

Evaluation of the Fighting Words creative writing model

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FIGHTING WORDS
THE WRITE TO RIGHT



CREA

Center for Culturally
Responsive Evaluation
and Assessment

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Executive Summary

This report is an evaluation of the *Fighting Words* creative writing centre. The report presents an overview of the work and activities carried out by *Fighting Words* with specific reference to the use of the model with second level students. The purpose of the evaluation is twofold; firstly, to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness and impact of the model in its current format on secondary school students, and secondly, to examine the potential transfer of the model to the second level formal curriculum.

The research, a predominantly qualitative study conducted over a twelve month period, presents data gathered from various key stakeholders through interviews and questionnaires and offers an analysis of the data in terms of the impact of the model on participants to date and also in terms of its suitability for inclusion in the formal second level curriculum. The stakeholders consulted include the founders of *Fighting Words*, Roddy Doyle and Séan Love, the tutors who volunteer with *Fighting Words*, second level students who have participated in *Fighting Words* since its inception, their teachers and NCCA CEO Dr. Anne Looney. Discussion of the model's suitability for inclusion in the formal second level curriculum is largely informed by the curricular changes proposed in the recent government publication *A Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The report's findings indicate that the *Fighting Words* model has positively impacted on participants' personal, social and academic development and the analysis highlights specific areas where this impact is evident. The findings, among others, indicate that participants in *Fighting Words* demonstrate increased levels of engagement –with creative writing and with the school experience-and motivation, improved confidence and self-esteem, recognition of and pride in creative ability, a greater ability to work collaboratively, and improved literacy.

The report also finds that the *Fighting Words* model has considerable grounds for inclusion in the revised Junior Cycle curriculum. The report identifies areas of the curriculum that the model could transfer to and offers a number of suggestions that would enable that transfer to occur. The areas considered most suitable include as a short course in the revised Junior Cycle, as part of the revised Junior Cycle English curriculum and/or as a module in Transition Year.

The report correlates the outcomes of the research with the key skills of the revised Junior Cycle and concludes that the principles underpinning the *Fighting Words* ethos are consistent with the key principles of the revised Junior Cycle.

Introduction

Rationale of the evaluation

The current global economic crisis has sparked much debate about the need for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship in a twenty first century society. As argued by Beghetto (2005, p. 254)” given the benefits of creativity in solving complex individual, social, and global problems, it would seem that promoting student creativity would be the celebrated centerpiece of all educational efforts.”

While there are many international studies on various aspects of arts education, relatively little research has been published specifically on the amalgamation of out of school arts based programmes into formal education. This study is an evaluation of the work of the *Fighting Words* creative writing centre and focuses specifically on the activities offered in partnerships with secondary schools in Ireland.

The evaluation has two main purposes:

- Evaluating the benefits derived by secondary school students from participation in *Fighting Words* activities
- Ascertaining whether the *Fighting Words* creative writing model could be translated into the second level curriculum and identifying suitable curricular environments for such translation.

Fighting Words key activities

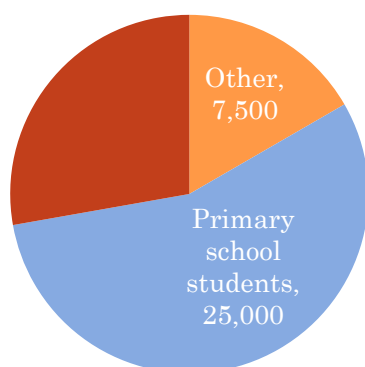
The evaluation begins with an overview of the key activities of the organisation.

The origins of Fighting Words

Fighting Words is a creative writing centre established by Irish writer Roddy Doyle and Séan Love in Dublin in 2009. According to their website ‘*Fighting Words* helps students of all ages to develop their writing skills and to explore their love of writing’. Inspired by the creative writing project 826 Valencia founded by American writer Dave Eggers in San Francisco, Doyle and Love saw potential for such an initiative in Ireland. In Roddy Doyle’s words the translation of the original model was initially a trial and error process, but the American model was left behind quite quickly to respond more closely to the realities and needs of Irish participants.

The participants

Between 2009-2014, *Fighting Words* has worked with 45,000 participants from all parts of the country, but predominantly with students from the greater Dublin region and particularly with schools based on the North-side and inner areas of the city, where greater social disadvantage is more likely to be found. 84.5% of the participants are of school age between 6 and 18.



Over those first five years a total of 90 primary schools and 45 secondary schools have taken part in various workshops. To date *Fighting Words* has worked with a total of 500 primary and 230 secondary school groups. In addition *Fighting Words* has indicated that their sessions are oversubscribed by a multiple of five. Due to the oversubscription, *Fighting Words* applies a selection process to ensure that schools in disadvantaged areas or those which have been on the waiting list for over a year are given priority.

Fighting Words also offers its services to special and diverse needs groups. Approximately 15 groups from fields of intellectual disability, mental health, elderly care and support and children's hospital support avail of its services. A total of 300 groups from this category have been served by *Fighting Words* to date.

The activities

Fighting Words is open seven days a week all year round with the exception of one week during the Christmas festivities. It offers all activities free of charge.

Primary schools workshops

Approximately 5,000 students a year take part in the primary school workshops. These workshops are offered during the school term and involve approximately 20-30 children per session. Children work initially collaboratively to construct a story and in the second half of the session they continue writing individually. At the end of the session all participants are given a personalised book containing the stories they have written.

Secondary schools workshops

Approximately 2,500 students a year take part in the secondary school workshops. These workshops have a similar format to those offered to primary school pupils and generally groups of approximately 20-25 take part in each session facilitated by approximately eight volunteer tutors. The workshops can be once off sessions or can be part of the year-long book project. Year-long book projects are undertaken by students during Transition Year. These projects culminate with the publication of an anthology of short stories written and edited by the students themselves. The books are professionally published and are available for purchase in bookshops and online. Since its inception *Fighting Words* has supported seven year-long book projects.

The Write Club

Unlike the workshops, which are connected to school activities, the Write Club is offered to young people who have manifested a personal interest in creative writing and want to pursue their creative pursuits in their own time. No tutoring is involved in these three hour sessions which take place on Wednesday afternoon, but professional writers are in attendance and offer support when required. A core group of approximately 20-30 young people aged between 13 and 18 attends these sessions.

The Writers' Circle

The Writers' Circle is an opportunity for those who have graduated from the Write Club and for *Fighting Words* volunteers who are interested in creative writing, to write, and obtain support. The Writers' Circle is mostly an informal activity which takes place on Wednesday evenings but occasionally workshops are also organised.

Summer camps

During school summer holidays *Fighting Words* runs eight week long camps for three age groups (6 to 9 year olds, 10-13 year olds and 14-17 year olds). These camps are not connected to school activities and focus on developing young people's ability for writing fiction, song-writing, graphic fiction, film and script-writing, film-making, poetry and playwriting. Other programmes are also on offer during summer weekends for those who want to further enhance their creative writing. These programmes are jointly co-ordinated with professional organisations such as the Abbey Theatre, The National

Gallery of Ireland, Brown Bag Films, The Irish Times, The Science Gallery, The Irish Print Museum etc. The summer camps and collaborative projects are attended by approximately 750 young people every year.

The cinemobile

The *cinemobile* is a one hundred-seater cinema which has been leased from the Irish Film Institute. Piloted at six locations in 2013, it offers a mobile venue to replicate around the country the school workshops which would normally only be offered in the Dublin centre. Over 1,500 students outside Dublin were able to participate in once-off primary and secondary school workshops as a result.

The Verbal Arts Centre - Derry

Also launched in 2013 is a pilot project to offer the workshops in the North-west of Ireland in co-operation with the Verbal Arts Centre, located in Derry. *Fighting Words* hopes to offer their activities in this and similar venues around the country on a regular basis in future.

Special needs activities

Fighting Words also offers workshops for children and adults with special needs such as intellectual disabilities and issues with mental health and patients in the children's hospitals. Approximately 15 (300 participants) groups a year take part in these specific activities.

The volunteers

Fighting Words relies almost entirely on volunteers. 48 volunteers were available from the start of the activities in January 2009. There are now 450 active¹ volunteers of which approximately 100 frequently contribute to *Fighting Words* activities. Among those approximately 10 per year are allocated to the secondary book project.

Volunteers are selected through an interview process, subjected to reference check and Garda vetting and undergo specific training. They come from different walks of life. Among them there are most commonly current or retired teachers, post-graduate students, writers or aspiring writers, journalists and librarians. They range in age from 19 to over 60 and are predominantly female.

¹ An active volunteer is a volunteer who participates in at least 2-3 sessions a year.

² On 16th May 2013 Michael D. Higgins, President of the Irish Republic, visited *Fighting Words* premises in occasion of the launch of a stamp by An Post celebrating Dublin city through a brief story written by a student

The purpose-built space and its use

The premises of *Fighting Words* are located in Dublin inner city an area often associated with economic disadvantage. The building is a purpose-built space and is an integral part of the approach to creative writing taken by *Fighting Words*.

The main room is a large brightly lit space with flexible seating and walls lined with bookcases. Adjacent to the main room there is another large room with colourful tables and chairs and which is separated from the main room by a heavy curtain rather than by a door. In the main room the initial portion of the stories written by the students is developed collectively. To aid the process a projector is used to show the text which is projected onto a large screen and is typewritten by one of the volunteers while it is being developed through the collective contributions of the students. Participants move to the adjacent room to write the continuation of the story individually. In the same room the creative efforts of some of the students are read either by the participants themselves or by the *Fighting Words* volunteers at the end of each session.

Sharing the model

Fighting Words was the first project of its kind in Europe but others, inspired by the Dublin project, have since followed with new centres opened in London, Stockholm, Milan, and Barcelona all of which acknowledge the key role that *Fighting Words* has played in their development.

A further five new projects (in Belfast, Amsterdam, Vienna, Paris and Copenhagen) are currently in preparation. *Fighting Words* is also the impetus behind the establishment of a formal European association of creative writing centres. The association will aim to protect the core principles that have informed the establishment of non-profit creative writing centres for participants of all ages.

The structure of the report

Chapter 1 examines the literature around the area of creativity and its benefits for students. It also considers the second level new curricular developments in Ireland. It pays particular attention to the

principles of the revised Junior Cycle with the view to identify whether the curricular changes offer greater opportunities for the promotion of creativity within the formal education system.

Chapter 2 illustrates the evaluation model adopted in this report and examines issues relating to evaluation of educational innovations. The chapter also provides an overview of the methodological approach employed for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 reports on the data gathered in the course of this evaluation through questionnaires distributed to secondary school students who have participated and continue to participate in a range of activities offered by *Fighting Words*. The responses obtained from teachers and tutors who supported the students involved in the year-long book projects are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4 reports on the outcomes of in-depth interviews with the principals of six of the seven schools that were involved in the year-long book projects. The presentation of the outcomes is organised around common themes that have emerged from the analysis of both the questionnaires and the interviews. Woven in the discussion are also extracts from interviews with Roddy Doyle, Séan Love, Dr. Anne Looney, NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) Chief Executive, and excerpts from a speech by President Michael D. Higgins². Extracts from an interview carried out by the national radio station *Lyric FM* with several *Fighting Words* stakeholders was also included to add breadth to the analysis of key stakeholder voices.

Chapter 5 discusses cumulatively the outcomes of chapters 3 and 4 and brings together the key issues that have emerged from the evaluation. The chapter draws conclusions and tries to suggest ways forward in terms of a potential contribution of *Fighting Words* for the promotion of creativity in the formal second level education system in Ireland.

² On 16th May 2013 Michael D. Higgins, President of the Irish Republic, visited Fighting Words premises in occasion of the launch of a stamp by An Post celebrating Dublin city through a brief story written by a student attending Fighting Words.

Chapter 1: Creativity in Education

Introduction

This chapter offers a brief review of the literature on creativity in education. It focuses particularly on the relationship between creativity and participation in the arts. It examines current curricular developments in second level education in Ireland and considers how the proposed curricular reform offers potential opportunities for the adoption of the *Fighting Words* model into the formal curriculum.

What is creativity?

The current global economic crisis has sparked much debate about the need for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship in a twenty first century society. One of the factors fuelling that debate is the fact that fostering creativity is considered an enabling factor in addressing social and economic matters (Craft, 2003; Burnard, 2006). Not surprisingly, much of the focus of this debate has been on the role of education in meeting these demands. Consequently creativity is emerging as a dominant concept in educational policies with the past few years seeing many western countries such as the US, UK, France, Germany, Sweden and Australia restructuring their education systems to encompass creativity (Feldman & Benjamin, 2006; Craft, 2005; Shaheen, 2010). Recent curricular developments in Ireland indicate a similar shift is happening here.

While there is an overwhelming consensus that creativity is a priority for education, there is less certainty on what the concept of creativity means and how it might be fostered. Creativity, it appears, albeit essential, is a somewhat elusive concept. The literature provides a rich tapestry of divergent views on creativity. Sir Ken Robinson (2011, p. 220) defines it as ‘the process of having original ideas that have value,’ a definition that appears to effectively encapsulate recent thinking in the field. Much of the discussion centres on varying degrees of creativity. The notion of “big C” creativity and “little c” creativity, originally coined by Craft (2001), is used to distinguish between different levels of creativity, with the former referring to the extraordinary feats of figures such as Mozart, Da Vinci, and Einstein and the latter referring to the ordinary problem-solving of individuals in everyday life (Craft, 2003). Recent discourse on creativity is driven by the concept of ordinary creativity, rather than extraordinary acts of genius, and the perception that the ordinary person can be creative (Craft, 2001; NACCCE, 1999; Seltzer and Bentley, 1999; Weisberg, 1993).

From an educational perspective, the push for creativity is predominantly concerned with the development of little c creativity and the development of what Craft (2000, 2001) terms “possibility thinking”. Craft (2000, 2001) proposes the notion of “possibility thinking” as a significant element of creative learning central to little c creativity and evident in the learner’s response to “what if” questions posed during problem finding and problem solving.

Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) argue that the big C/little c dichotomy overlooks the type of creativity demonstrated by individuals engaged in the process of learning. They propose the addition of a further category, which they term, mini-c to highlight “the importance of recognizing the creativity inherent in students’ unique and personally meaningful insights and interpretations as they learn new subject matter” (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009, p. 4).

There is a further debate on whether certain domains are more likely than others to foster creativity with some commentators suggesting that creativity spans all domains (Lucas, 2001). Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) have, for example, received much attention in this regard, but recent commentary suggests that an overemphasis on STEM subjects is misplaced and will not lead to the much needed creativity and innovation unless accompanied by the parallel development of other fields (Coolahan, 2008; Robinson, 2013).

Although creativity may span all disciplines, there is growing evidence to suggest that the arts, in particular, could play a pivotal role in fostering innovation, creativity and imagination in education (Coolahan, 2008). Some commentators suggest that arts education enables individuals to develop perspectives in a way that is not possible in other disciplines. According to Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin (2013, p.19):

The arts allow a different way of understanding than the sciences and other academic subjects. Because they are an arena without right and wrong answers, they free students to explore and experiment.

The freedom to explore and experiment encourages risk-taking and problem-solving – both essential prerequisites for creativity. The increasingly credible links between arts education and creativity may account for the growing perception that arts education can not only help improve student achievement in schools but that arts education can also be helpful in achieving social, cultural and economic goals (O’Farrell, 2013). As these concerns continue to drive the political and economic agenda worldwide, political and educational leaders are turning their attention to the role that arts

education has to play in addressing these wider societal matters. This development has resulted in an increasing emphasis on arts education globally, a move that has placed arts education at the forefront of educational policy in many countries.

The UNESCO world conferences on arts education in Lisbon (2006) and in Seoul (2010) highlighted that educational policies throughout the world need to ensure that arts education is accessible as a fundamental and sustainable component of a high quality renewal of education and that arts education principles and practices be applied to solving today's social and cultural challenges.

The Arts as an agent in the promotion of creativity

The literature reveals an extensive body of international research concerned with the impact of arts education on student learning and holistic development and offers much evidence to suggest that the arts can cultivate creativity. A number of large scale arts education studies conducted in recent years (IFACCA, UNESCO and ACA, 2006; ACER, 2010; CCE, 2012) indicate overwhelmingly positive findings. The 2006 global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education, collaboration between Professor Bamford, UNESCO, the Australia Council for the Arts (ACA) and the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA) compares data and case studies from more than 60 countries, analysing the differences between "education in the arts" and "education through the arts". The compendium provides a valuable record of the educational, cultural, and social benefits of arts education.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) 2010 education review calls for the arts to be embedded in all learning as a way of cultivating creativity and imagination. The review highlights that embedding the arts in learning has a positive effect on students' levels of academic attainment, interest in learning and self-esteem. While many studies indicate that education in the arts has a positive effect on participants' academic, cognitive, personal, social and civic development (Wiessner, 2005; Wright, John, Alaggia, & Sheel, 2006; Weinstein, 2010), there is also growing evidence to suggest that 'at risk' adolescents participating in arts based programmes in economically disadvantaged communities demonstrate improved critical thinking skills (Horn, 1992), increased self-efficacy (Chandler, 1999) and higher self-esteem (Heath and Roach, 1999). Heath & Roach's (1999) research on the impact of out-of-school organisations in economically disadvantaged communities on students' academic, personal, social and civic outcomes highlights the value of community organisations:

Community organisations that work effectively with youth successfully fill the "institutional gap" by providing young people with substantial learning and practice opportunities with adult professionals and older youth who serve as teachers and models (33).

They conclude that while all organisations offered mentoring support and guidance to young people "arts-based organisations offered a unique element of imaginative creativity" (33).

In a study evaluating the impact of community-based arts programme for youth in low-income communities in Canada, Wright, John, Alaggia & Sheel (2006) found that participation in the programme had a positive impact on student behaviour and attitude. The findings also indicate that students are more likely to participate in arts programmes if they are free of charge. Further research carried out by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in Australia in 2012 has found that 'at risk' students who have access to the arts in or out of school also tend to have better academic results, better workforce opportunities, and more civic engagement. Similarly, Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson's study examining the relationship between arts and achievement in at-risk youth in the United States in 2012 found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds who had a high rate of participation in the arts had higher levels of academic attainment and civic engagement than those who had a low rate of participation in the arts. The study also found that students who participated in the arts were more likely to pursue careers that require third level education. Such findings suggest that engagement with the arts leads to positive outcomes for disadvantaged youth. The burgeoning evidence that adolescents who are considered 'at risk' benefit the most from aesthetic education is, according to UNESCO's International Bureau of Education *Working Papers on Curriculum Issues* (UNESCO:IBE, 2006), an indicator that arts education could help reduce inequalities of academic achievement between privileged and disadvantaged children.

In the UK, Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE), an international non-governmental organisation, has introduced over 4,000 schools, 750,000 pupils and 60,000 teachers to creative ways of teaching across the curriculum through its Creative Partnerships programme (CCE, 2012). The initiative was purposely 'designed to bring about observable changes in the engagement, attainment and behaviour of pupils within the English education system through the development of their creative skills' (CCE, 2012, p.21). Again, the results here were tremendously encouraging with evidence indicating that creativity in the classroom improves not only student academic achievement, but also significantly boosts confidence, communication skills and motivation (CCE, 2012). An inspection carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) in 2010 found that there had been notable improvements at Creative Partnerships schools in pupils' levels of achievement and in measurable aspects of their behaviour, such as attendance. They concluded: "Creative Partnerships

had demonstrated how even the most reluctant pupils could be engaged and excited.” (Ofsted, 2010, p.43). Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) urge that more empirical research on arts education be carried out to investigate the impact of arts education on the development of a variety of skills and suggests that a high priority area of study would be to investigate the effect of arts education on skills important to innovation, such as creativity, metacognition, and skills supporting good communication (Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin, 2013).

While there is considerable evidence to suggest the positive impact of the arts, much of the research to date has focused on the art forms of drama, music, dance and visual art, with comparatively little research having been conducted on the impact of creative writing interventions or the value of collaborative approaches to creative writing. Recent research in this domain, such as that carried out by Roberts and Eady (2012), tends to focus on the effect of group interaction on individuals’ literacy and writing skills as opposed to the impact of such activity on individuals’ holistic development. However, a number of earlier studies indicate that engaging in creative writing has a positive influence not only on participants’ academic attainment but also on their personal, social and civic development. According to Chandler (1999), writing is an act of empowerment and the process of participating in a group writing project can be a particularly affirming experience that enables individuals to access self, imagination and voice. Nicolini (1994) asserts that success in writing boosts students’ self-esteem and Chandler (1999) further proclaims that writing can contribute to the mental, emotional, and social development of the writer, a view supported by Howell (2008) who argues that creative writing promotes personal and social development and offers students opportunities to develop civic awareness and responsibility through the exploration of social and moral issues. A further study conducted by Chandler (2002) revealed that the experience of writing in a group using a specific approach facilitated emotional catharsis, increased self-knowledge, coping strategies, and understanding and appreciation of others. Similarly, research in the field of psychotherapy highlights the therapeutic value of creative and expressive writing as an agent for self-expression (Wright, 2002; Baikie and Wlihelm, 2005). A study carried out by Weinstein in 2010 identified the benefits of youth spoken word poetry for youth including the development of literacy skills, self-confidence, positive self-identity, community building, therapeutic benefits, and respect for peers and adults.

Despite its international reputation in a range of art forms, Ireland has relatively limited arts education provision. The need to address this was clearly signaled in *The Public and the Arts* 2006 report which indicates that over 80% of respondents believe that, 'Arts education in schools is as important as science education' (p. 108). The recent emergence of new organisations such as Encountering the Arts Ireland (ETAI) and Association for Creativity and Arts in Education (ACAE) is perhaps a further signal of the appetite for change and a broader recognition of the importance of the arts in education. The Arts Council, the national agency for developing the arts, defines arts-in-education as, 'interventions by the world of the arts into the education system' (*Points of Alignment*, 2008, p. 3). Artists visiting schools or schools engaging with professional arts practice are cited as examples.

In January 2013, the Irish government launched the first ever *Arts in Education Charter 2013*. This joint initiative between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills declares that creativity must be Ireland's primary focus for the future. The charter announces its intention to place the arts at the centre of Ireland's education system asserting that, 'While the arts have no monopoly on creativity, they foster it particularly well' (*Arts in Education Charter*, 2013, p. 7). The charter Ireland builds on the Art Council's *Points of Alignment* 2008 report which stated:

Irish society and the Irish economy need a workforce and a wider population that value risk-taking and experimentation and that are adept in the kinds of problem-solving and the engagement between ideas and materials that characterise the arts (p. 18).

