge as primary drivers of textbook-reliance and ‘old-fashioned’ teaching methods.

*“I suppose I don’t know how to make grammar and learning grammar fun”*. (Participant R1: Interview #1)

*“Another challenge for me, my own grammar isn’t great at all, like, I have to admit that”*. (Participant B2: Interview #1)

*“I don’t put the lesson together, I wouldn’t have the confidence to put a lesson like that together myself”*. (Participant M3: Interview #1)

Through these reflections teachers began to identify knowledge deficits and although these reflections were not fully reflexive, they did show an emerging awareness of the link between self-knowledge and professional action.

This increased awareness related not only to their own personal practice, but to the Irish immersion context and the unique learning opportunities it affords. While the project was initially centred on history lessons chosen by the teacher as the primary context for integrating grammar instruction, as the study progressed and teachers became familiar with the framework there was a clear evolution in understanding. For some teachers this understanding was demonstrated by overt questioning as they reflected on the approach and considered opportunities in other subject areas:

*“Can we move outside of the history lesson? Because there are lots of things like science that would maybe be good for the imperative, following steps [...]”*. (Participant M2: Informal check-in)

For others, the shift in understanding was more subconscious as they recognised opportunities to integrate grammar into other subject areas only as they arose:

*“I wasn’t planning on doing a lesson on the present tense but in the explanation in the book it said to always use the briathar saor*

*[autonomous verb] in the present tense, so then it's like, I'll use some of the stuff that you had done. It wasn't my plan but I saw that there was a chance there to do it". (Participant B1: Focus Group B)*

These evolving perspectives highlight the value of reflective practice in broadening instructional strategies, as teachers began to recognise the ubiquity of grammar teaching opportunities across the curriculum in Irish immersion settings.

It may be the case that the ongoing, cyclical nature of action research has the capacity to develop reflectivity and reflexivity over time as teachers are engaged in an iterative process rather than isolated activities.

### ***Collaboration as a Catalyst for Reflectivity and Reflexivity***

Although much of the reflection that took place during the study was on an individual basis, teachers appeared to place a high value on collaboration. What is notable is that instances of collaboration such as workshops and focus groups often prompted spontaneous reflection. From the outset, teachers cited the importance of collaborating with others and being given opportunities to share resources and knowledge.

*"It will be beneficial, even this project, that we'll be able to come together and say well like, what's the goal that we have as teachers in the senior classes, what's the best way to go about it, because we don't usually have the opportunity, so this is brilliant". (Participant M3: Interview #1)*

One teacher spoke about the value of this opportunity to collaborate as being a success of the project before it even began:

*"Even to be thinking about things like that and to be talking to other people about it as well. That's already worthwhile to begin with". (Participant R1: Interview #1)*

The suggestion that authentic dialogue with other teachers prompts active thinking and encourages them to consider their goals and approaches highlights the importance of collaboration, and although they did not explicitly label these discussions as reflective, the accounts of joint

planning, problem-solving and informal debriefs clearly embodied reflective practice. This aligns with Cosán's stance on the importance of collaborative learning and reflection (The Teaching Council, 2016) and further supports Harrison's (2002, p. 257) view of talking with others as a "valuable professional activity". As teachers considered their decisions, challenges, success and alternative approaches through these interactions, they were able to gain an insight into the broader implications of their practice. This, in turn, reinforced reflectivity and in some cases, early-stage reflexivity as teachers considered their own beliefs and values in relation to the teaching of Irish grammar. This finding suggests that collaboration could be a catalyst for the development of reflectivity and reflexivity and may be a powerful inclusion in action research projects.

### ***Role of the Researcher***

The previous findings highlight the importance of providing teachers with ample opportunities to reflect and consider the values and beliefs that underpin their practice. It appears then that the role of the researcher in action research projects may be significant, as they are responsible for the provision of both the individual activities for reflection and the creation of opportunities for active collaborative reflection.

At the outset of the project, teachers' reflections were largely focused on the practicalities of their approach with little evidence of reflexivity. Although some critical reflection occurred spontaneously during dialogue, it appears that the focus on procedural aspects of practice could be, in part, attributed to the prompts provided by the researcher. Larrivee (2008) argues that:

without carefully constructed guidance, prospective and novice, as well as more experienced, teachers seem unable to engage in pedagogical and critical reflection to enhance their practice. (Larrivee, 2008, p. 345)

The critical reflection referred to here may be achieved through providing more probing questions, as outlined in the below table (Table 3), where participants are asked to consider not just the 'what' and the 'how', but also the 'why' behind their beliefs and decision making.