The *Arts in Education Charter* intention to place the arts at the centre of Ireland's education system certainly signals a new approach to the provision of arts education in Ireland. Ostensibly, this bodes well for Irish education in general and arts education in particular but how the proposed measures will manifest in the curriculum and to what extent they will cultivate creativity remains to be seen. In the keynote address at the Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI) conference in Dublin in April 2013, Professor Anne Bamford argued that 'a lack of creative education especially at second level' has a particularly negative impact on third level performance and she highlighted the need 'to establish synergies between knowledge, skills and creativity'.

The 2013 charter is a departure from previous arts education provision in Ireland and certainly appears to be an attempt at encompassing the kind of synergy advised by Bamford. However, in the same

speech Bamford also observed that, ‘with few exceptions, educational politics gets no further than paying lip service to these ideas’.

While there are many international studies on various aspects of arts education, relatively little research has been published specifically on the amalgamation of out of school arts based programmes into formal education. In particular, there has been an absence of research on the use of arts based initiatives in an Irish context. This dearth is noted by the *Arts in Education Charter* (2013, p. 15), it acknowledges:

the need for research – including action-based research – that builds on existing good practice and explores new models of arts and school practice (content, delivery structure, and relationship with mainstream arts provision and mainstream curricular provision) at home and abroad so as to build the competence of the sector and create a source of knowledge and experience for policy-makers and practitioners to draw on.

UNESCO’s *Roadmap for Arts Education* (2006, p. 7) advises that, ‘Any approach to Arts Education must take the culture(s) to which the learner belongs as its point of departure’. Given Ireland’s literary legacy and reputation for storytelling, an initiative like *Fighting Words* appears to be of immediate relevance to Irish cultural tradition.

Curricular developments in second level education in Ireland: the potential for greater promotion of creativity?

The Irish second level education system is currently undergoing a process of enormous curricular change and reform. In October 2012, the government announced a radical reform of the Junior Cycle curriculum in its publication, *A Framework for Junior Cycle*. In this document, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) identify eight key principles for Junior Cycle education, many of which align with policy suggestions and recommendations from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports and Education Policy Outlook Ireland; placing emphasis on and improving equity, quality, continuity, development and assessment for students in second-level education (see Table 1).

Table 1 Principles for Junior Cycle Education Source: NCCA (2012) *A Framework for Junior Cycle*

Quality All students experience a high quality education, characterised by high expectations of learners and the pursuit of excellence.	Wellbeing The student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and resilience. Learning takes place in a climate focused on collective wellbeing of school, community and society.
Creativity and innovation Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning provide opportunities for students to be creative and innovative.	Choice and flexibility The school's junior cycle programme is broad enough to offer a wide range of learning experiences to all, and flexible enough to offer choice to meet the needs of students.
Engagement and participation The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school.	Inclusive education The educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all.
Continuity and development Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning enables students to build on their learning to date, recognises their progress in learning and supports their future learning	Learning to learn High quality curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning support students in developing greater independence in learning and in meeting the challenges of life beyond school, of further education, and of working life.

The explicit inclusion of creativity as one of the key principles for Junior Cycle education is significant in three respects. Firstly, it signals that creativity is recognised as fundamental to student learning and development, secondly, it suggests a genuine commitment to fostering creativity across the curriculum and thirdly, it highlights its absence up to now. While the *Framework* does not attach a hierarchical structure to the key principles, it is argued here that creativity should be prioritised. The argument put forward here aligns with Robinson's (2013) view that 'creativity is as important as literacy and should be given the same status'. Creativity espouses the core philosophy of the new Junior Cycle and, therefore, giving it priority will ensure that all the key principles are realised. Creativity can act as a fertile ground for the promotion of the other principles outlined in the *Framework*. Engaging students' creativity will, as the literature has shown, improve student wellbeing, increase levels of engagement and participation and promote independent learning. It also ensures that students experience a range of learning experiences and an opportunity to develop strengths and skills in the school and beyond.

In line with the key principles, the *Framework* identifies eight key skills of Junior Cycle. In addition to literacy and numeracy, which are highlighted as fundamental to student development, the *Framework* identifies six key skills required for successful learning by students across the curriculum. These are:

- Managing Myself
- Staying Well
- Communicating
- Being Creative
- Working with Others
- Managing Information and Thinking

The *Framework* specifies that “working with digital technology also forms part of each of the skills”. According to the *Framework*, the eight key skills are to be embedded in the learning outcomes of all curriculum components. Students and parents will be provided with twenty four statements of learning which reflect the key skills and encapsulate the required learning at Junior Cycle.

In terms of “being creative” the *Framework* specifies the following key elements to be embedded in student learning:

- Imagining
- Exploring options and alternatives
- Implementing ideas and taking action
- Learning creatively
- Stimulating creativity using digital technology

The document states that:

This skill enables learners to develop their imagination and creativity as they explore different ways of doing things and of thinking. Students learn to stay with challenges or tasks to completion and to learn from their experiences.

Again it is argued here that promoting creativity has the potential to facilitate attainment of all the other key skills. Given an appropriate model, students presented with an opportunity for “being creative” will also have occasion to work independently and with others and to develop communication skills and self-confidence. The recent government policy document *Arts in Education Charter 2013* contends that creativity must be given primacy. A study of the Junior Cycle’s key skills also suggests that prioritising creativity should be top of the agenda.

The new Junior Cycle programme advocates a shift towards student centred learning and offers greater flexibility and autonomy for schools to select, develop and deliver curriculum to suit students’ needs. The *Framework* proposes that in addition to English, Irish and Maths, which are to remain core subjects, students choose from a range of subjects and short courses and also partake in ‘other

learning experiences' provided by the school. The 'other learning experiences' may involve aspects of pastoral care, guidance and personal and social development. Schools will also provide Priority Learning Units (PLU) for students with special needs. While many subjects from the present curriculum will continue to be offered, content will be reduced to allow more emphasis on the quality of learning. The introduction of short courses is a new component that allows schools to design and deliver their own courses based on students' talents, abilities, needs and interests. In this respect, the short course component is somewhat similar to the current Transition Year Option which offers schools freedom of choice in course content and design. The NCCA will offer pre-prepared short course programmes in a range of subject areas but schools are also encouraged to create and design programmes of study at local level and in accordance with NCCA specifications. This provides schools with the opportunity to create links with innovative and creative projects based in the local community and to establish learning in areas of interest and relevance to students' lives. Short courses may be an opportunity for students who are involved in various out of school activities to gain credit and recognition for developing skills and talents in areas of personal interest.

The proposed curricular reforms are clearly a departure from the present Junior Cycle programme but the most significant change, according to the *Framework* document, is in the area of assessment. The current Junior Certificate examination will be phased out and replaced by a school-based approach to assessment. While the NCCA 2011 document had recommended the retention of national certification and external examiners, the *Framework* indicates that schools will assess their own students and issue school certificates. The shift towards continuous assessment reflects the emphasis on students as active independent learners, and also aligns second level education in Ireland with best international educational practice. Involving students in their own learning through reflection and self-evaluation will, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD Policy Brief, 2005) see students take increasing responsibility for their own learning and progress.

In summary, the proposed Junior Cycle reform promises a student-centred approach to learning and assessment, an increased emphasis on active teaching and learning methodologies, deeper learning, a greater choice in curriculum and the embedment of key skills. In terms of creativity, the curricular changes demonstrate a much greater emphasis on creativeness and imagination than ever before and, as such, the changes offer greater opportunities for the promotion of creativity within the formal education system.

Although creativity is prominently promoted and identified as one of the key principles, greater centrality is necessary if it is to be realised. As outlined above, creativity has the potential to address the other principles identified in the *Framework* and should be given priority.

This opportunity in tandem with greater school autonomy and flexibility within the curriculum offers strong prospects for real and exciting change in Irish second level education. In particular, the prospect of schools developing short courses in conjunction with external organisations from the cultural, industrial, agricultural and business sectors should give rise to the formation of dynamic educational initiatives. The development of partnerships such as these is, in itself, an impetus for creativity that may trigger the type of creative response needed to address ongoing calls for creativity.

Employers and third level colleges have been calling for a change in second level education for many years. Reform of the Junior Cycle is broadly welcomed and it is hoped that its introduction will improve teaching and learning at second level in Ireland. Ultimately responsibility for promoting creativity will lie with the school and the individual teacher in the classroom and the extent to which schools and teachers embrace these opportunities will largely determine what will happen at the chalk face. If the spirit of the *Framework* is wholeheartedly embraced by school managers, administrators and teachers, second level education has the potential to become a powerful, inspirational leader in the creativity and innovation arena.

The next few years may see the emergence of innovative links between schools and entities from a wide range of fields. In this instance, as has been discussed here, there is compelling evidence to suggest that initiatives from the arts sector offer distinct advantages for promoting creativity.

Fighting Words is one such initiative. As an organisation its primary focus is the development of creativity. It seeks to provide young people with an outlet for creative expression and the creative writing model it offers has the potential to transfer in a number of ways to the formal school curriculum. Furthermore, as will be seen in the chapters that follow, its thinking is closely aligned with the principles of the new Junior Cycle.

Chapter 2: Evaluating the *Fighting Words* model: A theory and an approach

Introduction

This chapter illustrates the evaluation model adopted in this report and examines issues relating to evaluation of educational innovation. The chapter also provides an overview of the methodological approach employed for data collection and analysis.

Purpose of evaluation

This evaluation provides an evidence-based account of the pedagogical effectiveness of the *Fighting Words* creative writing model. The purpose of the evaluation is to evaluate the *Fighting Words* model, firstly, in terms of its impact on participants' academic, cognitive, personal, and social development and secondly, in terms of its suitability for translation into the main curricula for all secondary schools. It should be noted that the evaluation primarily seeks to provide formative feedback on the transfer of the model to the second level curriculum rather than feedback on the model itself.

Evaluation design

In designing an evaluation strategy for the *Fighting Words* project, the evaluators drew on the literature from the field of educational evaluation and consulted with the project manager, Séan Love, to ascertain the purpose of the evaluation. Since, as is the case with most evaluations in the field of education, the *Fighting Words* project evaluation has both a formative (improvement) and summative (accountability/mainstreaming) aspect, the evaluation design chosen was in the illuminative tradition (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972). This is understood to mean that the project is considered within the broader educational context in which it is set. Light is shed both on the impact and effectiveness of the innovation in terms of impact on student development both in academic and personal terms but also on the relationship which the project may develop within the educational context.

Model of Evaluation

The conceptual *Framework* and model of evaluation chosen is adapted from 'Stages in the evaluation of educational innovation' (Jacobs, 2000, p. 264) (see Figure 1). The model was chosen both for its simplicity and for its emphasis on the location of the project or innovation within a comprehensively described curricular *Framework*.

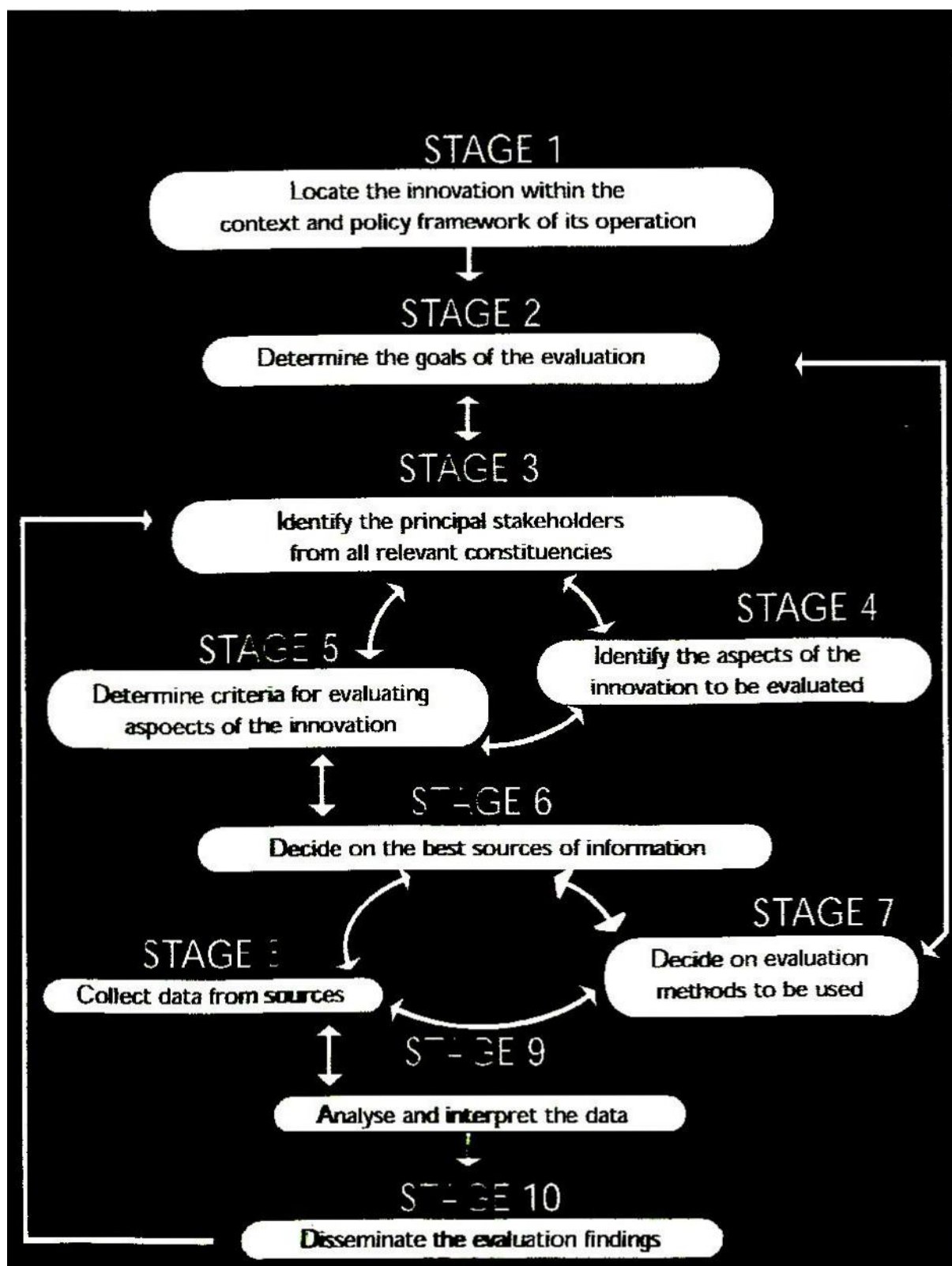


Figure 1 - Stages in the evaluation of educational innovation (Jacobs, 2000, p. 264)

The evaluation model adopts an eclectic approach by combining formative, summative and illuminative goals in an attempt to satisfy the range of stakeholders in a way that does justice to the

formative and summative needs of each. In doing so it is hoped to reject the ‘fallacy of objectivism’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) and develop a ‘narrative of two orders’ defined as follows by Daly (1997, p. 355):

A first order story is the local narrative embedded in the lived experience of the people being studied. A second order story is an interpretative commentary on these lived stories. It is a scientific story embedded in the lived and observed experience but conveyed in the language of the social scientist.

Data collection methods employed

The methodology of the evaluation was influenced by three factors, namely the alignment of goals of the project with new second level curricular developments, the goals and conceptual *Framework* of the evaluation and the views of the stakeholders.

The evaluation follows a largely qualitative research methodology but it was also considered necessary to collect some numeric data through questionnaires. The voices of stakeholders were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The data gathered through these methods provided an account of the lived experience of the stakeholders and the benefits students derive from engaging in this model. As current and past stakeholders were consulted, the accessibility of participants and stakeholder group size dictated the data collection methods employed. The following data collection methods were used:

- Questionnaire distributed to 116 book project students
- Questionnaire distributed to 7 book project teachers
- Questionnaire distributed to 41 *Fighting Words* volunteers
- Questionnaire to 120 once off workshop students
- Questionnaire distributed to 20 Wednesday afternoon students

The above data was collected concurrently and an emerging pattern was triangulated to ensure greater reliability. No gender selection was applied. As the purpose of the evaluation is to obtain as broad as possible picture of the lived experience of those participating in the *Fighting Words* model, non selective sampling has been applied. The above participant listing corresponds to the entire second level population of students engaging in the *Fighting Words* model for year-long book project, Wednesday afternoon students (i.e. continuing students) and a random sample of second level

students participating in once off workshops. The latter category of students was included to allow for a wider perspective on the model and an analysis of its short term impact. The inclusion of these data provided the evaluators with an opportunity to compare responses of short term stakeholders to responses of stakeholders engaged over a sustained period.

In addition to the data collection outlined above, qualitative data were collected through the following interviews:

- Interview with the manager and founder of *Fighting Words*, Séan Love
- Interview with the artistic director and founder of *Fighting Words*, Roddy Doyle.
- Interview with, the Chief Executive Officer of National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Dr. Anne Looney
- Individual interviews with 6 of the 7 principals of schools which participated in the year-long book projects (one principal had since retired and was not contactable)

These key stakeholders were selected because of their understanding of both the *Fighting Words* model and the current and new developments in the secondary school curriculum. For this reason, it was felt that they would be well placed to comment not only on the model itself but also on its potential translation to mainstream education.

To begin with the evaluators had an in-depth discussion with the manager of the project in order to ascertain the purpose of the project and the purpose of the evaluation. Following this initial discussion, the organisation's publications, website and media coverage were reviewed and a further meeting was held with the manager of the project. Policy documents pertaining to the revised Junior Cycle were also reviewed to ascertain potential transfer of the model within the proposed *Framework*.

Based on this preliminary data gathering, the evaluators developed a range of questionnaires to be distributed to some of the stakeholders. The questionnaires contained a mix of open ended and close ended questions to allow for the collection of both numeric and qualitative data. The questionnaires were designed to elicit the experiences and views of all the students (256), teachers (7) and volunteer tutors (41) involved in the project. The questionnaires differed according to the target population but care was taken to ensure that questions were designed so that, as far as possible, responses could be compared. The data emerging from the questionnaires served to give a comprehensive range of responses to more than 20 questions relating to all aspects of the project. Interview questions were

also designed to give a comprehensive range of responses to all aspects of the project and to allow for triangulation.

In addition to the above, the evaluators attended six once off secondary school workshops in order to witness the model in action and observe the interaction of students, tutors and teachers. They also attended a training workshop for volunteer tutors to observe how training was conducted and how the ethos of the organisation was presented. Given the enormous number of volunteer tutors working for the organisation, this was felt to be an important consideration.

In order to gain a broader perspective of the various components of the project, they also attended a number of auxiliary events including: the launch of the book written by students currently participating in the year-long book project and the launch of a stamp by An Post celebrating Dublin city through a brief story written by a student attending *Fighting Words*.

The phases in the evaluation process

The evaluation was carried out over a twelve month period as follows:

In January 2013 an initial meeting between the project manager and the evaluators was convened to establish the purpose of the evaluation and an estimated time scale. In February 2013 *Fighting Words* documents and Department of Education and Skills policies were reviewed to identify potential transfer of *Fighting Words* model to second level curriculum. The key stakeholders were identified. The evaluators sought ethical approval from their employer Dublin City University.

In March 2013 the aspects of the project to be evaluated were identified and criteria for evaluating same were finalised. It was decided that the eight key principles identified in *A Framework for Junior Cycle* (NCCA, 2012) would be used as the parameters to evaluate *Fighting Words*' suitability for inclusion in the revised Junior Cycle. The stakeholders were considered in terms of best sources of information and the data collection methods were decided accordingly.

In April 2013 the evaluation methods were identified and work began on developing the questionnaires and interview questions. In May 2013 ethical approval was granted by the university's research ethics committee and the data collection began. Schools were contacted and informed about the research. Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire and to coordinate the completion and collection of student questionnaires and consent forms. Interviews with principal were scheduled to take place in June and September. The evaluators attended workshops, tutor training session, transition year students' book launch and the An Post stamp launch. In June 2013 interviews were

conducted with 3 of the school principals, the project manager and the project's artistic director. In August 2013 an interview was conducted with Dr. Anne Looney, CEO, NCCA. In September 2013 interviews with remaining 3 school principals were carried out. Teachers and students who had not returned questionnaires were contacted again. In October 2013 data collection was completed and in November data were analysed and interpreted. In December 2013 the evaluation report was submitted to the project manager, Séan Love.

Chapter 3: Outcomes from the questionnaires (Students, Tutors and Teachers)

Responses to the questionnaire

A questionnaire containing a mix of closed and open-ended questions was circulated among five stakeholder groups. The questionnaire was either distributed in hard copy or an online link was made available to an electronic version designed using *Googledocs*. The following groups took part in the survey:

- Students and teachers from five schools (one based in Dublin inner city, three in Dublin North-side and one in Dublin South-side) who took part in the year-long book project;
- *Fighting Words* volunteers who had supported students involved in the year-long book project;
- Students from four different schools (of which three based in Dublin North-side and one in County Cavan) who have attended once-off *Fighting Words* workshops;
- Students who attend *Fighting Words* on an individual basis as part of the Wednesday afternoon Write Club sessions.

Table 1 summarises the response rates for all questionnaires.

Table 1: Summary of questionnaire responses

Stakeholder categories	Total group	Responses	Response rate (%)
Book project students (BPS)	116	42	36.2
Book project teachers (BPT)	7	5	71.4
<i>Fighting Words</i> volunteers (FWT)	41	13	32
Once off Workshop students (WS)	120	92	77
Wednesday afternoon students (WedS)	20	11	55
Total	304	163	54.3 mean

While the response rate by students who participated in the book project is disappointing, it should be noted that three of the seven groups belonging to this category had already completed the secondary school cycle since the completion of the book project. With the exception of one student, no access was available or facilitated for other students from these schools. The response rate by *Fighting Words* volunteers is also low and might to some extent be explained by the part-time nature of their involvement in the activities of the creative writing centre. Finally, it should be noted that one teacher had moved to different schools and was no longer contactable.

The following sections present information from both open-ended and close-ended questions. Responses to open-ended questions have been summarised in tables which offer an overview of the themes that have emerged more frequently from the responses of the stakeholders.

Profile of respondents

Teachers

The teachers surveyed are those who were involved in the year-long book projects. Two male and three female teachers aged between 25 and 49 responded to the questionnaire. Four are teachers of English, one is an Art teacher and some have also a dual role as Transition year coordinators. It is worth noting that two teachers are rather experienced and this challenges the conventional wisdom that only younger teachers are willing to experiment and engage with pedagogical innovations (Huberman, 1989).

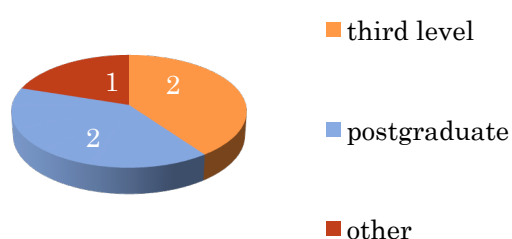


Figure 1: Highest Educational Qualification

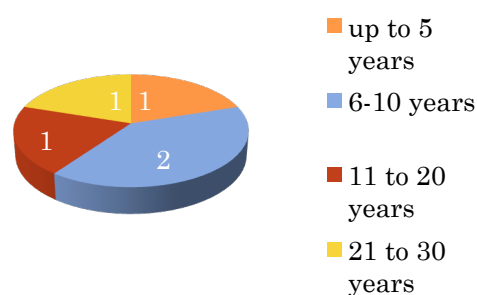


Figure 2: Years of service

Among the reasons for getting involved in the year-long book project, teachers mention having heard about the benefits for students from teachers who had participated in *Fighting Words* activities and about the opportunity for students to engage with published authors. In terms of their role as teachers respondents see “leaving the classroom traits behind”, “letting go of control” and “allowing students space and freedom to express themselves” as key, thus suggesting that participation in *Fighting Words* entails a form of teacher-student interaction different from the more conventional experience in the school context.

Fighting Words Tutors

While *Fighting Words* possesses a large database of tutors only those who were involved in supporting students who participated in the year-long book projects were surveyed. Two of the thirteen

respondents are still volunteering for *Fighting Words* whereas two mention other commitments as the reason for discontinuing their involvement with the centre.

Thirteen tutors, three males and ten females responded to the questionnaire. The majority (N9) of respondents are aged between 30 and 59. The volunteer group appears to come from a variety of backgrounds and nationalities. Along with Irish, British, American, Romanian and German nationalities are mentioned by respondents. Most tutors are educated at university level with ten possessing either a graduate or postgraduate qualification.

While respondent tutors come predominantly from professional backgrounds with a connection with writing and creative arts other professional activities are also mentioned (pensioner, homemaker, medical student, waitress, policy analyst). However there seems an almost equal distribution between those who have teacher experience and those who do not and only one of the volunteers has experience teaching at second level.

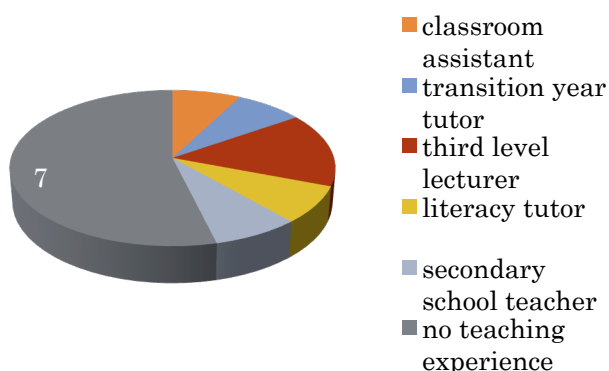


Figure 3: Teaching Experience of tutors

Among the motivations for getting involved in *Fighting Words* they quote “interest in literature”, “interest in working with young people”, “a passion for writing and creative writing”, “excitement at the prospect of working with Roddy Doyle”, “giving back to the community” and “freedom to volunteer at one’s own pace and without substantial time commitment”. They most frequently quote “helping students come out of their shell” and “helping students to develop confidence” among their greatest achievement and motivators for continued involvement in *Fighting Words*.

Book Project Students

Forty-two students who took part in the year-long book project responded to the questionnaire. Given that only students that have participated more recently in the book project responded to the questionnaire, not surprisingly, 35 out of 42 respondents are aged either 16 or 17. Among respondents three were male and thirty-nine were female. In addition to Ireland, the following countries of origin are mentioned by respondents: Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, UK, Vietnam, Latvia, Lithuania, and China. 70% (N30) of the respondents affirm to have spontaneously chosen to take part in the *Fighting Words* book project. 48% (N20) students have responded that they have continued writing after the completion of the book project.

Wednesday afternoon students

Eleven students, two males and nine females, who attend the Wednesday afternoon writing sessions (Write Club) responded to the questionnaire. The majority of the participants are aged either 17 or 18.

Notably these respondents come from families with a proportionally higher level of parental education (55% of parents qualified at third level and 18% at postgraduate level) than in the other two student groups (28% of parents qualified at third level and 7% at postgraduate level). Two of the respondents continued keeping in touch with *Fighting Words* after the completion of the book project, one after a once-off workshop and two after taking part in the summer workshop. The remainder of the participants came in contact with *Fighting Words* out of their own personal initiative.

These participants quote different reasons for having chosen to become involved or to remain in contact with *Fighting Words*. Among the reasons provided are the motivational impulse that writing in a dedicated space offers, the company of likeminded people, the availability of write club workshops, the support offered by volunteers.

Once off workshop students

Ninety-two students, seventy females and twenty-two males, among those attending once off workshop sessions responded to the questionnaire. The majority of students (65%, N60) in this group of respondents are aged 15 and affirm to have participated in the workshop as part of the compulsory school activities organised by their teachers. The students in this group were based in four different

schools of which three based in Dublin North-side and one in County Cavan. Two students mention having been previously involved in the *Fighting Words* workshop for primary schools. 61% of respondents (N55) stated that they wished to continue writing creatively after the workshop.

Perceptions of *Fighting Words*

The teachers and *Fighting Words* tutors were asked to comment on what they consider to be key ingredients of the *Fighting Words* model. Figure 4 provides a summary of responses.

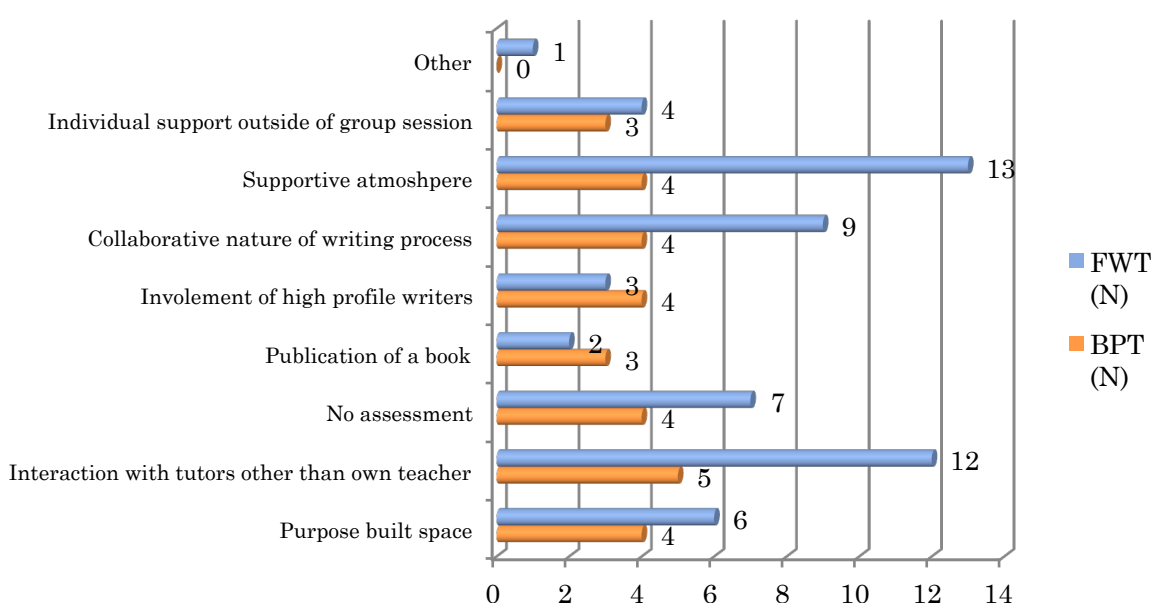


Figure 4: Essential ingredients for the *Fighting Words* model to work

The majority of teachers and of tutors regard the supportive atmosphere and the interaction with tutors rather than teachers as key to the model. Two out of five teachers and a minority of tutors consider the publication of a book to be an essential ingredient of the *Fighting Words* model. This is somehow at odds with responses from students who have taken part in the year-long project who, when asked to comment on what they consider to be one of their biggest achievements respond most frequently “the publication of a story in a book” (see table 7).

Benefits and challenges of being involved in *Fighting Words*

Students who attended once-off workshop session were brought by their teachers and had no choice on whether to participate, whereas students who took part in the book project sessions as part of Transition Year were given the option not to participate. Both groups were asked to comment on their motivations and expectations about participating in *Fighting Words* activities. Despite the different initial impetus for participating, there are strong similarities between the motivations mentioned by both stakeholder groups. “Love of English” and a “hope that participation in *Fighting Words* would help with writing skills” are the most commonly mentioned factors emerging from the analysis.

Table2: motivations and expectations about participating

<i>Book Project students</i>	<i>Once off workshop students</i>
• I thought it would help me to become a better writer/ I enjoy writing • I love English • The opportunity to publish a book • I hoped it would help me to increase my vocabulary • I hoped it would help me to become more confident • I thought it would help me with the Leaving Certificate • To improve my language skills (I am not a native speaker of English) • I originally was very anxious because I find it difficult to write • I initially did not want to get involved but I really liked it once involved	• I thought it might be fun • I love English • I wanted to see how this would benefit my English writing • To improve my writing skills • It sounded interesting • I like reading and find people’s thoughts and stories interesting • I thought it would be a great opportunity • I was hoping that Roddy Doyle would be there • My teachers recommended it • I wanted to improve my story planning and writing • I heard it was good from students who had participated the previous year • I was looking forward to the break from school • I had already participated in primary school and enjoyed it.

Not surprisingly, “getting a break from the routine of school” is also frequently mentioned by students attending the once-off sessions. This motivation does not feature among the comments made by the book project students who were in Transition Year and were experiencing a more generalised break from the routine of other school years.

Benefits & achievements

All questionnaires asked the various stakeholders to comment on the benefits that participating in *Fighting Words* activity may offer.

Table 3: Best aspects of being involved in FW

<i>Teachers (commenting on benefits for students and teachers)</i>	<i>Tutors (commenting on benefits for students and tutors)</i>
• Seeing confidence developing in students • Sense of achievement in producing and publishing a book • Break from routine • Inspiration and creativity enhanced in both students and teachers	• Interacting with young people/supporting them and building relationships • Seeing young people developing and learning • Becoming aware of young people creative potential • Enriching sense of mutual service (both parties gaining from the exchange) • Meeting other volunteers

Table 4: Best aspect of being involved in *Fighting Words* (according to students)

<i>Book Project students</i>	<i>Once off workshop students</i>	<i>Wednesday afternoon students</i>
• Having mentors supporting me • Freedom of creativity/being able to write what I wanted • The space: light and friendly • Relaxing atmosphere • Being able to express myself • Working with others • Publishing a book • Being able to share my ideas • Working with Roddy Doyle and established writers • Nobody judges you • Being away from the classroom • Constructive criticism • Having my say • It did not feel like school • Improving my English	• It was fun • Writing a story with peers • Hearing other people's stories • Working in groups/ interacting with the class • Different ideas from different people/sharing ideas • Helpful and relaxed environment • It got me to think outside the box • Being allowed to do our own thing • Getting the confidence to speak out/ not feeling intimidated • No right or wrong answers • Help from volunteers • Made creative writing less scary	• Constructive advice on my writing • Nice atmosphere for writing • It gives you a chance to think more about writing • It makes you work harder • Being around people who enjoy writing • Opportunity to interact with established writers

Table 5: Benefit/Impact of *Fighting Words* on students

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Tutors</i>
• Develops creativity and imaginative skills • Perseverance and commitment to a project • Working with established writers and not being taught • Develops confidence • Sense of freedom generated by being allowed to write their own stories • Develops planning skills • Develops writing and editing skills • It offers real education [source quote from questionnaire] • Got students interested in story-writing • Provides a great sense of achievement • Enriched the lives of students	• Offers a space alternative to school/ no-judgmental space allows students to make mistakes • Builds self-confidence • Builds creative potential • Allows self-expression • Being creative outside the formal school environment • Meeting likeminded people for those who are interested in writing • Offers a student-centred approach • Students are given a voice • Gives an outlet to those who are shier and less comfortable with self-expression

Most stakeholder groups refer to the relaxed and supportive atmosphere they have experienced in *Fighting Words*. In addition to the physical space which appears to be a contributory factor in the establishment of such an atmosphere, the non-judgmental ethos is clearly perceived even by students who only attend a once-off session.

The enhancement of creativity is also a benefit mentioned across the board. Freedom to think outside the box and confidence gained from seeing one's own ideas validated by other students, teachers and tutors emerge as frequently mentioned benefits. Students mention confidence in themselves but also in their ability to be creative. A sense of reciprocal gain also emerges. Teachers speak of how their own creativity has also been enhanced. Tutors speak of mutual service, book project students in particular express their appreciation for having been mentored and supported by tutors and students who attend the Wednesday afternoon sessions refer to the benefit derived from receiving constructive criticism.

Table 6: The most important thing learned from participating in *Fighting Words*

<i>Book Project students</i>	<i>Once off workshop students</i>	<i>Wednesday afternoon students</i>
• Being surprised at my own ability • Not being afraid of sharing my ideas / it is good to share ideas • I am more confident • I can be creative • I can write • I had a good story in my head and I did not know about it • To respect other people's imagination • No idea is bad/stupid • Teamwork is helpful • Speaking out	• There is no right or wrong answer • Listening to others is important • Thinking outside the box is beneficial • I value my own creativity more • I am more willing to share my ideas • Teamwork is helpful • Anybody can write a story	• Not to give up when stuck/resilience • Writing is a really worthwhile activity • My skills have improved and as a result I am less hesitant sharing my work with others

Unsurprisingly having published a book is the most frequently mentioned accomplishment by the students who engaged in the year-long project. One of the teachers when asked to comment on students' achievement recalls how he came to realise the impact that participation in *Fighting Words* had on a particular student:

Reading the stories the students published in the published book, I knew how much of an achievement it was for some of them....I had the pleasure of dropping off a copy of the book to a student who due to cultural pressure had decided to leave school. He was from the travelling community. His story was all about the adventures of a boy on Junior Cert. night. This was my

best memory, handing the book to his mother who looked proud of him. He had told her all about it.

Table 7: The biggest achievement from participating in *Fighting Words*

<i>Book Project students</i>	<i>Once off workshop students</i>	<i>Wednesday afternoon students</i>
• Writing my own story • Working with Roddy Doyle • Having my story published in a book • Being able to complete a story • Improving my creative writing skills • Being more confident in my own thinking • Understanding how a story is planned and constructed • Being able to communicate my ideas more clearly • Being more confident to ask questions even in school	• It made me more confident • I am able to speak in front of people • I am able to complete a story and to persevere • It is important to think outside the box • It has helped me to become a better listener • I learned to be more creative • I trust my imagination • I learned how to express my opinion better • I learned how to write a story	• Having produced novels and being published • Having achieved a high score in my Leaving Certificate thanks to my involvement in <i>Fighting Words</i>

Nevertheless also students who have attended once-off session seem to derive a similar sense of accomplishment at having been able to complete a full story in a very short period of time.

Students personal benefits

The data from the close-ended questions tend to a great extent to reinforce the themes which have also emerged from the open ended questions.

In general the more prolonged engagement with *Fighting Words* of the year-long book project students appears to have resulted in more markedly positive patterns in terms of development of self-awareness in relation to strengths and weaknesses. Students also self-report greater confidence in their own thinking and in their ability and willingness to share ideas with others. Tutors and teachers tend to see more marked improvement in students' ability to think for themselves than what the students themselves appear to declare. However the majority of students either agrees or strongly agrees that participation in *Fighting Words* made them more respectful of other people's ideas and more at ease with sharing their own ideas.

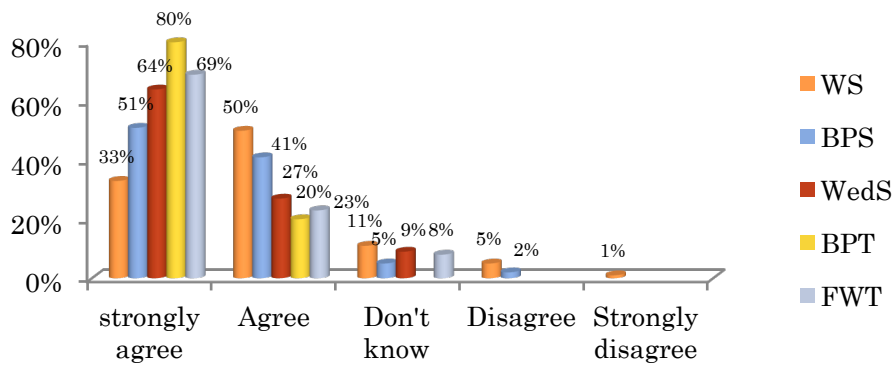


Figure 5: I am/Students more confident in my/their ability to be creative

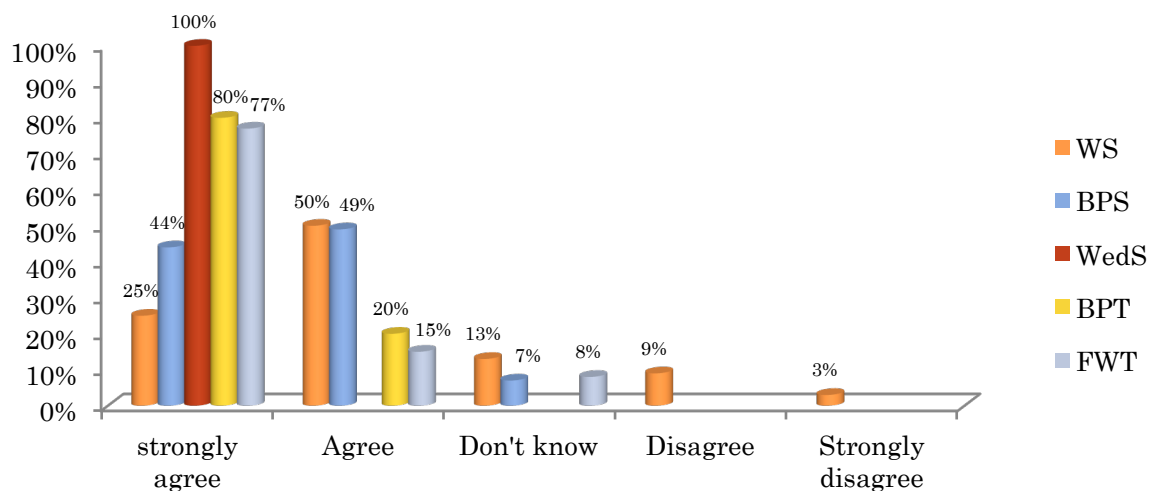


Figure 6: I am/students are more confident in my/their writing abilities

Not surprisingly students attending the Write Club appear to have developed a more marked sense of confidence in relation to their writing ability. Nevertheless 75% of students who attended the once-off workshop and 93% of the book project either agree or strongly agreed to this statement, matching closely the perception of the majority of teachers and tutors. It can be observed that the more general question about confidence in the ability of being creative elicits even stronger levels of agreement from all stakeholders. It should also be noted that one of the year-long book project groups produced a graphic novel and this group may have felt that their ability to be creative had been enhanced while their ability to write might not have been affected to the same extent.

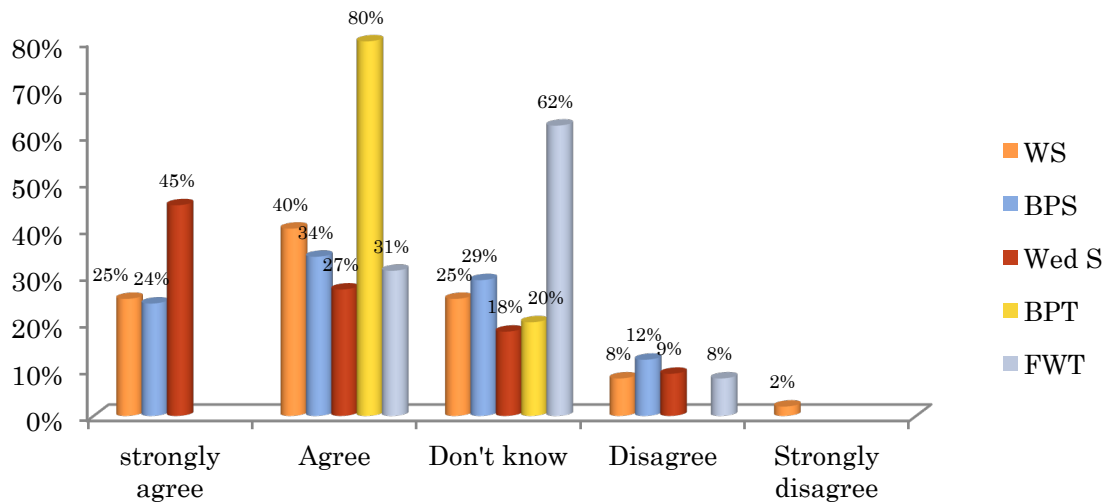


Figure 7: I am/students are better listener/s

While the majority of tutors state not to know whether students have become better listeners, the majority of teachers agree with this statement thus, perhaps indicating that the participation in *Fighting Words* had a noticeable impact on students' interaction in the school environment. Students seem to be less positive about their improvement in their ability to listen. However it is worth noting that students who have attended the once-off session indicate to have derived benefit in terms of their ability to listen and in response to the open ended questions many commented on their enjoyment of team work (see also figures 10 and 11) and of listening to the stories produced by their peers.