<p><b>Prompts for descriptive reflection</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What kind of approach do you use when teaching Irish grammar?</li> <li>● In your opinion, what are the primary challenges to effective grammar instruction?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Prompts for critical reflection</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Do you think the way you think about Irish grammar and grammar lessons has changed? Why?</li> <li>● Do you think what and how you are teaching has changed? Why has this change occurred?</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Sample Prompts for Descriptive and Critical Reflection**

As the data from the initial stages of the project was analysed, it became clear that more opportunities for critical reflection were needed by the teachers to enable them to move beyond procedural descriptions. This related not just to the prompts themselves, but to the type of reflective activity. Employing a range of tasks that encompassed both individual and collaborative activities provided opportunities for the teachers to reflect in different ways, thus providing more chances for their reflective and reflexive skills to develop.

As with the participants, the researcher must also engage in constant reflection and continue to question their positionality. Since it appears that the researcher in such a project can play a significant role in teachers' enhancement of reflectivity and reflexivity, they must remain open to adjustments and engage in ongoing analysis. In this study, the continuous engagement with the teachers and the data led to adaptations in Cycle 2 which were able to further enhance the teachers' reflective and reflexive skills. The following extract from the researcher's journal shows the importance of ongoing reflection:

*"I don't know if I'm giving them enough opportunities to reflect at the deepest level [...] This is something I have become aware of and something that I need to address. I suspect the fact that I have never really learned how to effectively reflect contributes to*

*this, but I want my research to be more than just answering simple and mid-level questions. I want the teachers to really think about what they're doing beyond the pragmatics of day-to-day life in the classroom". (Researcher, Journal entry, 6 March 25)*

As previously stated, the final interviews and journals have yet to be conducted, however the evidence from the existing data suggests a trajectory toward deeper, more reflexive engagement over time. It could be argued that this is, in part, due to the adaptations made by the researcher as a result of ongoing reflection during the project.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

This paper set out to explore the potential for action research to enhance Irish immersion teachers' reflectivity and reflexivity and examine the role of the researcher in this process. The summary of key findings below is based on the data gathered to date and will be further explored and clarified once the remaining data is collected and analysed. The tentative findings at present can be summarised as follows:

1. Teachers' initial reflections were largely surface-level and descriptive with a focus on the procedural aspects of implementing the framework. Over the course of the project (to date), teachers developed a greater awareness of their practice and the existence of knowledge deficits in relation to the teaching of Irish grammar, as well as exhibiting a deepening understanding of the unique opportunities inherent in Irish immersion settings. Although the final set of interviews is yet to be concluded, the data collected to date appears to show a clear evolution of teachers' reflective and reflexive skills as they began to consider the practical challenges of Irish grammar instruction, their existing practices and the personal values and beliefs underpinning them. At present, it appears the sustained and iterative reflective engagement inherent to an action research approach may play a significant role in facilitating this evolution over time.
2. Collaboration with other teachers was seen as a valuable professional activity and early indications suggest that it may have the potential to act as a catalyst for the development of reflectivity and reflexivity in Irish immersion teachers. Communicating with others (other participating teachers and the researcher) throughout the project

encouraged teachers to consider their decisions, possible alternative approaches and ultimately gain an insight into the broader implications of their practice. Action research is a process that emphasises ongoing collaboration, communication and feedback throughout each cycle of the project, so that any necessary adjustments to the research can be made. This requires reflexivity from all those involved as they continually reflect on their practice, experiences and beliefs, underscoring the capacity of action research to strengthen and sustain teachers' reflective and reflexive engagement with their work.

3. The data gathered to date suggests that the researcher may play an important role in supporting the development of teachers' reflective and reflexive capacities. Preliminary findings appear to show that the type and quality of prompts may influence the depth of engagement, with more probing questions potentially encouraging richer reflection and the emergence of reflexivity. Likewise, the ways in which opportunities for both individual and collaborative reflection are structured seem to shape outcomes, implying that the researcher may hold considerable responsibility in facilitating these processes.

The first research question focused on the ability of action research to enhance reflectivity and reflexivity in Irish immersion teachers, and based on the data gathered to date, it appears that its ongoing, cyclical nature is conducive to the evolution of reflective skills over time. It may be the case, as the early findings of this research suggest, that the development of such skills follows a trajectory from more surface-level, descriptive reflections to deeper, more critical reflections over time. Due to logistical constraints, this study consisted of just two cycles, however it is possible that additional cycles could be beneficial in allowing even more time and opportunity for the skills to develop.

The early findings in this study also highlight the importance of teachers' engagement in both individual and collaborative reflection. Although teachers were engaged in regular individual reflection, it appears that engaging in authentic dialogue with others, both the researcher and other teachers, also provided an opportunity for meaningful reflection. This supports claims that interventions to promote reflection must be multifaceted and strategically constructed (Dobbins, 1996; Spalding and Wilson, 2002; Thorpe, 2004; Trotman and Kerr, 2001), while also

underscoring the importance of the social aspect of reflection (Christ *et al.*, 2014; Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005).