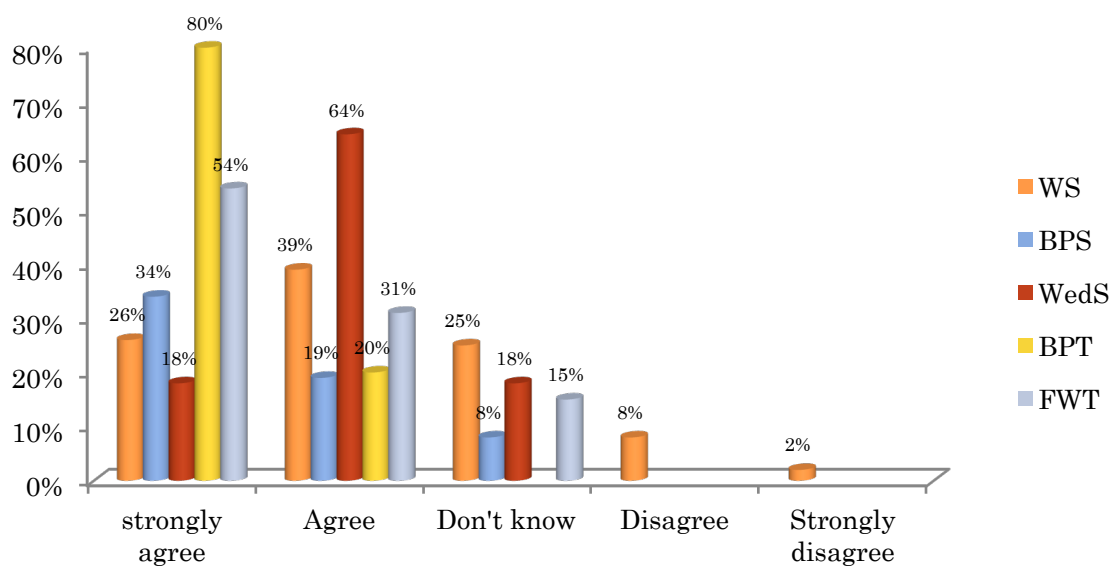


Figure 8: I am/Students are more able to think for myself/themselves

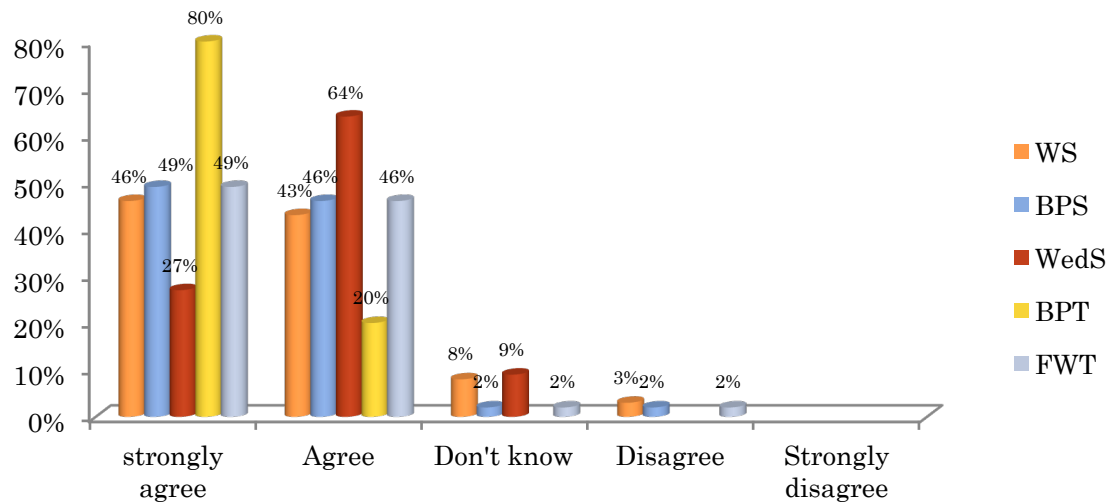


Figure 9: I am/Students are more respectful of other people's ideas

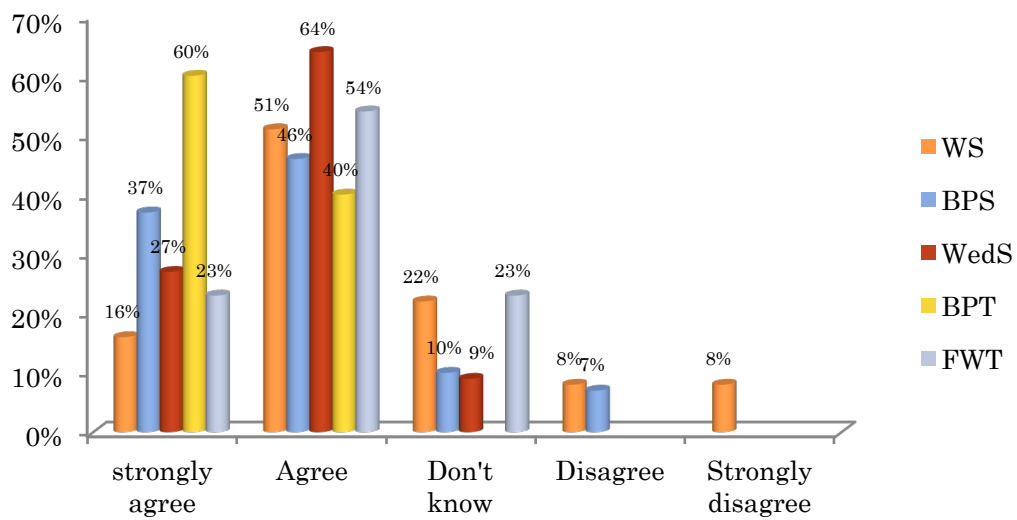


Figure 10: I /Students enjoy sharing my/their ideas

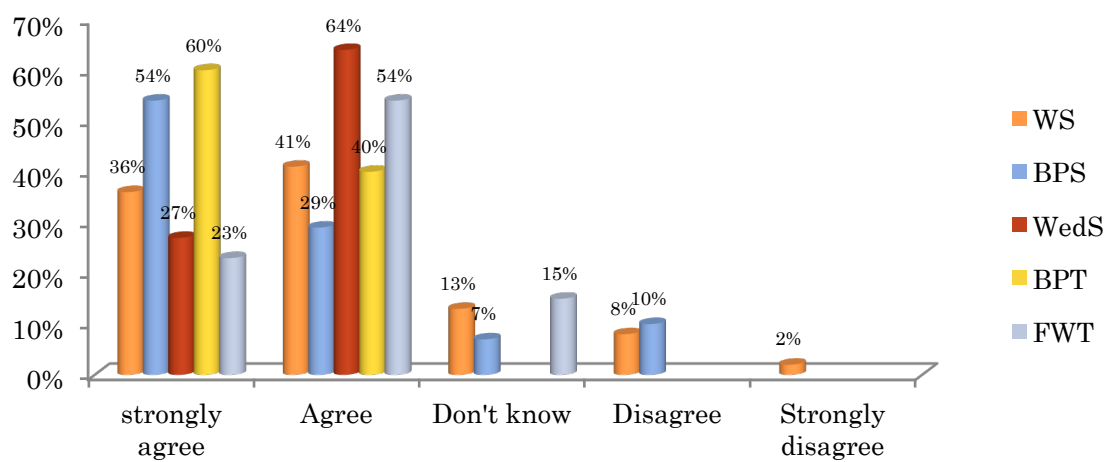


Figure 11: I am /Students are more comfortable working with others

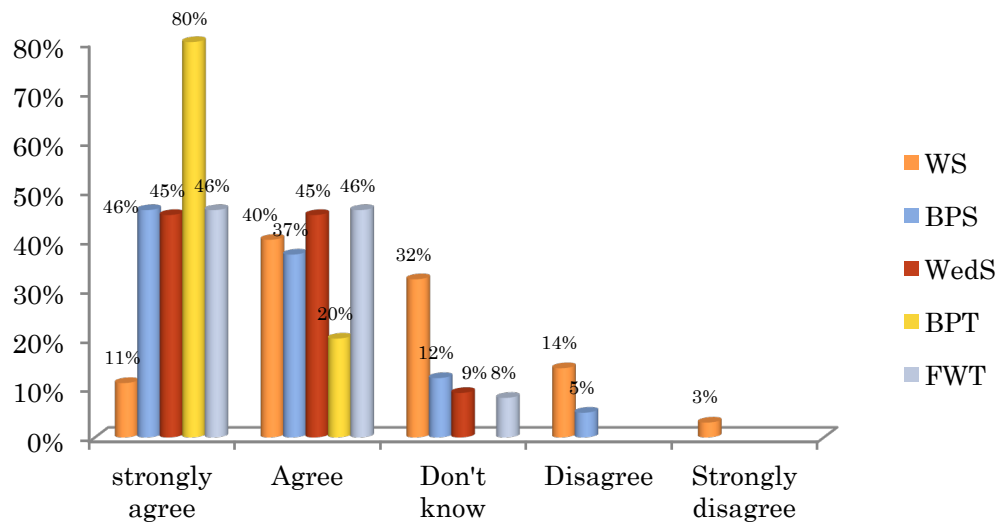


Figure 12: I/ Students have learned more about my/their strengths

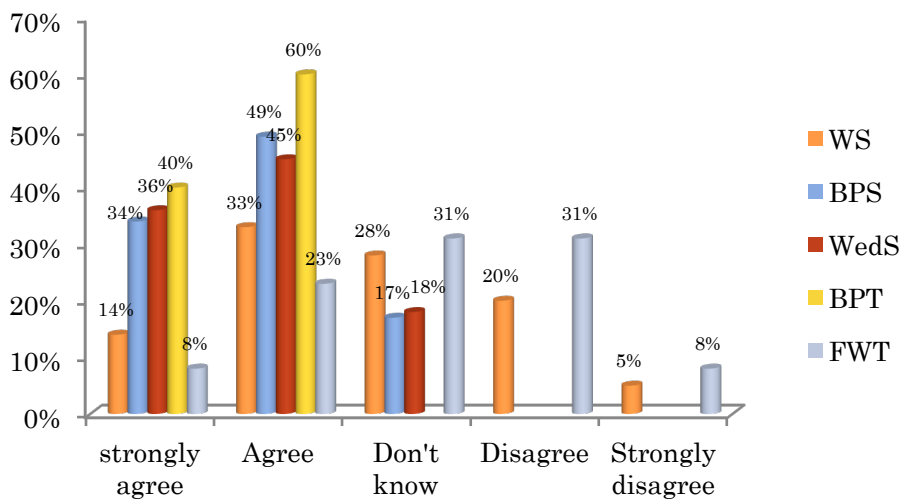


Figure 13: I/Students have learned more about my/their weaknesses

While students report to have gained confidence when asked whether this had resulted in an enhanced capacity to stand up for themselves, the question seems to have produced a mixed outcome. This might indicate that while confidence in terms of creativity and writing has been developed, other aspects of self-confidence may have been enhanced to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that the non-judgmental approach taken by *Fighting Words* coupled with constructive criticism may have impacted on the students' willingness to ask for help as indicated by the levels of agreement shown in figure 15.

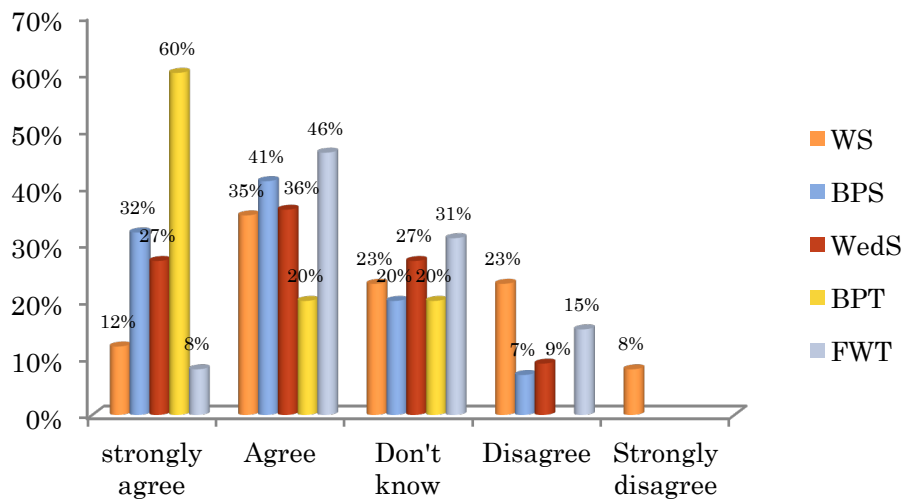


Figure14: I am /Students are not afraid of standing up for myself/themselves

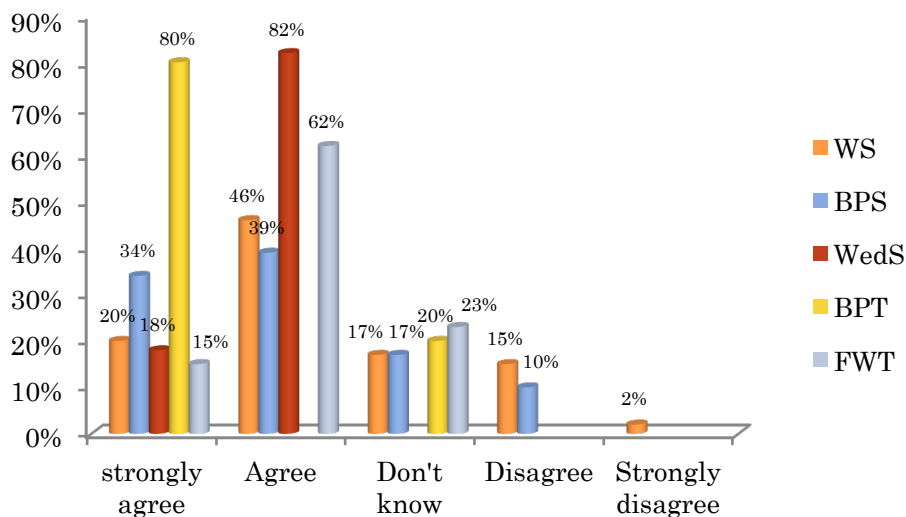


Figure 15: I am/ Student are not afraid of asking for help

Students academic benefits

In addition to benefits in terms of students' personal development the evaluation attempted to ascertain whether some benefit of an academic nature had also been derived from participation in *Fighting Words* activities. Teachers were asked to express their level of agreement on the impact of participation in *Fighting Words* on the development of literacy, on performance in written continuous assessment, on interest in literature and on the enhancement of the ability to analyse literary and a broader range of texts. Four out of five teachers strongly agreed on the impact of *Fighting Words* on literacy and on the strengthening of students' interest in literature. However, all teachers also either agreed or strongly agreed that students developed their ability to analyse texts of varied nature.

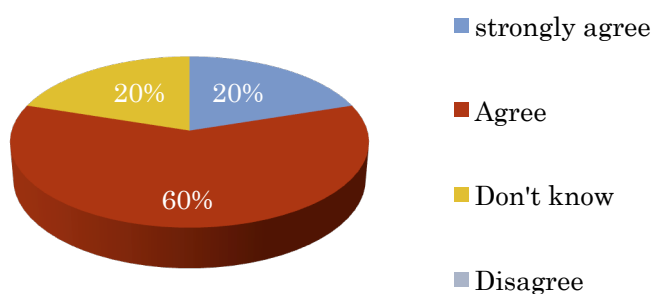


Figure 16: (teachers) As a result of the involvement in *Fighting Words* students' literacy has improved

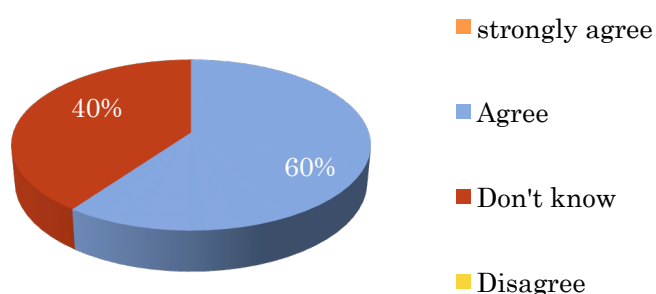


Figure 17: (teachers) As a result of the involvement in *Fighting Words* students' performance in written continuous assessment has improved

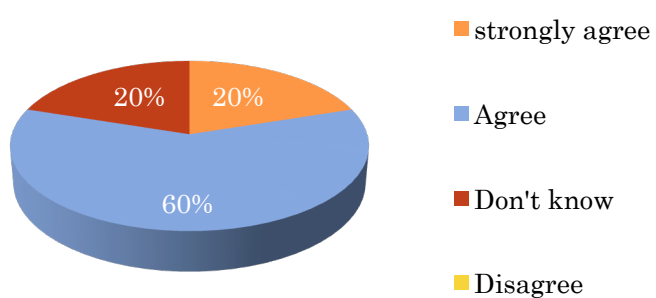


Figure 18: (teachers) As a result of the involvement in *Fighting Words* students show more interest in literature

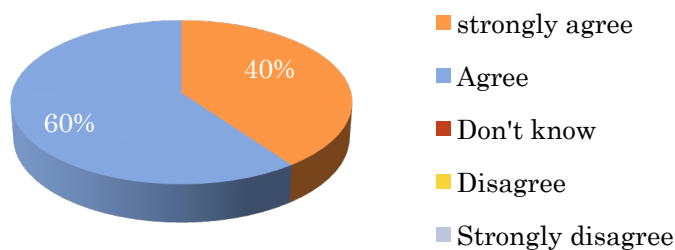


Figure 19: (teachers) As a result of the involvement in *Fighting Words* students show a better ability to critically analyse literary texts

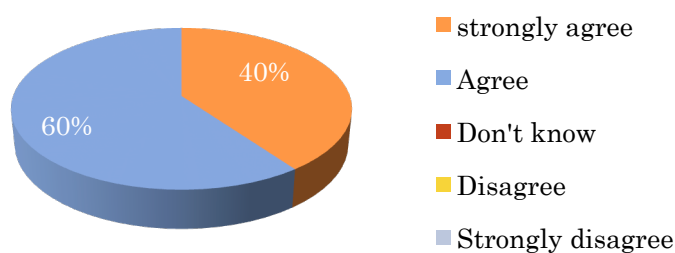


Figure 20; As a result of the involvement in *Fighting Words* students show greater ability to analyse a broader range of written texts

Further questions relating to potential academic benefits were asked to all stakeholders. An increased interest in literature, as reported by teachers, does not appear to have motivated students to visit the library more often. However, approximately half of the book project students and half of the once off workshop students and the majority of the students attending the Wednesday session appear to indicate that they are reading more frequently, though, perhaps, not through sourcing books from a library.

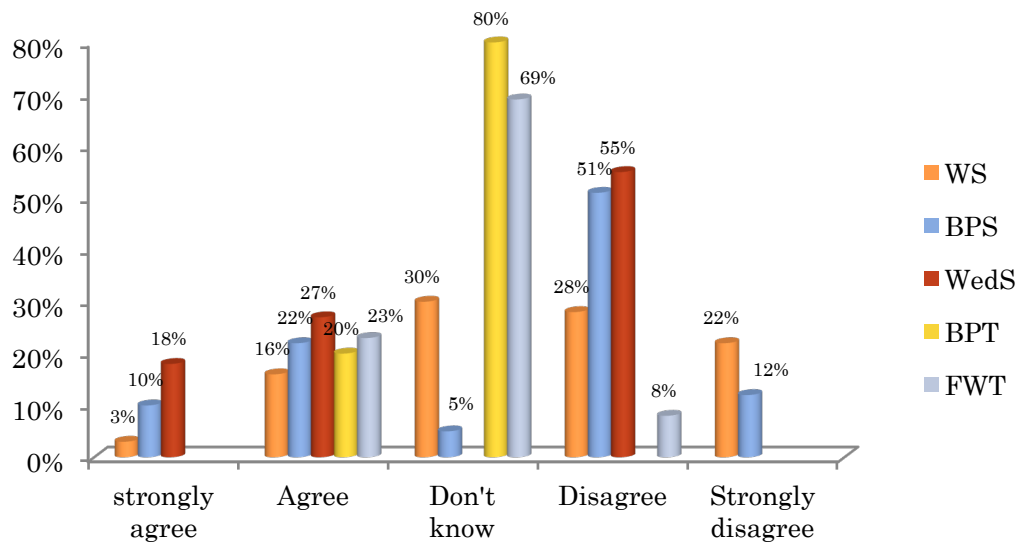


Figure 21: I /Students visit the library more often

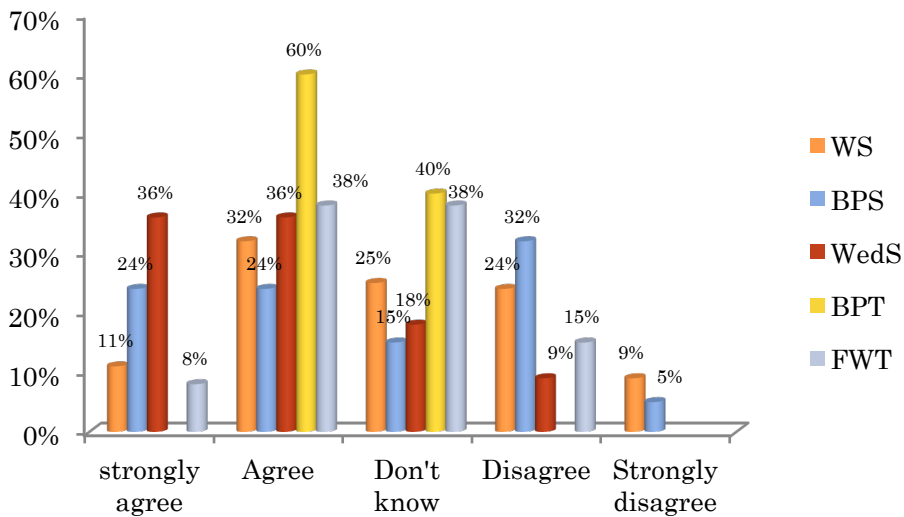


Figure 22: I /Students read more

Finally, all students and teachers show a high level of agreement in terms of an enhanced ability to communicate more clearly as a result of involvement in *Fighting Words*.

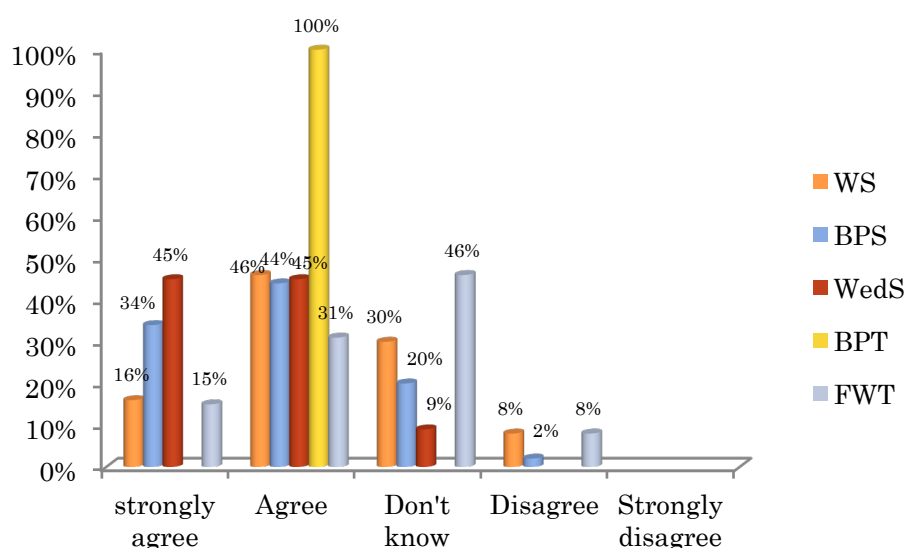


Figure: 23 I/ Students can put my/their point across more clearly

Additional benefits

Teachers were asked to comment on whether the involvement had an impact on the relationship with their students. Table 8 summarises the recurrent comments made by teachers.

Table 8: Changes in the teacher-student relationship as a result of the involvement in *Fighting Words*

Teachers
• Greater bond with the students and among the students themselves
• New-found respect for each other
• Improved relationship with parents
• Students more likely to approach teachers with new ideas
• Better appreciation of how students learn

In general it can be observed that all teachers acknowledge the positive influence of the *Fighting Words* experience on students and one teacher also comments that this has also resulted in a “very healthy classroom environment” thus suggesting that the supportive and respectful atmosphere which had been experienced in *Fighting Words* had also transferred to the school environment. Three of the five teachers also speak of the constant reminiscence and the nostalgic recalling of an important and shared experience for both teachers and students. One teacher states: “it helped us to bond as a group of people who love stories”. There is a sense that teachers and students are equals in the enjoyment of the experience. One teacher remarks that he has seen “how they truly learn” by having witnessed students how students engage with learning out of the school context. While this teacher does not elaborate further on his statement, it might be inferred that by having seen students

interacting and engaging outside the school environment he has witnessed students' learning from a different angle thus gaining a more rounded understanding of the students themselves.

Challenges

While in the account presented by students the benefits appear to outweigh difficulties, some challenges encountered by students are mentioned. Table 9 summarises the challenges for the 3 student stakeholder groups.

Table 9: Challenges of being involved in *Fighting Words*

<i>Book Project students</i>	<i>Once off workshop students</i>	<i>Wednesday afternoon students</i>
• Long process • Would have liked more days • Repetitiveness of the activities • Correcting drafts long and boring • Tiring • Premises too far away • Hard work • Deadlines	• Writing individually/difficult to write on one's own • Having to read the story aloud • Not getting to finish the story/Too little time to finish my story • It felt too long sitting down • Got into individual writing too quickly/not warmed up enough to write individually • Under pressure to write • Did not receive sufficient criticism/ too positive • It was only a once-off	• Once I am finished with school I will no longer be able to attend • Unavailability of other writing clubs once this will be over. • Premises far from where I live

Students attending once-off workshops primarily comment on the difficulty of having to complete stories in short period of time and the pressure experienced in having the story written and ready to be read out to all the other students and tutors.

To some extent the challenges experienced particularly by the book project students are also mirrored in the comments offered by volunteer tutors as listed below. Keeping motivated and motivating despite tiredness, boredom and the frustration generated by the editing process emerge from the comments of both students and tutors. Tutors also mention the difficulties experienced in supporting students more resistant to advice or less confident. In particular they comment on the tendency of some students to take even constructive criticism on their work as more general judgment on their ability to write and how helping these students meant striking a delicate balance between supporting and standing back to ensure that students would not become over-dependent on tutors.

Table 10: Challenges of being a tutor for *Fighting Words*

<i>Tutors</i>
• Difficult to encourage the students when they were tired or frustrated
• Difficult to help them to take constructive criticism through feedback from the editor
• Limited involvement with the students/ not enough time to get to know them well
• Difficult with resistant students/ breaking through to some students/ a good dose of patience needed
• Keeping students engaged with the story/encouraging perseverance
• Guiding editing at times onerous
• Challenging students lack of self-belief
• Knowing when to stand back and let the young person's work take shape

The concerns presented by the Wednesday afternoon students are rather different from those listed for other groups. These students are familiar with the challenges posed by writing as they have chosen to continue after engagement in previous creative writing activities. The challenges are not related to the writing process-itself – which seems to be the primary concerns for BPS and WS- but rather are connected exclusively to other extrinsic factors such as the future inability to attend the centre and the distance of the *Fighting Words* premises from their home.

Transfer of the model to second level curriculum

The teachers and volunteer tutors involved in the book project were asked to offer their views in relation to the possibility to translate the *Fighting Words* model in the formal school environment. It can be observed that while no teacher considers the translation of the model impossible, tutors are less optimistic about the feasibility of such translation. Nevertheless, the majority of teachers and of tutors express some reservations.

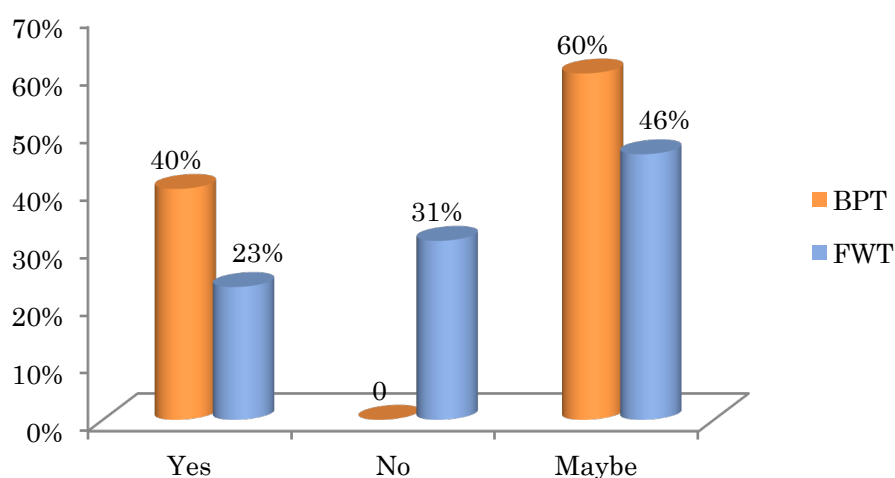


Figure 24: Can the Fighting Word model be transferred to the formal school environment without compromising the integrity of the model? (Teachers and Volunteer tutors' responses)

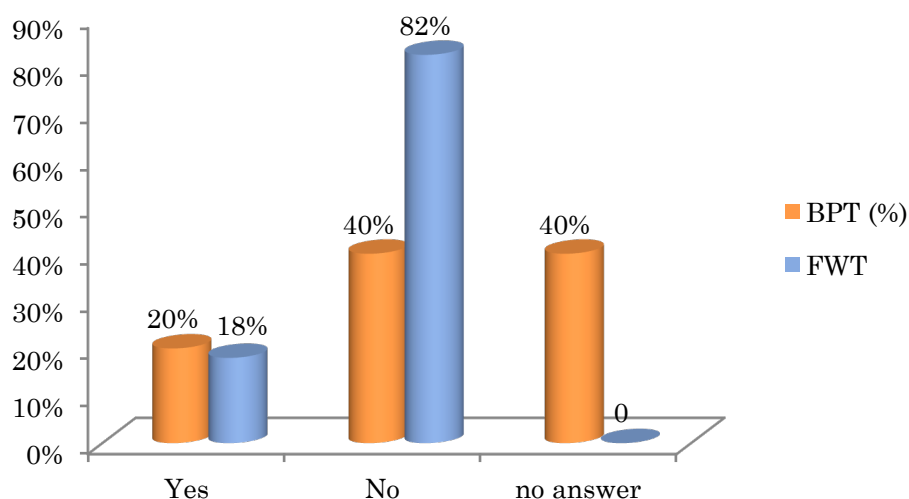


Figure 25: Can the *Fighting Words* model be transferred to the formal school environment without modifications? (Teachers and Volunteer tutors' responses)

The majority of respondents are convinced that the model could not be transferred without modifications. Table 11 summarises the potential difficulties envisaged by teachers and tutors while Table 12 highlights some of the modifications of the model that may need to be considered if it were to be mainstreamed in the secondary school system.

Teachers are primarily concerned with recreating the atmosphere generated by *Fighting Words* and the "out of school experience", which allow the students to take a break from school related activities. To some extent tutors echo the comments presented by teachers regarding the setting and the implications for the experience. One tutor comments:

Much of the beauty of it is difference from the norm of school... so maybe a specific 'creative room' would need to be set aside in the school so that students don't view it just as another class.

Tutors also emphasise the importance of the type support they are able to offer which from the comments emerges as characterised by personalisation and equality. A tutor speaks of the need for "unlearning" first in order for students to become comfortable with writing and relates unlearning to students freeing themselves from the rigid mindset that permeates the school experience. Similarly another tutor speaks of the need for teachers to change their own mindset if they were to replace tutors in the school environment and questions whether this is really possible.

Table 11: Reservations on transferring the *Fighting Words* model to the formal school environment

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Tutors</i>
• Students would not be as relaxed in a school environment • The school settings makes students think of work as homework • Schools can be rather chaotic and offering the model in a school could prove difficult in terms of timetabling. • An outside environment helps students to leave the school day behind.	• Difficult to replicate the experience of interacting with tutors rather than teachers • The presence of set standards and assessment are potential difficulties • The school environment tends not to treat students as equals • The level of individual attention given to students could be difficult to replicate in a formal school environment • If teachers were to support the Fighting Word model a radical change of attitude towards students would need to happen • Curriculum tends to stifle creativity • <i>Fighting Words</i> provides an alternative space to school • The physical space allows relaxing. A school environment may not contribute as well. • If model was replicated in a formal setting it would resemble a school project

Teachers and tutors identify similar modifications. Essentially they advocate that the school environment accommodates some of the core features of the *Fighting Words* model such as the creation of a dedicated space for creative interaction, the support of tutors and the involvement of established writers. Therefore their suggestions imply that the school system should introduce a little more flexibility in terms of the physical space, but also in terms of the parties involved in supporting and mentoring students.

Table 12: Changes need to be made in order for the model to be transferred

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Tutors</i>
• A suitable space needs to be found within the school • Finding ways of getting volunteers involved in the school • Finding ways of getting established writers involved	• The room should not be a classroom • More flexibility in terms of writing (less emphasis on grammatical accuracy greater on creativity and self-expression) • The use of volunteers should be retained/teachers should only be in the background

Locating a suitable space within the curriculum

Finally teachers were asked to comment on the curricular context in which they felt the translation of the *Fighting Words* model could be accommodated. Three out of five teachers see the model more suited to be incorporated in the English syllabus. As it will be outlined in chapter 4 this view is also shared by two of the six principals interviewed and by Dr. Anne Looney, Chief Executive of the NCCA.

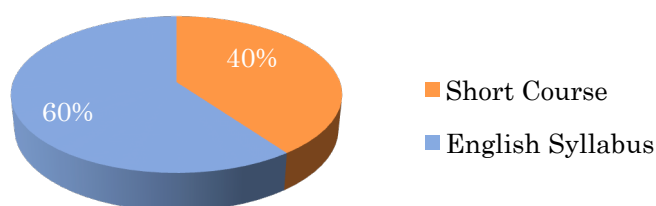


Figure 26: Where in the Junior Cycle can the *Fighting Words* model be incorporated?

The teachers surveyed do not elaborate extensively on their expressed preferences. Those in favour of a translation within the English syllabus bring as reasons more time available for the development of stories compared to the duration of a short course. One teacher states not only that the English syllabus allows for more time devoted to the development of stories, but also offers opportunities for interplay with other elements of the English syllabus:

I have previously tried to teach a short module to 4th year students. This strand lasted 6 weeks. It simply did not allow enough time to complete each story. I felt that if it was drawn on a little more it might have succeeded more successfully. It might also benefit from other elements on the English Syllabus –reading, poetry and media studies.

Table 13: Where should *Fighting Words* be incorporated in the school curriculum?

<i>Teachers</i>	
	• In a short course as teachers may not want to compromise the syllabus
	• In the English Syllabus because the short course does not allow for enough time to develop a story
	• Across the syllabus of different subjects (it does not need to be linked exclusively to the English syllabus)

A similar sentiment is expressed by another teacher who sees an opportunity for an inter-disciplinary approach to the integration of *Fighting Words* in the secondary school curriculum.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has examined the responses to questionnaires distributed to different groups of students; teachers and volunteer tutors who have been involved in *Fighting Words*. While the questionnaires have offered the opportunity to a range of stakeholders to voice their views, it is acknowledged that they represent only a relatively small portion of the overall population.

Nevertheless an overwhelming sense of enjoyment of the *Fighting Words* experience emerges from across all the groups. Despite some challenges identified by both tutors and students, students have

predominantly referred to the benefits they have derived from the experience, which extend well beyond the development of creative writing skills.

However, only a relatively small number of students a year are able to participate in *Fighting Words* activities and in particular in the year-long book project. Despite the expansion of *Fighting Words* activities to an even broader range of groups, a *cinemobile* which brings the model around the country and the planned opening of a new centre in Belfast, a large part of the secondary school population in Ireland has no opportunity to experience *Fighting Words*. An opportunity for reaching a larger population may arise from the mainstreaming of the model within the school curriculum. The data from this chapter highlight that while a translation of the model in the school curriculum might be possible a number of modifications may be necessary, which, if not carefully considered and addressed, may result in substantial compromising of the original model.

In order to further explore the issues that have emerged in this chapter another data collection has been carried out. More in-depth information obtained from a smaller -but key -group of stakeholders (*Fighting Words* founders, School principals and Dr. Anne Looney, NCCA CEO). Interviews have been organised, recorded, transcribed and analysed. The outcomes of these interviews will be presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 will round up the analysis. It will integrate the findings from chapter 3 and 4 and will identify future directions.

Chapter 4: Outcomes from dialogues with Key Stakeholders

Introduction

This chapter outlines the outcomes of the analysis of dialogues with some key stakeholders. These are the founders of *Fighting Words*, Roddy Doyle and Séan Love; The Chief Executive Officer of the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment), Dr. Anne Looney; principals of 6 of the 7 schools which participated in the year-long book projects. It should be noted that it was not possible to interview one of the principals as he had retired and was not contactable. These key stakeholders were selected because of their understanding of both the *Fighting Words* model and the current and new development in the secondary school curriculum. For this reason, it was felt that they would be well placed to comment not only on the model itself but also on its potential translation to mainstream education.

The chapter also draws on the transcript of an interview carried out by Irish radio station *Lyric FM* with several *Fighting Words* stakeholders and on the transcript of the speech by Séan Love and by President of the Irish Republic Michael D. Higgins at an event organised by *Fighting Words* to celebrate the launch of a stamp by the national postal system containing a short story written by a *Fighting Words* former student. The analysis of these additional transcripts was included as they add further breadth and depth to the discussion of the themes identified in the reading of the above mentioned dialogue transcripts.

As in chapter 3 this chapter is organised according to key categories that have been generated from an initial analysis of all the data gathered. Within each category specific themes that have emerged are presented.

Perceptions of *Fighting Words*

On 16th May 2013 President Michael D. Higgins visited *Fighting Words* to unveil a stamp capturing the essence of Dublin city in a brief story written by one of the students who had participated in the *Fighting Words* year-long book project. On this occasion Séan Love chose to encapsulate the main purposes of *Fighting Words* in the following quote by President Higgins.

When we learn to read and to write, to understand letters on a page and to create our own sentences using those letters we are handed a great gift, a gift that allows us to engage fully in society, to educate and inform ourselves to open our minds to realise our possibilities and to discover new worlds and new ways of thinking.

Along with the overtly declared intent of encouraging creative writing- which is also clearly stated in the *Fighting Words* website- a civic and social purpose also implicitly emerges from the choice of this quote. More frequently Séan Love and Roddy Doyle describe *Fighting Words* exclusively as a creative writing centre with two main characteristics: making writing accessible and giving an opportunity to participants to be creative by compensating for what they perceive as a lack of creativity in the Irish education system.

Roddy and I had spoken about the absence of creative writing, we just observed the absence for the opportunity to have creative writing in the Irish education system. We'd come to know each other when I was director of Amnesty International when he and a lot of other writers and artists did a lot of work with us on human rights education, so we kind of observed the absence of an opportunity, particularly for second level students, to get involved in creative writing (Seán Love)

...for the individual children and young people who come through the door, open their heads to the idea that they can write and that it's not something that's for other people or it's not something they can only do *if* they're in honours English or *if* ...they've loads of books or *if* various circumstances are correct ... when you start writing you don't know how it's going to go and obviously school, of necessity, having been a teacher myself for fourteen years, is dictated by the bell and the rhythm of the academic year. It's not to say this should be done away with. Somehow I think within the system there should be an openness to the notion that the answer 'I don't know' is the appropriate answer at the very beginning, but as you go deeper in you try to find out. I think people are frightened of that phrase, 'I don't know' to be honest with you. (Roddy Doyle)

Openness, creativity-as the opposite of rote learning and empowerment are cited as defining purposes of the activities offered by *Fighting Words* by both of its founders. Self-esteem is also mentioned as a recurrent outcome resulting from engagement with *Fighting Words*. Similarly one of the principals describes *Fighting Words* as an "outlet for students to develop their talents" and offers an opportunity that –while seen as valuable- it is also rarely offered in a school environment. All principals concur that *Fighting Words* creative writing centre offers a valuable opportunity, however one of the principals does not see their service as compensating for a deficiency in creativity. Rather he sees *Fighting Words* as complementary to formal education thus considering its services necessarily as parallel and offering something different from what a school can ever hope to be able to provide.

I suppose I would've seen it as being something within...em...our total provision within the arts and I wouldn't have seen it in a sense as replacing a deficiency, yes there are...eh...there's an extent to which you could say that arts education isn't as strong as it should be but there still needs to be something which is...eh... different to what's in that curriculum anyway, that you are...eh...offering something which allows an opportunity which wouldn't really be there anyway to students let's say who are very interested in creative writing.(Principal A)

The concept of opportunity is a recurrent theme across all interviews. Opportunity is characterised by respondents as availability of a physical space conducive to creativity and as an emotional space,

where the supportiveness and non-judgmental attitude of the key players of the *Fighting Words* model create a unique environment where not only creativity can thrive but its by-products -such enhanced self-esteem and development of academic skills- are also enhanced in students. A more detailed discussion of this dual dimension is presented in the next two sections.

Fighting Words as a physical space

The premises of *Fighting Words* are an embodiment of the principles that animate the creative writing centre, with open and bright spaces and minimal use of physical barriers such as doors. In an interview with the radio station Lyric FM, Orla Lehane, *Fighting Words* former Educational Co-ordinator affirms:

The building itself is quite magical and I think the space is an important part of what we do...We are lucky to have a magic door at *Fighting Words* and the magic door is a bookcase that opens up so when the kids are ready to go through they come up with a couple of magic words and the main part of the centre is a big bright space.

One of the principals recalls:

the setting, the setting is superb it's a wonderful place to go down and visit...em...I remember being blown away the first day going into that first reception space walking through the wall of books if I'm right into the other nice bright space (Principal B)

Opening up of a new bright space through a door made of books is a metaphorical image that can be interpreted as representing a broadening of perspective through creative writing.

The physical space however has also a further symbolic connotation which is recurrently and consistently brought up by all interviewees. It represents an "out-of-school space" and an "out-of-school experience". Anne Looney comments that the "out-of school" dimension is a key constituent of *Fighting Words* and emphasises how the physical space is also a vehicle for a different type of experience for the students.

We're taken out of that into a space that's much freer, quite different, we interact with different kinds of adults, they're not teachers who tend to be a particular class, type, so they interact with different people...now is that integral to the *Fighting Words* experience? Is that experience of coming out of school into a different kind of space where everything is different, there's no desks...the organisation of the space is different.

The "out-of-school space" is a space that does not reassemble a classroom. Three out of the six interviewed principals affirm that if the model were to be replicated in the formal school environment the school library or even a space outside but close to the school would need to be rented for this purpose.

Going out of the school is in itself breaking away from the school experience. A principal recalls that the students displayed behaviours different from those usually shown within the school environment:

outside of the school they're a little bit more open and they remember I think more of what's said from outside people; teachers, they see us all day, every day we say the same thing, that's important, this is important so I think that would be lost if it's just down to the teacher...em...and I think as well when they're down there what my understanding is they were so eager to get up and talk and vocalise and one girl, they were saying, never stopped talking ye know this sort of thing just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk were we're always saying be quiet, settle down so I think that's a different type of dynamic which worked well when they're outside school cos we've certain subjects ye can't have that but when they went and done their workshop they were so willing to get up and verbalise (Principal B)

The "out of school experience" is also space with less defined boundaries, both physical and metaphorical. Less boundaries between mentors and students and less specific limitations on what can or cannot be done but also flexible seating arrangements encouraging less formal types of interaction. One of the volunteers – also interviewed by Lyric FM- comments:

In *Fighting Words* when we are given a group of kids to work with they are already excited and they're already out of their class environment and generally that makes it really easy to guy standing up there having a laugh with them and helping them with their ideas and we get a great reaction because we can write a story and the character in it can let a big fart and they don't do that in school so we already have them giggling and laughing.

In the case of *Fighting Words* the "out of school experience" is also an educational experience, but education becomes dissociated from schooling. As a principal commented the educational boundaries dissolve and the student rather than the syllabus becomes the centre of the educational experience.

I suppose to give the children an opportunity to engage with language outside of the classroom and to open it outside of the syllabus itself to give them an opportunity to express creatively something that reflects their own experience of life and that is not necessarily dictated by the curriculum and syllabus laid down by the department, like I know lot of people choose creative writing ye know within the syllabus but this is something that gives total freedom to the student so it's more student directed. (Principal C)

Similarly another principal comments that the out of school experience offers a memorable experience precisely because it offers an alternative from what is normally done in schools.

it's different ye know like, suppose like what days do we remember from school? It's not the days we sat doing maths or something for the thousandth time but you remember trips you made...'oh yeah we went, do ye remember we did that?' 'oh yeah d'ya remember we went there?' these are the things that are remembered whereas if it's just sort of part of that great melange of a...of school, school work I don't think that's as memorable as something that's seen as different. I suppose people would remember if they put on a play or something in school and that can be done in school but that is such a, a different experience or the day they played in a concert or they sang or something like that they would remember that but I suppose that the external part of it that encourages people remember (Principal D)

As mentioned above the physical space is a vehicle for the creation of a supportive environment for *Fighting Words* participants. Recurrently in the interviews, *Fighting Words* is described as an emotional and nurturing environment that supports without judging and in so doing creates a safe place in which to thrive both academically and personally. The participants come to *own* the space. A young participant in the interview given to Lyric FM comments:

It's just something about it that I can't even describe but it just gives the kinda feeling that this is your world. What you want to happen, happens and it's just great.

The empowerment that results from supportiveness of the environment opens up a creative space where participants are not afraid to experiment with their imagination, but also to express their views in a broader sense. Students are given full control over their stories and no teaching takes place. Roddy Doyle in the interview with Lyric FM speaks of students feeling comfortable with taking charge of the activities they carry out in *Fighting Words* and suggests that this leads to generating a sense of community and of mutual respect.

They're making up their own rules, swapping work with each other although they're very, very gentle with each other which is a good thing as well and they just have that common cause, so to speak.

Similarly Seán Love speaks of "creating something that is entirely theirs, from their own imagination" and adds that this largely possible because of the freedom that students experience and the lack of judgmental activities like assessment. Furthermore President Michael D. Higgins in his speech at *Fighting Words* stamp launch highlights that the co-operative atmosphere generated by *Fighting Words* has implication beyond its overt aim to enhance creativity. It also gives students an experience of empowerment and active participation that might they feel encouraged to reproduce in a broader sense in society.