Although enhancing reflectivity and reflexivity may benefit teachers in all settings, this research highlights its potential to address challenging areas of instruction particular to the Irish immersion context. As teachers grapple with the 'lófa lofa' issue, it appears a move away from isolated grammar lessons to grammar-in-context may be beneficial. This move, however, requires a shift in understanding as teachers transition from traditional approaches where grammar is taught in isolation, towards a more integrative approach. Regular reflection on the efficacy of their practices (both existing and new) facilitated a deepening understanding among teachers of the unique opportunities provided by an Irish immersion setting. This is crucial, as it appears a lack of reflection may limit problematising and so affect teachers' ability to change their practice, in this instance in relation to teaching Irish grammar. It was only when they were asked to reflect that teachers appeared to begin questioning their practices and the beliefs underlying them.

The second research question focused on the role of the researcher in enhancing teachers' reflective and reflexive skills, and based on the current data, it appears that the researcher plays a significant role in supporting this development. This tentative finding is important as it would suggest that the evolution of teachers' skills may depend, at least in part, on the researchers' ability to provide adequate prompts and opportunities for reflection. To this end, the provision of specific training for researchers operating in this area may be beneficial. This could include guidance on how to construct effective prompts that support teachers as they reflect on procedures, their practices and their beliefs as well as information on the provision of various individual and collaborative reflective activities. Although action research emphasises the co-construction of knowledge, the current findings suggest that much of the reflection is guided by the researcher. In order to facilitate high-quality, effective reflection among participants, the researcher must maintain an awareness of their own positionality and show a willingness to engage in ongoing reflection themselves.

Considering these findings, future research should aim to expand opportunities for teachers to engage in action research as it may have the

potential to enhance their reflective and reflexive practices through individual and collaborative reflection. This need is particularly pressing within the Irish immersion context, as the unique challenges and opportunities inherent in such settings must be explored. As a core element of this, comprehensive training must be provided for researchers to equip them with the essential skills necessary to effectively facilitate teachers' professional growth through reflective methodologies. By addressing these areas, the educational community can promote a more robust culture of continuous improvement and transformative practice.

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## Appendix A

Appendix A provides an overview of the data collected at the time of writing. As the data collection process was still ongoing, the table summarises only the activities conducted to that point.

Month	Data Collection Method	Outline	Reflection Type
<b><u>Cycle 1</u></b>			
Sept. 2024	<i>Interview 1</i>	Teachers were individually interviewed to ascertain their current practices and attitudes to grammar instruction .	Collaborative
Sept. 2024	<i>Workshop 1</i>	Teachers attended an in-person workshop where the framework was introduced. Once familiar with it, they worked in groups to design lessons implementing it, reflecting on the perceived possibilities and barriers as well as their own practice.	Collaborative
Sept. 2024	<i>Reflective Journal 1</i>	Following the workshop, teachers were asked to reflect on the possibilities and challenges of the proposed framework.	Individual
Oct. 2024	<i>Lesson Observation</i>	Teachers facilitated a lesson observation by the researcher and a post-lesson discussion on their experiences of it.	Collaborative
Nov. 2024	<i>Reflective Journal 2</i>	Teachers reflected on their experience of implementing the framework.	Individual
Dec. 2024	<i>Reflective Journal 3</i>	Teachers reflected on their experience of implementing the framework.	Individual

<u>Cycle 2</u>			
Jan. 2025	<i>Focus Group</i>	Teachers took part in a focus to discuss their experience of the approach and its perceived impact on their practice and attitudes.	Collaborative
Feb. 2025	<i>Workshop 2 + 3</i>	Teachers attended two on-line workshops. Workshop 2 focused on sharing their experience of implanting the approach and reflecting on the possibilities and challenges. Workshop 3 focused on the implementation of affective assessment within the framework (incl. self- and peer-assessment), reflecting on the perceived possibilities and barriers as well as their own practice. Teachers worked in groups to discuss and design assessment tools.	Collaborative
Feb. 2025	<i>Reflective Journal 4</i>	Following the workshops, teachers reflected on the possibilities and challenges of framework and the integration of assessment strategies.	Individual
Feb. 2025	<i>Lesson Observation</i>	Teachers facilitated a lesson observation by the researcher with a focus on teaching and assessing within the framework and carried out a post-lesson discussion on their experiences.	Collaborative
Mar. 2025	<i>Reflective Journal 5</i>	Teachers reflected on the successes and challenges of the framework and the changes that have occurred over the course of the project.	Individual