It is so important making the provision of a space for exploring and nurturing creativity as *Fighting Words* has done...eh...it's a powerful contributing to a future generation to develop their imagination and to explore their potential and possibilities within a truly, truly decent society and a fair society.

He also adds that through working together with others students develop a tolerance and ethics that enables them to respecting other people through respecting in first place their imagination.

According to all the principals interviewed, in *Fighting Words* different dynamics from those existing in schools are generated. Key to the establishment of such dynamics and contributory factor to the

creation of an “out of school experience” is the support of *Fighting Words* volunteer tutors. Anne Looney considers volunteers so integral to the *Fighting Words* model that she questions whether the same experience could be replicated without them.

[tutors are] integral to the *Fighting Words* experience – in other words that we come out of the institution that regulates our space our time our dress our lives. We’re taken out of that into a space that’s much freer, quite different, we interact with different kinds of adults, they’re not teachers who tend to be a particular class, type, so they interact with different people...

Tutors who are not seen by students as teachers and who do not act as teachers are the most frequently quoted factor in the establishment of an atmosphere different from that experienced in school. Students find in *Fighting Words* a nurturing space where praise was having a profound effect on students. Mentorship alone does not seem to be a sufficiently differentiating characteristic for tutors, as it can be argued that teachers also fulfill that role to some extent. However the constructive and advisory role assumed by volunteer tutors -which in *Fighting Words* is decoupled from the judgmental role associated with assessment - is reported by interviewees as being influential in the establishment of supportive relationship with students.

Student benefits

As argued in the previous sections, *Fighting Words* was regarded as a positive, nurturing environment which resulted in considerable personal and academic gain for students involved in the programme. The specific benefits highlighted by the key stakeholders are outlined below.

Students’ personal benefits

Stakeholders identified a number of personal benefits for participants of the *Fighting Words* project. Students who participated in the project were perceived to have increased levels of engagement and motivation, improved confidence and self-esteem, and a strong sense of their creative abilities. Being given an opportunity to have their voice heard was seen to be an empowering experience for participants, particularly for those who were quiet or withdrawn, and those with poor language skills or behavioural difficulties. Many of the stakeholders observed that students took ownership of the work and were given the opportunity to express ideas and develop the imagination. It was also noted that participants took enormous pride in their creative achievement and for many it was the highlight of the school year.

Having a voice

The opportunity to express their views and have their voices heard was identified as a significant factor in building participants' confidence and self-esteem. Some stakeholders observed the value of *Fighting Words* in providing a platform for the student voice. According to NCCA, CEO, Dr. Anne Looney, voice is at the core of the initiative:

Fighting Words to me is about voice so it's about giving students the tools to articulate views, opinions, ideas, concepts, questions even if they're challenging...giving them the tools, giving them the space and...em...giving them the confidence as well to find that voice.

This view is echoed by a principal who comments on the significance of this platform given the absence of the teenage voice from the media.

I think the media today particularly print media is often dominated by adults and you get a different dimension coming from what the kids write. *Fighting Words* encourages students to engage with experience at their level that's why it's attractive to students... their experience counts, their experience of life has merit so it's really facilitating the teenage voice and giving expression to their ideas particularly with societal issues that are not necessarily covered in the media by their peers because most of the stuff... is usually written from a journalistic perspective whereas this way it gives them a voice. (Principal C)

An outlet for students who are shy, students with behavioural challenges or poor language skills

While all the stakeholders agree that those who participated in the *Fighting Words* project benefited in numerous ways, a significant number of the stakeholders also commented on the impact of the project on students with special needs, students with behavioural difficulties and students with poor language skills. According to Love, this was one of the unanticipated benefits of the project and he remarks that some of the workshops with special needs students have been particularly engaging.

Some of my favourite workshops are with children and adults with special needs. The feedback from themselves and from their parents or teachers or whoever's with them is that it can have extraordinary benefits for them... particularly, I'm struck by parents of children with Asperger's about what it has opened for their children... and for the visually impaired... I think the workshops with those students are just the best fun ever... the other day we had a group of adults with a range of intellectual disabilities from Cork, and it was just the most fantastic session. They had a fantastic time, they wrote a fantastic story together, they wanted their books and so they waited for them to print and had a singsong.....and got a late train home.

A number of principals also remarked that one of the major benefits of the project was its impact on special needs students. One principal noted that participating in *Fighting Words* "would have done absolute wonders for their self-confidence and their self-esteem" (Principal A). Another principal observed that it was a hugely affirming experience for non-national students to have the opportunity to tell their stories and have their voice heard.

One of our girls was a non-national student who was very poor at English, she wrote a wonderful story which *Fighting Words* kindly translated from Polish into English. It was good to

show that, that girl, even though she was not from Ireland and couldn't speak English, she too could write her story. To then have it translated so that it was printed in both languages in the book... I think was an amazing thing. (Principal B)

The opportunity to have their voice heard was also particularly significant for notably quiet students and students with mental health difficulties. One principal commented on the therapeutic effect of writing, remarking that the project helped one student who was very withdrawn, had low self-esteem and suffered with mental health issues express himself in a manner that was comfortable and safe for him.

It was very surprising for me when I realised that this was the boy who was getting published because to me he was withdrawn and he was quiet and that's why... ye know... it's not just the more articulate kids who participate... it actually can reach out to someone who is quite quiet so, ye know the power of the pen... I think *Fighting Words* is an opportunity to unravel some of the issues that they are dealing with. (Principal C)

Another principal provides a further example of how the project particularly benefited a student with poor social skills who had been seriously bullied in primary school.

Participating in the project was good for him, good for his parents and has helped him develop that little bit of extra confidence that wasn't there before. (Principal A)

The same principal makes a similar observation in relation to students with behavioural problems. He refers to one student for whom the project was hugely beneficial. The student in question had ongoing serious difficulties and had never been involved in any extracurricular activity previously but his participation in *Fighting Words* "drew him into a much more positive relationship with the school as a whole".

An outlet for creativity and imagination

One of the obvious strengths of *Fighting Words* is that it provides participants with an outlet for creativity. Stakeholders identified its capacity to stimulate the imagination and engage the creative skills of participants as a significant opportunity for students to develop their creativity. Undoubtedly part of the reason for its facility to do so is the strong ethos that underpins the organisation. There is a remarkable emphasis on recognising the creativity of each individual.

Our experience in here is that every student is creative. There's not a single student since we opened, more than 40,000 of them coming through here, who doesn't engage. They may have different levels of ability but every single one of them, every single one... and they don't really get that opportunity in the formal system, in my opinion. (Seán Love)

The lack of opportunity for creative expression in the present formal curriculum is also highlighted by a number of the principals who comment on the noticeable absence of the arts and the consequent neglect of young people's talents. In this regard, they see *Fighting Words* as having an important role in supporting the formal education system.

It's an outlet for students to develop talents, develop their creative abilities in a way which is probably not as easily replicated in the classroom situation... one of the big benefits of something like this is that it broadens the range of students who can avail of something which is going to be of real benefit to them in their writing, in their artistic development... to develop talents outside of the 9-4 curriculum. In school life the arts and sports should be two areas that are very similar that offer various opportunities but I do think that the arts has been a neglected area both within the...eh...really within the curriculum as well as outside of the curriculum. (Principal A)

Another principal commented on the constraints of the curriculum and the resultant lack of opportunity for students to engage their imagination. This principal remarked that failure to provide this opportunity at second level has repercussions not only for the individual students but for society at large.

While we offer a broad curriculum the syllabi are very constraining so the imagination of a child is very constrained... generally they are reminded to regurgitate the facts, the facts, the facts and sometimes there isn't space for expression aside of the facts... generally they don't get the opportunity... kids have imaginations and we forget that they have imaginations and imagining and ye know positive day dreaming and visualisation again from a de-stressing perspective is very important... it's a way of releasing. Imagination is very, very important and it's something that is not encouraged enough at second-level and it's something that should be cherished... I think for society ye know everywhere not just at second-level and if you do it at second-level then they'll bring it with them and that's a tool basically for positive mental health. (Principal C)

The freedom to imagine and the opportunity to be creative are central tenets of the *Fighting Words* initiative. Séan Love sees these as essential elements in the development of the individual and argues that the formal education system is not providing young people with this opportunity.

I want to emphasise that any criticism is of the system, not the teachers,there's very little opportunity for creativity that I can see at any level in secondary because of the points and the examinations system ...I think one of the downsides of the absence of creativity at second level is that it's...it's really quite destructive from a societal perspective....as I understand it the universities over the last few years are saying that students are coming in from secondary with 600 points but they don't have the capacity to engage in critical thinking...or in creative thinking, they haven't done it and...so they, no matter how many points they've got they're completely ill-prepared for third level... to think critically or creatively... they've never had the opportunity to do it...that's not a healthy thing, I think...

Another principal refers to the impact of the group dynamic and the fact that the *Fighting Words* experience is different from what students might usually encounter in school. In her view, students learn from this and "learn to be more creative or at least open a door to their creativity"(Principal E). According to one principal, the development of creative skills is more important now than ever and therefore *Fighting Words* is a timely initiative.

I think it's more than just short story writing, I think it's about developing the creative skills, the mind-set in young people today; they're so tuned in with their i-phones and TV programmes, sometimes to get into that creativity the students don't realise that they actually have...I just think the idea...get in there, something so simple and basic yet I think we fail to do

that in schools, at times within the mainstream curriculum. I think they found a niche, a fun way of developing those creative skills because they are skills we're looking for in young men and women leaving school. We're looking at one of the key skills in the new Junior Cycle *Framework* as well, so I think they're hitting the nail on the head and this can only go further. (Principal F)

Confidence, empowerment and self-efficacy

Having a voice and an opportunity to develop the imagination raised students' awareness of their creative potential, this - in turn – had a positive influence on students' self-image. All of the key stakeholders commented on the tremendous sense of empowerment and confidence that participants gained from the *Fighting Words* experience.

Principals observed a noticeable improvement in participants' self-confidence and self-esteem.

Their esteem shot through the roof... some of those girls may have certain issues at home, broken backgrounds... alcoholism at home... coming into school is almost a relief for them... they never get the praise... the merit in anything because they're average students... but going out there every Thursday... they were coming back having been praised by the volunteers in *Fighting Words*... told they can do this, that they were wonderful human beings, that they were brilliant creative beings and I could see over the course of the year, their shoulders were physically up more. (Principal F)

Another principal remarked, that engaging in the writing process and seeing the final output of their collective efforts was a hugely affirming experience that raised participants' self-perception.

For the girls to see their words in print and to hear them talking about themselves as authors is just amazing. So...em...I just think it's a confidence thing...they benefit hugely from their confidence being boosted but...em...also from their writing skills... they *can* write and what they have to write is of value. (Principal B)

The potential for positively boosting students' self-esteem and giving students a sense of empowerment through creative expression is the impetus behind the *Fighting Words* initiative. While they claim to be nothing more than a creative writing centre, they are cognisant that providing young people with an opportunity to engage in creative self-expression can positively influence lives.

The primary purpose is to give every, well... as many children as possible the opportunity to engage with creative writing and just to see what it opens up for them. We think that creative writing is an absolutely essential part of every child's education, or should be, and in reality here in Ireland you're depending at best on a particularly dynamic teacher to find the opportunity and there are many such teachers... but in general and particularly at second level the opportunity just isn't there... every child should have that opportunity...and underlying that... it's about self-esteem, self-confidence and empowerment...we're not looking to find or create the greatest writers. We can already see some of them passing through here, but that's not our purpose. (Seán Love)

The link between developing self-confidence and participating in the arts is also articulated by one of the principals who argue that the arts give students the opportunity to explore alternatives without the fear of failure.

It really is as much about skills and giving them the confidence to try something and ye know one of the things which...eh...I suppose in terms of the arts and the educational system as it is, is that you need students to be able to fail at things but without it having huge consequences. (Principal A)

Anne Looney's comment on the importance of students learning from their mistakes echoes this sentiment.

In Junior Cycle we're really trying to move towards teaching students that the learning process is about making mistakes and about discovering and getting things wrong and reworking them and I think that part of the issue that *Fighting Words* connects with the idea of the voice of the student and giving, allowing that voice to be heard. It also deals with the issue of creativity which is also one of the underpinning skills of the new Junior Cycle.

Seán Love highlights the importance of encouraging people to experiment, take risks and search for answers. He argues that this is an important part of enabling people to discover their potential.

...One of our most natural... gifts...as humans is to be creative and we're not actually indulging that and allowing students to experiment.....it seems the answer always has to be a certain thing... and the answer if you let people come up with their own answers mightn't be the greatest answer but at least they're being creative around it. (Seán Love)

Another principal argues that enabling students to discover their creative potential not only promotes self-efficacy, it also results in the development of transferrable skills.

Fighting Words they're actually seeing the level I suppose, of where students are in terms of their academic ability, their reading skills, their literacy skills, their writing skills...em..they're doing it in a fun way and yet they're challenging the students... and there can only be a ripple effect when they go back into the classroom... for example we had it this year in TY... the girls were not only going into English... also going into French, into Irish and writing short stories, writing their own poetry... they were developing transferrable skills. (Principal F)

Sense of pride and achievement

A number of the stakeholders referred to the tremendous sense of achievement that students experienced from their involvement in *Fighting Words*. In particular it was noted that students were enormously proud of the fact that they had created something entirely from their imagination. This outcome was especially significant for those students who had previously lacked confidence. For Roddy Doyle, participants pride in their achievement is understandable. He observes:

It's one of the measures of independence really isn't it? The ability to write something that is your own and to actually take the next step and let other people read it.

For many participants the feeling of success was heightened by the reaction of others to their work and the fact that other students in the school now looked up to them.

They were so proud of themselves to have their book launched, to be sold, to become writers, published writers – a lot of those girls - their self-esteem has just blossomed and they hold

their head up high and they're kind of role models now to the other students, the other students in their year group thinking, wow, you did that, pure role models. (Principal F)

The night of the book launch was also described as an enormously uplifting experience for students and their parents and a cause for great celebration in the school.

When we had the launch night here and when parents came in they were very proud of their children - any opportunity where parents are proud of their children is obviously a good thing, ye know. It was a very positive experience for the students who took part... We took photos and you could see all the happy faces... all the heads were up, all proud of themselves ye know, like if you wanted anymore proof like that's enough like and they were...eh...some of those kids were quite shy so it really was a great achievement for them (Principal D)

A couple of principals compared the *Fighting Words* opportunity to engage in creative arts to the opportunity other students get to partake in a sport. One principal remarked:

It is, is akin I think to the student who...eh...in sport or an area like that, that they can express themselves so when they can express themselves in a literary fashion obviously that's very good as well. (Principal D)

Roddy Doyle makes a similar comparison in relation to the Wednesday Write Club

What I suppose write club is in a way is teenage writers anonymous where...a kid with an interest in football has no difficulty asserting that and finding other people who play football and it's great. Wednesday afternoons...a lot of schools get half days and this room is full of kids who want to write on Wednesday afternoon and some of them weren't aware that anybody else wanted to write and they love it here. (Lyric FM)

The other principal likened the launch night to a sporting triumph and welcomed the opportunity it presented to promote creativity and raise the profile of the arts in the school.

The fact that we had the launch of it here in the school with advertising and all of that would have given all of this the same sort of lift I suppose, equivalent to winning something in a sport which gives it...eh... profile, really important profile to an artistic project... to creativity... and so the spin-off is... that you have students in first year saying "I'd like to try that, I'd like to do it" (Principal A)

This principal also observed that creative writing presented students, who may not be inclined to experience other art forms, a valuable opportunity to engage in an artistic process over an extended period of time.

Lots of schools have their musical or their play but that's very much a once off self-contained area. Something like this is different... yes you have a final product but... it's a process that's going on over a longer period of time and allows for much more engagement by the student both in the final outcome but also in the process of how it's actually put together so from that point of view it's something which is giving...em... that broad term 'the arts' a higher profile... bringing in students who might not for instance have been the ones to play the sport or play a part in the musical or whatever... so I think that's really, really important and it's fantastic to be able to have an outside body providing you with some assistance and some resources. (Principal A)

All of the principals remarked that the project was a positive, educational and enjoyable experience for students and some principals pinpointed *Fighting Words* as the highlight of the school year for many participants.

I know when we get to the end of TY and we ask them to assess the different activities they've been involved in, *Fighting Words* will always be one they have up there as one of their favourite activities. (Principal E)

Similarly, another principal considered *Fighting Words* to be one of the better programmes on offer to students.

The children who come to this school are very happy because of the opportunities they get and *Fighting Words* is one of the better opportunities they get in my opinion. (Principal B)

Another principal commented on the high quality of the work students produced and remarked that it is experiences like these that stand out in the memory long after school days are over.

The standard of both the story making but also of the art work that they did was, it was fantastic and that's great it's great for the students primarily but for everybody else whether it was the staff involved, the parents...em...for them all it's, it's something that they remember, forever. They have that book at home that they did when they were in whatever year, and that remains with them and that's fantastic. (Principal A)

Students' academic benefits

The key stakeholders identified numerous academic benefits including, learning to work with others, participating in a collaborative process, developing a love of writing and improved literacy.

Learning to work together and participation in collaborative processes

Both Doyle and Love emphasise the importance of the group working together at the beginning of the writing process. They see this collaborative approach as an integral part of the creative process and have found it to be a highly effective strategy for enabling writing. The act of working together allows the participants to take ownership of the work and gives them a starting point and a sense of purpose.

Any group that comes in, they work at the outset as a group, writing the beginning of a story together orally and their ideas all get typed up on the screen by somebody who's working on the laptop. Generally it'll be a group of 25, standard class size, working together so rather than trying to get them to start working individually on a blank sheet of paper from the beginning when they come in...no matter what age they are, they work as a group and we use the screen....and what we discovered, really what this did was, it opened the door for not just teenagers but older people as well, it got them over the fear of the blank page – not knowing how to start...once they get started the inhibitions disappear. (Seán Love)

We brought in the screen which works really, really well with primary school kids and we started using it with secondary school kids and it was a fabulous way of starting work. Everybody we've worked with including adults and including blind kids who can't see what's

actually going up on the screen but they still love the event. So it worked very well, that notion of them working together at first and then bringing them away from the screen and getting them to work on their own. It was one of the things I remember at the time that really...it filled me because I felt, now we know what we're doing. (Roddy Doyle)

The value of a collaborative creative process is also recognised by two of the principals who refer to the importance of students sharing ideas and working together before writing independently.

Fighting Words was a chance to get the girls to write down their stories cos they've such imaginations they've such life experience and to get it down, to show them how easy it is because actually I attended one of the first sessions as well and...em...there was a role play and the facilitator just asked two girls to get up just have a conversation about say, someone took your mobile phone and talk about it so they got up and they were chatting away no problem and as they were talking I was amazed, there was somebody typing up the dialogue so by the end of those two 30 seconds or 40 seconds they could see that was a page of script nearly, from a novel. So it was making them see that they have got something to say so that's what, I would hope they get from it, is to know that...em...to have confidence in writing down either what they imagine and create or maybe their life experience. (Principal B)

Roddy Doyle and Séan Love state that adopting a collaborative approach enables participants to overcome the fear of the blank page as they have already begun the story before they start to write individually. Doyle remarks, "I like the notion, the collective start. I do think it rids it of a lot of its terror... and it's ye know it's... dare I say it... fun!"

Starting with a scenario based role play, participants are given the opportunity to develop dialogue, create characters and establish a setting, all of which gives participants the inspiration and confidence to start writing immediately. Doyle remarks, "It's the blank page that terrifies people more than anything else". Love agrees, emphasising that this process not only allows them overcome this obstacle; it also enables them to take ownership of the work.

When they would start orally with an idea...we'd give them scenarios that they could ad-lib and kind-of act out and we'd type up these brief dialogues. It works without fail, no matter who the students are, once they see it become real written up on the screen they start to edit it and they take ownership of it. (Seán Love)

Simple as it may appear, the screen is a hugely significant element of the model both in terms of the collaborative creation of the story and the powerful effect it has on the participants. Love and Doyle emphasise that for the participants the simple act of seeing their own words being typed on the screen is incredibly liberating and hugely important confidence building experience. The method is particularly striking in that it appears to work for everyone, especially those who do not consider themselves as writers.

We discovered it particularly, perfectly worked with a group of young women, girls who had left school early. They came in... they would've been all around 19/20 that kind of age and they were coming in to write a story but of course they all came in and said I don't know how to

write, dunno how to write a story. So Roddy got a couple of them up to ad-lib a situation and once the words got typed up on the screen all of the inhibitions disappeared and they wrote an extraordinary story and ...the main thing was they took ownership of it. Once they created characters and they saw their words typed on the screen...eh...all of the inhibitions disappeared. (Séan Love)

Love of writing

A number of the stakeholders commented on the potential of *Fighting Words* to spark a love of writing that would remain with some participants for life. One principal remarked that having their work published was enormously encouraging for young people and significantly increased their chances of pursuing writing as an outlet and seeking to be published no matter what career path they might choose in the future.

When something is actually published and it's there particularly on a library shelf or online or on our website or in the national newspaper that motivates them to seek perhaps third level involvement with language and so it opens them up to maybe, ye know Journalism or ye know making creative writing, be that in poetry or prose, sort of alive in the 21st Century so that people from all backgrounds... basically if somebody gets something published at the age of sixteen it means that they will probably keep on writing even if they're studying science or something that they will keep on writing creatively and seek to publish outside of their actual profession, that could be a profession in pharmacy but that they see a relevance in literacy and that everybody is capable of writing that it just doesn't belong to those who study English. (Principal C)

Roddy Doyle makes a similar point and emphasises that an important part of the process is convincing participants that they can write and that writing is not just for a select few.

...to open the individual children and young people who come through the door, open their heads to the idea that they can write and that it's not something that's for other people or it's not something they can only do *if* they're in honours English.

Development of literacy

Doyle and Love make no reference to developing literacy skills and while levels of literacy may improve as a natural follow on, this is certainly not the primary purpose of the project. Nevertheless, some principals see this as an important component.

The primary purpose is to help students express themselves in English and to write and to develop their confidence and improve literacy (Principal D)

In many instances, principals see *Fighting Words* as an important vehicle for raising the profile of literacy among participants and the wider school.

Well I suppose in raising the profile of literacy ye know and I suppose it's...we have a very strong focus on literacy anyway... So in a sense, *Fighting Words* is another vehicle for it to continue and so from that point of view it enhanced our literacy programme (Principal E)

Another principal agreed that the project helped promote literacy in the school and was also cognisant that the model caters for all levels of literacies and abilities.

Creative writing, getting students to express their own experience in their own words at their own level because I think that what's good about it is, it caters for all levels so you can have somebody struggling with literacy who's writing at a certain level and you can have somebody who's very proficient in the language so...em...because we are seeking to promote literacy and because the children have more of a freedom in this project I think it will engage them because to a certain extent they're creating ye know their own...em...how do you say?...syllabus really I suppose (Principal C)

Participants, irrespective of their level of literacy, were confident in their ability to write and continued to draft and redraft their work until they were satisfied with what they had produced. All the principals commented on the quality of the work produced and Seán Love remarks:

The consistent, extraordinarily high quality of writing by children from every background, of every ability, would blow you away

Additional benefits

In addition to the personal and academic benefits for students, a number of other benefits emerged from the data.

Improved teacher student relationship and enhanced capacity to engage in dialogue

A number of the stakeholders observed that participating in *Fighting Words* tended to foster improved teacher/student relationships and enhance students' capacity to engage in dialogue with teachers, peers and other adults. The development of positive relationships was referred to by two of the principals who noticed teachers' perceptions of students change as a result of the project.

It allowed some teachers to view children differently in that they saw them...eh... in a very positive light. Not all of these students would have had very positive reputations so it allowed them to show a different side of themselves. (Principal D)

Some staff are seeing some of the girls and may not be the most easiest girls to deal with on a day to day level, they're seeing them with new light and actually seeing that they do have something to offer... certainly the staff over the course of last year said to me, 'I didn't realise X was as good as what she was and she was showing me her draft and there was a buzz amongst them...' (Principal F)

Another principal remarked on the interpersonal skills students developed as a result of their relationship with the staff and volunteer tutors of *Fighting Words*. He felt that the passion and commitment of the staff and volunteer tutors had a positive influence on students and that students benefited enormously from the experience of interacting with adults and engaging in dialogue around their own learning.

I found talking to the staff or the people involved from *Fighting Words* that they had first of all a real interest and it came across a passion for what they were doing which I think is crucial

that's fantastic when you can get that and...ehm...they liaised very well with the students I think they facilitated the...em...the work really well and I think that's a really important part of something like this that...em...the adult is interested, concerned, will discuss; is that how?...is that good or not? but very much still letting the student try things out...eh... have a good dialogue about why they were doing something but ye know that interpersonal relationship in something like this is crucial and certainly from what I could see of it there was a very good atmosphere when you went down to the room. (Principal A)

Anne Looney makes a similar point in relation to dialogue. She also remarks that the collaborative approach adopted by the *Fighting Words* model engages students in a dialogue that enables them to manage their own learning. This dialogical approach to learning, she observes, is similar to the assessment techniques that will form part of the reformed Junior Cycle.

The phrase we're using instead of assessment criteria, because that's hard for students to understand, the phrases we're using are features of quality. So in conversations with students, we're saying... before we start this piece of work we want to agree what are the things that would make this a really good piece of work? What are the quality features here?... You'll find that they can identify the ones you would want, ye know, as a teacher. Once you've got those features of quality out there and students know what they are and they're shared with students... that dialogue around assessment is actually quite in keeping with the *Fighting Words* spirit... ye know about empowering students to take control of their own learning and also to have some peer input. So if you're, as a teacher in the English classroom, if the class has decided that one of the features of quality that it has to, that your dialogue or your interview or your speech has to keep our attention well one of the ways a teacher can assess that is to ask the other students... well did it keep our attention? Does anyone want to suggest how they could've got our attention more? That kind of dialogue is very powerful for students in an assessment context.

Increased resilience and perseverance among students

A couple of principals remarked that they noticed an increased resilience and perseverance among students who had participated in the *Fighting Words* project. These principals believed that the experience of participating in *Fighting Words* had inspired students to see projects through to completion. Students displayed behaviour and attitude that indicated they had developed an understanding of deferred gratification and an ability to persevere with a course of action even when they encountered challenges that they would have previously considered insurmountable. This change in behaviour and attitude was most noticeable among students who would be considered at risk of leaving school early. These students showed increased resilience and determination and went on to complete school.

These students, nearly all of them I would say, finished out the Leaving Cert, right – which is a good thing... if it shows, if it shows students that...eh...yeah I can do something and I can get benefit out of education then obviously it's a good thing ye know it encourages...eh... people to stay in school. The more positive connection students have to school obviously the easier it is for them to stay here. (Principal D)

This principal singled out one student in particular whom he felt surpassed all expectations in her achievements.

Well, one of the girls there she had the best, she'd the best Leaving Cert last year ye know and got her first choice in college right and she would not have always been an obvious person for that. (Principal D)

Another principal anticipates a similar outcome for the *Fighting Words* participants in her school. She believes that the boost in confidence that students experienced will result in a higher rate of achievement among the *Fighting Words* students than might have previously been expected.

As a principal I would know a lot of them individually and know that some of those girls, their self-esteem isn't great, they'd be facing an ordinary Leaving Cert of maybe 250 points. Yet they tasted success; they know they can take on board an initiative, carry it through do really, really well, reap the benefits and that's... those skills have to be transferred across the board. (Principal F)

Students more likely to take leadership and mentoring roles

One of the principals observed that *Fighting Words* participants were more likely to take leadership and mentoring roles in the school. Most of the *Fighting Words* participants in this particular school went on to play active leadership roles in the school with one participant becoming head girl of the school. The principal felt this trend was partly due to both the practical skills but also the confidence, initiative and sense of agency students acquired as part of the *Fighting Words* project.

Students who were involved in *Fighting Words* in fourth year are generally the ones who maybe put themselves forward for things maybe like mentoring in fifth or sixth year or the student leadership team in sixth year; I think that whole notion of getting up and also presenting their work, working with groups it just gives them maybe skills that students who haven't been involved mightn't have do you know... one of the writers is now the head girl, most of them actually are on that student leadership team and I would say a lot of that, it wasn't 'the only thing, that obviously influenced the vote or whatever, but they got skills during that including to get up in the hall in front of strangers and speak, which would be very much outside the comfort zone to organise the book launch itself in conjunction with teachers. All of those sorts of activities certainly benefitted the whole school because they're a group of young women who are now in leadership positions. (Principal E)

Transfer of the model to second level curriculum

Whether *Fighting Words* is compensating for a creativity deficiency or providing a complementary activity to what can be offered in the formal education system, it nevertheless represent a model for encouragement of creativity among a range of students, including secondary school students. Roddy Doyle argues that *Fighting Words* model currently has only limited impact on the formal education system and mainly through the teachers who have been exposed to the model by participating in

workshops and projects. Similarly Séan Love remarks that the influence of *Fighting Words* can only be seen at an informal level and that there has been “significant engagement by the teaching community” through participation in workshops as teachers choose to bring their students to such workshops.

This report investigates whether the translation of the Fighting Word model in second level schools in Ireland is possible and beneficial. It also aims to identify to what curricular context the *Fighting Words* model might be best suited. It also highlights some challenges to the translation and questions whether such challenges may lead to compromises that may ultimately result in the model losing its integrity. This section outlines through a discussion of the data gathered for this chapter how these questions have been answered by the key stakeholders.

Locating a suitable space within the curriculum

Chapter three has shown that the majority of the teachers surveyed and of the *Fighting Words* tutors were only partially convinced that the model could be translated in the school curriculum and that the transfer would entail some modification of the model which might compromise its integrity.

At present students engaged in the book project attend *Fighting Words* for an entire school year and are traditionally part of Transition year groups. Transition year is a school-designed program with no examination. According to the Department of Education its main purposes are the development of “Personal maturity by providing opportunities to develop communication skills, self-confidence and a sense of responsibility” and the encouragement of “Social maturity by developing greater ‘people’ skills and more awareness of the world outside school” (<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Transition-Year-/>). Transition year offers an ideal environment for exposing students to the *Fighting Words* model in a curricular environment allows them to break away from the more traditional school experience. Whether Fighting Word can infiltrate the more traditional school experience remains debatable.

Roddy Doyle argues that the model has “worked with so many different types of kids, so many different types of people so many different varieties of ability and backgrounds” and it presents a flexibility that may allow for some translation model beyond the less traditional Transition Year. Séan Love cautiously refers to the hope that the Junior Cycle reform could act as a spring board for future linkages of the *Fighting Words* model with the formal school curriculum.

the teachers at second level, they're so driven by the system, the curriculum, they need at the moment to deliver the Junior Cert and the Leaving Cert and so... I don't know actually is the honest answer. Whether what we do can infiltrate the system...there is at the moment a whole reforming of the Junior Cycle and the Leaving Cert taking place and hopefully it does accommodate a much greater emphasis on creativity and individual thinking. I hope that's where it goes.

All interviewed principals responded positively about the translation of the *Fighting Words* model in the school curriculum and four out six concur that the revised Junior cycle may offer greater opportunities for such translation. One of the principals identifies specific linkages between the *Fighting Words* model and the core principles that have shaped the development of the revised Junior cycle, thus reinforcing the suitability of the model for a translation in the formal curriculum.

with the new Junior Cycle we're going to have our core subjects like English, Irish and Maths and so forth and Science and the Languages. We're also developing short courses or what the NCCA are looking at, at the moment, we haven't started here at [school name removed], that yet but we're looking at it, we're planning it but...em...certainly with *Fighting Words*. I suppose with the new Junior Cycle, if I go back maybe, we're really looking at 6 key skills, to embed six key skills for everything that students will engage in and with *Fighting Words*, I did mention earlier on, for me the core skill there is of creativity that's one sixth of the course done, but also with *Fighting Words* they've got team, teamwork that they're using, also IT skills, typing up their short stories... (Principal F)

Another principal also reflects on the principles of the revised Junior Cycle and considers *Fighting Words* as a model that enables self-expression along with the development of students' literacy skills.

we're moving forward, we have a module in, we have our own module in 4th year which is working successfully as you know but with the new Junior Cert...em...as I say creative writing, getting students to express their own experience in their own words at their own level because I think that what's good about it is, it caters for all levels so you can have somebody struggling with literacy who's writing at a certain level and you can have somebody who's very proficient in the language so...em...because we are seeking to promote literacy and because the children have more of a freedom in this project I think it will engage them because to a certain extent they're creating ye know their own...em...how do you say?...syllabus (Principal C)

The interviewees were asked to identify the curricular context they found most suitable for the translation of the model. A mixed response was received. However Roddy Doyle comments that the model would fit anywhere in the school system:

I don't see why it wouldn't work, if we're talking about secondary school kids, at any particular level. Obviously Transition Year is the easiest one to fit with because that's the nature of Transition Year. I don't think any school has said to us no we're too busy. They all jump at it. They love the idea so it's the easiest one to do but if creative writing was to be a part of the Junior Cert following the model that we use, I think it would be very doable very, very doable. I

can see nothing to get in the way other than the usual things that get in the way of any project. By and large none of them are ever insurmountable really.

Two principals affirm that a short course is the most suitable curricular environment for the translation of the model. One principal (Principal A) suggests that short courses give teachers more latitude and this may allow to devise programmes with a stronger focus on the development and enhancement of creativity. Similarly another principal (Principal C) argues that Short courses offer a certain degree of flexibility also in terms of timetabling of the activities.

Other two principals while they are in favour to development of short courses, they also prefer to see the Fighting Word book project to continue as Transition Year activity predominantly offered outside the school environment.

transition year is a good place in a way like the people say transition year is a waste of time we have transition year it's compulsory here. We like people to do, to explore a bit and like that, was definitely exploring ye know ...eh...it probably isn't for everyone either I'm not sure it's something that not everyone, it's like teachers saying they don't want to learn French I'm sure that ye know they don't want to learn...eh...this there's always going to be elements like that. So in a way when you have them in transition year it's handy but I'm sure it is a possibility that you could use it in...a...as a short course maybe linked up with literacy somewhere around that ye know it might be ye know for, imagine a little book of short poems or something like that or short stories or things ye know that yeah! There...eh...yeah it could fit there as well. (Principal D)

Another principal sees Transition year as an easier option as he expresses concerns for the level of preparation and work that devising a short course may require.

It definitely fits in Transition Year first and foremost but that's not to say it wouldn't fit into one of the Junior Cert short courses but I got so excited when I heard about the new Junior Cert first I was told there was going to be a short course on this and a short course on that...if you're creating a short course it has to be half of that so it is a huge, it's not just an idea of coming up with something, let's do this it would have to be methodically written out to show that it would be covered over a one hundred hours over two or three years so yes if it was there in black and white whether we could sit down as a staff and try and come up with the short course I would have to say at this time no because it's too much of an unknown at the minute... (Principal B)

He also mentions that the creation of a short course would eat into the time devoted to "regular English classes", thus, unlike Principal C, he felt that Short courses could unnecessarily complicate timetabling.

Other two principals argued that the *Fighting Words* model was best incorporated in the English syllabus. Similarly to Principal B quotes the current uncertainty surrounding the development of short courses as a reason for preferring such form of translation:

I would think as part of the curriculum because if you really want to embed it, it'll have to be, because I don't think, now again this is a personal opinion, I don't think teachers are totally sold on the sort course idea yet anyway (putting it mildly)...so I think unless it's embedded into the actual curriculum...emm...ye know it's not going to be...well I mean it'll still work but I think it won't be embraced as much as it could be. (Principal E)

Anne Looney, NCCA CEO agrees with the majority the principals who have identified linkages between the revised Junior Cycle and the *Fighting Words* model but also offers some pedagogical motivation for her preference for its incorporation in the English Syllabus

Well, the new Junior Cycle...well obviously the I mean the most natural home for it is English ...what's really interesting is the most enthusiasm and the greatest amount of feedback we received on the new course for English which is part of Junior Cycle has been around oracy Because for the first time we'll be assessing students oral competence their ability to speak because previously we didn't do that and so that's a big new feature of the course is that as well as doing, interacting with texts students will also be speaking and that wasn't part of, while it was in the syllabus in Ireland if it wasn't examined, didn't happen so...eh...it was in the syllabus but it was never really given a space in schools so that is a big feature of the new English course, so yeah you can see, you can see how...em...what *Fighting Words* does in terms of giving students an opportunity to create some work whether it be a speech or a piece of writing or whatever does fit in with what's proposed, in particular in the English.

Anne Looney emphasizes that *Fighting Words* model promotes verbal interaction and that this element, if incorporated the English syllabus could potentially allow to introduce assessment of oral competence. She further explains that what can be translated from *Fighting Words* rather than the model *in toto* is the methodological approach.

Well, the kind of methodology that *Fighting Words* uses is, is good teaching and learning I mean it's the kind of teaching and learning you want teachers to be using not just in English but in other subjects

She is otherwise not fully convinced that the model in its entirety can be translated because such its integral features such as the "out of school experience" cannot be replicated in the formal school environment.

Challenges to the transfer of the model

As discussed in the previous section, while the majority of the interviewees regard the translation of the *Fighting Words* model in the school curriculum possible, they also refer to potential challenges which may affect the transfer or result in a loss of integrity of the original model.

Roddy Doyle expresses concern in relation to assessment which would add a pressure that would take away from the enjoyment of the *Fighting Words* experience.

we don't measure the success according to grading or the quality of their writing as compared to the average child of 15 or 16. We don't do it that way. We just try to get the individual child to do as well as they possibly can do but within the school system my worry would be that if there is the insistence on grading and if it isn't done or nuanced in such a way that allows the freedom, and that there aren't sort of pressures from home... we don't want grinds in knowing how to write and you could see it possibly could happen...so I could see it would be one of the anxieties...

Séan Love expresses a similar sentiment. He acknowledges that assessment is part of the formal education system and that the extent to which the model can be compromised by assessment is dependent on the form of assessment utilised. However in his responses a dichotomy emerges.

we actually go out of our way to take the students out of the school environment into the centre here. Which again is not in any way criticism of school...it's just to give the children a different place that they know isn't school and therefore they know there isn't an exam at the end and nobody's marking it and nobody's judging it and all the rest of it so...there's a potential obviously there for us to be a little bit compromised in doing that... I don't know what the answer is, but I don't have a difficulty with trying to find the right answer to how we could be part of assessing it or a way in which we could be comfortable. But then again if it wasn't called the *Fighting Words* programme it wouldn't compromise us in the slightest.

The non-judgmental philosophy of *Fighting Words* and the necessity of assessment in the formal system are potentially irreconcilable differences for the translation of the model in its entirety.

Principals also refer to the following challenges:

- Lack of suitable space recreating the “out of school experience”
- Staff not trained to support the model
- Absence of volunteers/mentors different from teachers
- No access to established writers as models and mentors for students.

Factors that would help facilitate the transfer of the model

Two of the principals and Seán Love mention the possibility of establishing partnerships with schools whereby *Fighting Words* could train and support teachers in developing their version of the *Fighting Words* model. Two principals reflect on the possibility of utilizing the school library or to rent a room in a close-by facility to recreate the “out-of-school experience”. However if the model were to be embedded in either a short course or in the English curriculum, volunteers could not be involved in the

delivery of the programme. Equally, while staff in some of the schools might have established writers as their contacts this could not be a feature that could be generalized to all schools.

While some of the stakeholders indicated that the transfer of the model to the formal school curriculum could present some challenges, most of the stakeholders, nevertheless, agreed that the transfer would bring a number of benefits. Chief among these was the fact that the presence of the model on the school curriculum would give it wider access.

It would just be lovely to have it running throughout the year for *every* student. We've sixty students doing TY but only 25 could go and it was a case of names inside a hat almost, literally who were interested and who got in first, ah but it would be lovely if every girl could experience that, every single girl. (Principal F)

The same principal expressed the view that the model addressed the core principles of the revised Junior Cycle and therefore would be of enormous benefit to the school as it had the potential to become a short course.

With the new Junior Cycle, we're really looking at six key skills, to embed six key skills for everything that students will engage in and with *Fighting Words*, for me, the core skill there is of creativity that's one sixth of the course done, but also with *Fighting Words* they've got teamwork, they're using IT skills, typing up their short stories...em...so that could transfer to a short course. (Principal F)

Another principal felt that if the model was to transfer to the formal school curriculum it would give the school a greater insight into the work, more teachers might get involved and it would be a source of motivation for younger students who would look forward to having the opportunity to participate as they moved up the cycle.

It would give more autonomy to the school, ye know, it would give the school a bigger involvement... I think if it were in school, the school community would have a greater understanding of the work that's going on... maybe you would get other teachers involved... maybe the art teacher... if it's being done in the school and people see the work going on, word spreads and then...'Oh I can't wait to get to second year to do that'. (Principal B)

Séan Love argues that the model provides students with the opportunity to think critically and creatively, skills he hopes the proposed curricular reform will actively promote and "accommodate, as promised, a much greater emphasis on creativity and individual thinking". He contends that "whatever system the reformation of the moment creates it has to allow for freedom to think" and expresses concern at what he sees as a lack of 'real' education in western society.

There's no freedom to think in secondary and I think if you're really educating children they have to have the freedom to think and it's not just an Irish issue. The model which we have adapted from the U.S. and which is now developing in so many other countries...the same thing is being said... that the education systems in so many of the countries are so restrictive. There's little opportunity for anyone to be creative.

There was a general consensus among the stakeholders that a number of key factors would help support the transfer of the model to the formal school curriculum. Among these were suggestions around training for teachers, the availability of volunteer tutors to assist with the project in schools, support from the *Fighting Words Centre* and links with writers in the local community. A few of the stakeholders expressed an interest in seeing the model being fully developed into a short course.

Several of the principals remarked that the delivery of the model should not necessarily be confined to English teachers. It was felt that any teacher who had a passion for writing or a creative flair should be given the opportunity to teach the model. In relation to teacher training, a number of principals expressed similar views:

I think we would need to train our teachers not necessarily only English teachers but maybe one or two teachers on the staff, who are interested in that model, who have that rapport, that relationship, understand group dynamics, the whole concept of creativity and embedding those skills in the teachers so they can translate them in to the classroom. (Principal F)

I think with greater flexibility it should be something which you can build into a number of subjects, and I'm not talking here just about *Fighting Words* but where outside organisations can link their expertise in a sense to...eh... to training teachers to be able take the philosophy, take the ethos and bring that into their work too. (Principal A)

It kind of depends on the resources and by resources I mean who are the teachers available and the teacher has to be engaged with it and motivated and creative so it doesn't suit every teacher so within a short course you have to have the teacher willing to engage with it...em...but I don't necessarily see it ultimately with the English department because ye know many, there are many teachers with arts degrees such as in History and Geography and Music and Art and you may often find that people like that write themselves so if it's run by a teacher outside of the English department then it kind of gives more...em...attention to language in general and creativity in general. (Principal C)

A couple of principals suggest that *Fighting Words* should design a short course in accordance with NCCA guidelines.

There is a template that the NCCA have produced for short courses and maybe if a module was to be planned by *Fighting Words* in consultation with some schools...we might, initially get the support from *Fighting Words* to help plan the course and then be willing to share that with the NCCA and put it on the website for other creative, innovative schools willing to try. (Principal F)

Fighting Words appear to be amenable to such suggestions.

Teachers would need training or support in whatever form it comes...to deliver it which obviously were this to happen we'd need to roll it out on a gradual basis and ultimately have what we're doing being absorbed into the teacher training programmes in colleges so teachers, students as they become teachers actually feel equipped. I think as well, from our experience here, writers would be hugely supportive in that process....How that could be designed would have to be worked out but the obvious focus would be in teacher training...that it would be part of teacher training and we'd be happy to be part of that. We've

obviously got a decent amount of knowledge and expertise around how we do things that we'd be happy to share... and to support others in doing... I think we'd be happy to design or help design a course...as I say, our only issue is assessment. How closely we would be connected to an assessment programme?.....but designing a course – absolutely. Yeah... why not? (Seán Love)

Concluding comments

The outcomes of the analysis presented in this chapter are to a large extent consistent with those presented in chapter 3. Despite the self-denomination 'simply' as a creative writing centre, *Fighting Words* appears to go well beyond its overtly stated remit. Key to the success of the *Fighting Words* model for the promotion of creativity is a workshop format that is flexible, based on co-operative principles and informed by a non-judgmental ethos.

The benefits for students outlined by the key stakeholders in the interviews range from the development of some academic skills such as literacy and writing skills to personal benefits such as the development of self-confidence resulting from a strong sense of achievement derived from their creative writing achievements. In particular the principals highlight how the benefits derived from participation in *Fighting Words* have also a positive knock-on effect on engagement in school. The perseverance required during the writing process resulted in greater resilience against adversities and this led some students to complete the secondary school cycle against all odds.

All key stakeholders interviewed for this chapter indicate that a translation of the *Fighting Words* model in the secondary school system is possible, albeit one that may require substantial modifications to the original model. In particular, the absence of a suitable space in schools and of volunteers replacing teachers appear to be among the most commonly mentioned challenges. Furthermore, the translation in curricular environments other than that of Transition Year is necessarily associated with the introduction of some form of assessment, which is potentially one of the most substantial threats to the integrity of the original model.

While the contributions of principals presented in this chapter offer some valuable suggestions for addressing some of the challenges identified a more detailed discussion will be presented in chapter 5 where the overall outcomes of the research will be summarised and some future directions will also be suggested

Chapter 5: Summary of outcomes and future directions

Introduction

This report has attempted to identify and outline the main ingredients of the *Fighting Words* creative writing model. It has evaluated the benefits for participants and has examined the suitability of the model for a potential translation into the formal second level education system. This chapter summarises the findings derived from the data collections according to the above three purposes. It also presents possible future directions that might address some of the issues that have emerged from the analysis.

Perceptions of *Fighting Words*

The consultation with *Fighting Words* stakeholders has produced a description of the core features of the model and of the principles that animate the activities offered by the creative writing centre. As shown in figure 1 six core features have emerged.

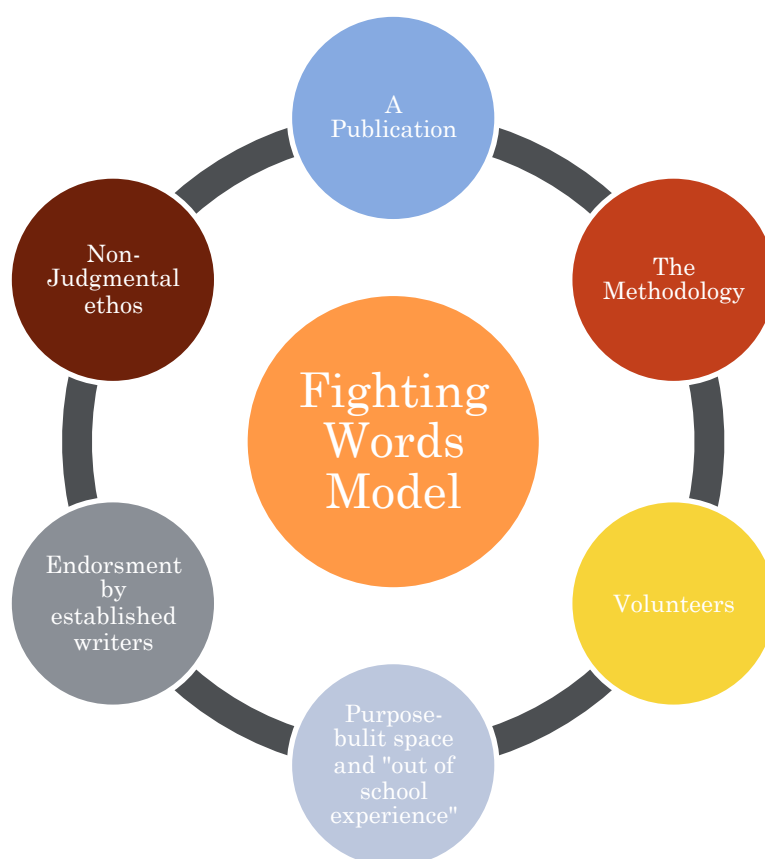


Figure 1: Core features of the *Fighting Words* model

Plucker (2004, p. 90) describes creativity as:

The interaction among aptitude, process and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context.

The *Fighting Words* model creates an environment and generates a process by which both individual and groups of students, regardless of their initial aptitude become capable of producing short stories that demonstrate a level of originality and creativity often unexpected by their teachers. It is impossible to establish a hierarchical order of importance in relation to the above features. The interplay rather than individual features represent the strength of the model.

The **publication** of books produced by students is a fast growing educational practice (Miners, 2009; Heyer, 2009) particularly with more wide-spread availability of web-publishing technology in schools. However it can be argued that the production of a publication, -while highly motivational for students- is perhaps not as fundamental as the other features. Hayer (2009) has documented how the prospect of publishing a book written by his students kept them engaged and comments that “ their questions and creativity signaled that they enjoyed thinking about becoming published authors” (p. 60). Similarly the overwhelming majority of students who took part in the *Fighting Words* book projects speak of the publication of a book as their greatest achievement. As pointed out by the principals of the schools that participated in the year-long book project, the launch of the book has been a highlight of the school year not only for the students but also for the schools themselves. The publication of a book has increased the visibility of schools and -according to the principals- their profile has been raised thanks to the association with *Fighting Words*. Nevertheless, the responses to the questionnaires by the students who have attended only a once-off workshop show a proportionally comparable sense of achievement derived from completing a story in a short period of time and without the benefit of a professional publication. Bringing a creative task to completion therefore emerges as a positive outcome even if dissociated from a high profile publication.

The methodology utilised by *Fighting Words* in their workshops is –as acknowledged in the training literature for tutors- informed by “the Socratic method” as it requires volunteers who facilitated the workshops to engage in an open and democratic dialogue with the students who see the beginning of their story developing before their eyes on a big screen. Ross (1996, p. 13) argues that “collaborative story writing seems to unleash the creativity locked inside many of the students”. The combination of collaborative and individual activities constitutes a unique mix that develops different skills such as the ability to work in teams, self-management and autonomy but also specific attitudes such as respect for

others, self-reliance and resilience. The method is regarded by the teachers who have participated in the workshops as an inspirational form of teaching and a teacher has commented: “I feel I was lucky to have witnessed real education and have had this opportunity”. Similarly, in her interview Anne Looney refers to the *Fighting Words* approach as an example of good teaching.

The support of **volunteers** is consistently mentioned by all stakeholders as fundamental to the success of the model. A study conducted by Peters (2010) on the benefits of mentorship in an art field highlighted that the personal mentor-mentee relationship increases confidence and self-esteem in the young persons and contributes to their overall development. Furthermore Holaday (1997) suggests that coaching rather than judging is more likely to help students to develop writing skills and confidence in their writing ability. Volunteers offer students support decoupled from a judgmental function that is associated to the role of teachers and therefore assume a complementary mentoring role in the formation of the students who take part in the creative writing activities. As evidenced by the data presented in chapter 3 and 4 tutors are seen by principals and teachers as essential in motivating students to endure through a lengthy writing process. The tutors themselves highlight the importance of their often arduous motivational role in helping students to build self-reliance and resilience.

Several studies have highlighted the benefits of a **partnership between arts professionals, teachers and schools** (Stevenson et al., 2005; Anderson, 2013; Imms et al., 2011). In particular the Poetry Quest evaluation project (Anderson, 2013, p. 3) has highlighted that engaging with professional artists “inspires pupils, sets a strong context for workshops and provides a performance model pupils are keen to emulate in their own performance at the end of the project”. A study by Imms et al, (2011) attributes to the praise and encouragement from art professionals a strong motivational impact on students. The association to *Fighting Words* of several established writers along with Roddy Doyle is quoted by the students, teachers and principals involved in book project as giving prestige to students’ publication. The introduction to all the books has been written by different high-profile published authors who comment on each individual short story included in the book. The endorsement of writers has generated a sense of validation of students’ creativity among the students themselves and those students who have continued to keep in touch with *Fighting Words* through the Write Club confirm that this factor has influenced their decision to continue to write creatively.

The importance of the ***Fighting Words space*** – both physical and emotional- has been mentioned consistently by all stakeholders surveyed and interviewed for this evaluation. The physical space is represented by the building per se and by its openness, brightness and minimal use of physical

barriers. The necessity of this type of physical space to promote creativity has been also suggested by Jankowska & Atlay (2008) who refer to what they call the C-space (Creativity space) as “clean, nicely furnished/decorated... [and which] doesn’t feel like a classroom” and add that “the space influences creative thinking” (p. 275). The emotional space is the lived experience of the space, the atmosphere and the ethos as experienced by the students. Jankowska & Atlay (2008) also speak of the importance of the atmosphere and suggest that in such emotional space the atmosphere is personal, less bookish and makes students feel open to comment honestly. Tutors are fundamental to the creation of a safe and supportive emotional space as they embody the *Fighting Words*’ values in their interaction with the students. As discussed in chapter 3 and 4 the space has a symbolic connotation as it represents an **‘out of school’ experience** for the students. The students themselves have commented on breaking away from the school routine and teachers and principals have suggested that the dynamics and student behaviours witnessed in the *Fighting Words* centre are different from those normally witnessed in school, such as for instance a greater willingness to verbalise their ideas and to actively contribute to the development of the story. The ‘out of school experience’ has been described by Anne Looney as the most problematic aspect of the *Fighting Words* model to recreate in a school environment. If the *Fighting Words* model were to be offered within the school environment, the major challenges would be represented by not being able to move students physically out of school but also by the difficulty in moving schooling –and its associated roles, behaviours and dynamics-out of the educational experience.

The ***non-judgmental ethos*** of *Fighting Words* plays a significant role in the establishment of a supportive and safe environment for students but also in the development of creativity and in particular of “possibility thinking” (Craft, 2000, 2001) and divergent thinking (Torrance, 1972). The fundamental belief that anyone can be creative permeates *Fighting Words*’ activities and this is clearly perceived by the students who have attended the centre, as documented by the comments presented in chapter 3. Students speak of the freedom that being creative offers and a sense of perceived validation of individual and collective imagination emerges from the responses to questionnaires by all three surveyed groups.

Some form of assessment of the students work takes place as students receive feedback on their creative efforts. However the feedback is formulated in formative terms and does not present a summative dimension. Thus, while feedback – as a dimension of assessment- is present in the *Fighting Words* model its function is formative rather than judgmental. As pointed out by Beghetto (2005, p. 259) “assessment does not necessarily undermine creativity” and argues that how students “perceive the goal message sent through assessment is what really matters”. He puts forward that if students

perceive feedback as helping them to improve such information will actually support creative expression.

Benefits of the *Fighting Words* Model

The consultation with *Fighting Words* stakeholders has revealed a wide range of personal, academic and additional benefits for students. These are summarised in Figure 2.

Personal Benefits

Responses to *Fighting Words* were overwhelmingly positive in terms of the project's benefits to participants. All the stakeholders agreed that *Fighting Words* had a positive impact on participants' personal and academic development. All stakeholders indicated that participants had increased levels of **confidence, empowerment and self-efficacy** and some of the stakeholders attributed this to participants **having a voice**. A number of studies have highlighted that writing in a group setting promotes confidence and empowerment. For example, Fair et al.(2012) research on the impact of creative writing on HIV positive adolescents in a group setting found that participants showed increased openness and confidence and according to one group leader, "They were more empowered and they found that voice that 'I have something to say, I'm not invisible, and that I matter'" (p. 386). Similarly, Chandler (1999) describes writing as an act of empowerment and argues that the process of participating in a group writing project can be a particularly affirming experience that enables individuals to access self, imagination and voice. Nicolini (1994) asserts that success in writing boosts students' self-esteem and Chandler (1999) further proclaims that writing can contribute to the mental, emotional, and social development of the writer, a view supported by Howell (2008) who argues that creative writing promotes personal and social development.

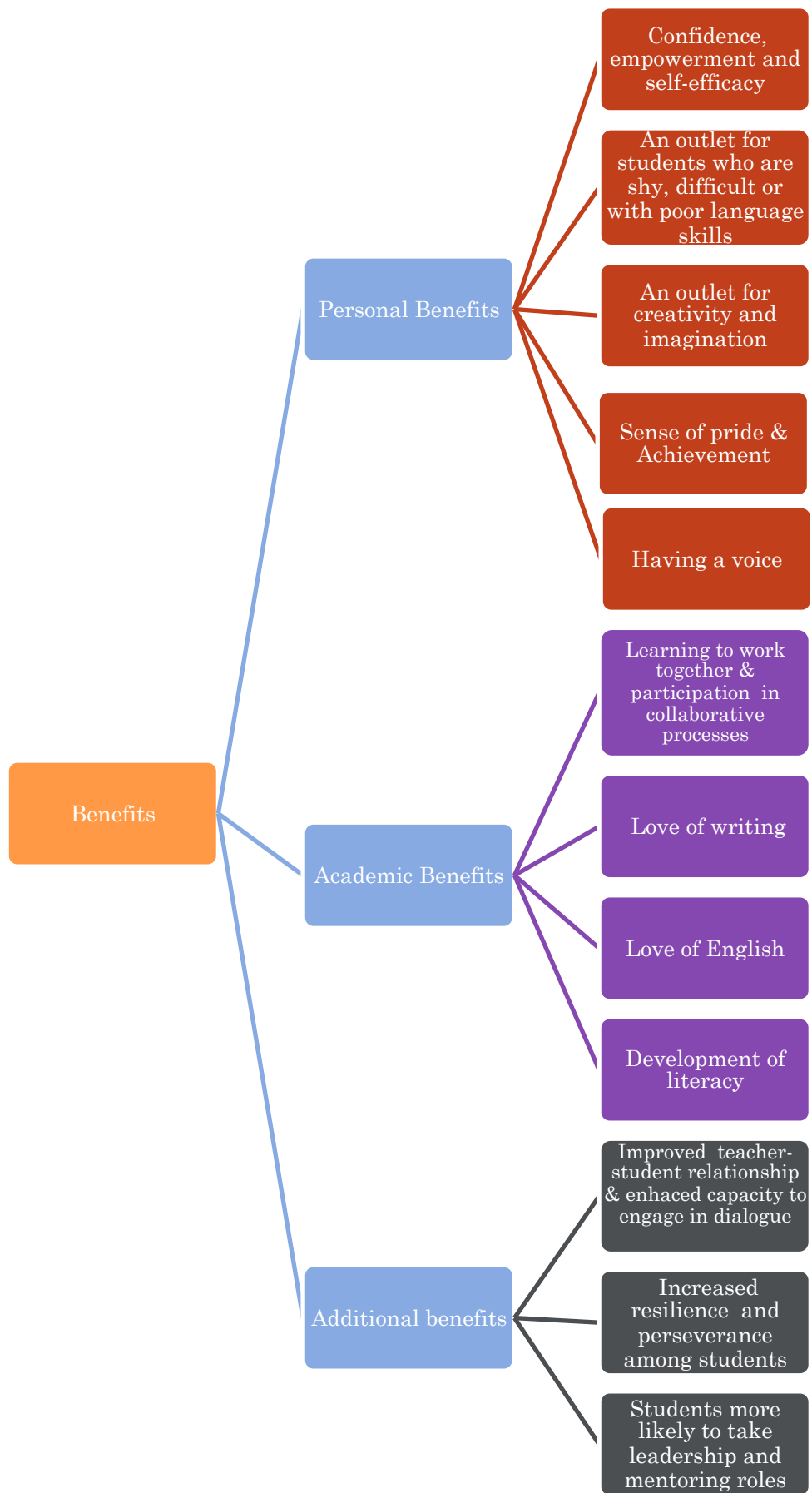


Figure 2: Benefits for students

The data reveals that *Fighting Words* provides student with a much needed **outlet for creativity and imagination**. This was also considered to be an important factor in boosting students' self-esteem particularly for **students who are shy, difficult or with poor language skills**. Providing the opportunity for creative self-expression is one of the distinguishing features of the arts according to Heath and Roach (1999) who identify the important role of arts based organisations in providing a "unique element of imaginative creativity" not found in other outlets (33). Some stakeholders indicated that the participants' sense of creativity was boosted by the fact that *Fighting Words* considers all students to be creative. This stance is in line with recent discourse on creativity which highlights the importance of recognising everyone's potential to be creative and the need to acknowledge little 'c' creativity (Craft, 2001; NACCCE, 1999; Seltzer and Bentley, 1999; Weisberg, 1993).

Other stakeholders indicated that the increased levels of confidence and empowerment were a result of the **sense of pride and achievement** participants felt at having completed a task and having created a piece of work solely from their imagination. Participants' positive self-image was attributed to a change in attitude – participants viewed themselves as writers, as creative beings capable of overcoming a challenge. In a study evaluating the impact of community-based arts programme for youth in low-income communities in Canada, Wright et. Al. (2006) found that participation in the programme had a positive impact on student behaviour and attitude.

Academic Benefits

The majority of students commented on their improved confidence in writing. Some students **discovered a love of writing** and expressed surprise at their ability to write and the sense of achievement that came from having completed creative work. Teachers agreed that students' writing had improved and principals remarked that the project supported the **development of literacy** in participants but also promoted literacy in the school. A study carried out by Weinstein (2010) identified the benefits of youth spoken word poetry for youth including the development of literacy skills, self-confidence, positive self-identity, community building, therapeutic benefits, and respect for peers and adults.

All of the stakeholders felt that one of the benefits of the model was that students were **learning to work together**, to share ideas and to listen to other people's views. **Participation in collaborative processes** was considered to have a positive impact on learning and the quality of student writing. This finding is supported by Roberts and Eady (2012) who found that directed collaboration can enable

powerful learning to take place within a group context. The study also revealed that the practice of getting students to share their work and read each other's stories gives students a sense of pride in their work and an incentive to improve the standard.

Additional benefits

Principals and teachers reported **improved teacher student relationship** arising from the *Fighting Words* experience. Teachers and students developed a new-found respect for each other and developed a greater bond. Principals also remarked that **students were more likely to take leadership and mentoring roles** in the school. Principals, participants and teachers all commented on **an increased resilience and perseverance among students**. Some principals observed that this was especially true for potential early school leavers who, prior to *Fighting Words*, had a negative perception of school and difficult relationships with teachers but subsequently went on to complete second level and in one case third level. A number of studies suggest that engagement with the arts leads to positive outcomes for disadvantaged youth (Horn, 1992; Chandler, 1999; Heath and Roach, 1999), of particular relevance here is Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson's (2012) study which found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds who participated in the arts were more likely to pursue careers that require third level education.

As can be seen from the findings that emerge from the data, the benefits arising from *Fighting Words* are closely related to the key skills of the Junior Cycle. The following table correlates the benefits gained by participants of *Fighting Words* to the Junior Cycle key skills.

Table 1: The *Fighting Words* model and the Junior Cycle Key Skills

Key Skills for Junior Cycle (Source: NCCA (2012) A Framework for Junior Cycle)	Benefits gained by participants of <i>Fighting Words</i> as emerging from the consultation with stakeholders
Managing Myself	Students demonstrate increased perseverance and resilience See a task through to completion Look for new and different ways of answering questions and solving problems
Staying Well	Students display increased levels of self-confidence and self-esteem Recognise and celebrate their achievement Develop positive relationships Find enjoyment and fun in learning
Communicating	Students express themselves more readily Speak in front of others Listen to others Respect others' views and ideas Edit, correct and improve writing Participate confidently in class discussion

Being Creative	Students develop their creativity and imagination and an appreciation of their ability to be creative Try out different approaches when working on a task and evaluate what works best Seek out different viewpoints and perspectives and consider them carefully Imagine different scenarios and predict different outcomes
Working with Others	Students learn to work together in a collaborative process Show respect for different positions and different points of view Contribute to decisions as part of a group
Managing Information and Thinking	Students learn to develop planning, writing and editing skills Think creatively and critically Manage their own learning Look for new and different ways of answering questions and solving problems

Transferability of the *Fighting Words* model to the second level education

One of the purposes of this report was the evaluation of the transferability of the *Fighting Words* model to the secondary school system. As highlighted in chapter 1 the Irish second level education is currently undergoing a process of enormous change and reform. Such process is opening new opportunities for the integration of a broader range of disciplinary domains. It also places greater emphasis on creativity which emerges as one of the core principles informing the revised Junior Cycle. *Fighting Words* – as a model for the promotion of creative writing- has shown during the past four years how creativity can be enhanced and encouraged among secondary school children. Therefore, it represents an example in terms of process, method and ethos that can inform the promotion of creativity in schools in a broader sense. The following table summarises the potential contribution of *Fighting Words* to the Junior Cycle with specific reference to its principles.

Table 2: The potential contribution of *Fighting Words* to the Junior Cycle curricular environment

Principles for Junior Cycle (Source: NCCA (2012) <i>A Framework for Junior Cycle</i>)	Possible contribution of <i>Fighting Words</i> as emerging from the consultation with stakeholders
Quality All students experience a high quality education, characterised by high expectations of learners and the pursuit of excellence.	All students are considered capable of being creative Students gain self-confidence and achieve beyond their originally expected performance
Creativity and innovation Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning provide opportunities for students to be creative and innovative.	Offers a teaching methodology example for the integration of creativity in the classroom Offers a model development of creative writing
Engagement and participation The experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates	Through group-based component of the workshops students develop an ability to work with others Students actively and collaboratively participate in the

engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school.	initial development of a story and this enhances their ability to relate and respect others
Continuity and development Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning enables students to build on their learning to date, recognises their progress in learning and supports their future learning	The year-long book project is a process-oriented learning activity that encourages students to improve through continuous feedback and constructive criticism on students' creative efforts. The process offers an example of how writing skills can be progressively developed.
Wellbeing The student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and resilience. Learning takes place in a climate focused on collective wellbeing of school, community and society.	One of the core features of <i>Fighting Words</i> is the supportive atmosphere that characterises all interactions between students and tutors. The emotional space created by <i>Fighting Words</i> exemplified the importance of establishing a co-operative and safe climate in which students can thrive both personally and academically.
Choice and flexibility The school's junior cycle programme is broad enough to offer a wide range of learning experiences to all, and flexible enough to offer choice to meet the needs of students.	One of the core features of the <i>Fighting Words</i> creative writing model is its flexibility which has made it adaptable and suitable for different age groups. This characteristic offers opportunity for integration of the model in different curricular environments within the Junior Cycle
Inclusive education The educational experience is inclusive of all students and contributes to equality of opportunity, participation and outcomes for all.	<i>Fighting Words</i> practice is informed by a democratic and inclusive ethos. The structure of the workshops favours co-operation and fosters respect for all voices The outcomes of this research show that <i>Fighting Words</i> in particular has given a voice to those students with poor language skills, students with mental behavioural issues and students at risk of dropping out of school.
Learning to learn High quality curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning support students in developing greater independence in learning and in meeting the challenges of life beyond school, of further education, and of working life.	The outcomes of this evaluation show that sustained learning has resulted for students who have engaged in the year-long book project. As reported by teachers and school principals, the confidence and skills developed by these students during this project have also motivated greater engagement with learning in the school environment.

The analysis evidenced a strong consistency of the principles and process that characterise *Fighting Words* with the principles that inform the revised Junior Cycle. Such consistency offers a fertile ground for a potential mainstreaming of the *Fighting Words* model in the secondary school system.

Some of the stakeholders (Dr. Anne Looney, Séan Love, Roddy Doyle, school principals, tutors and teachers) were consulted on the possibility of a translation of the *Fighting Words* model. The following four key findings have emerged:

- **The translation of the model in second level education is possible.** The majority of the stakeholders regarded the translation of the model in the second level school system as part of the Junior Cycle. However two principals felt that it was preferable to continue to offer the book project workshops as part of Transition Year and they felt that this year allowed more flexibility and was intended as an opportunity to enjoy experiences different from the

traditional school year. Also 40% of the tutors were opposed to such translation primarily because of their concern for the difficulties in recreating the “*Fighting Words* experience”, with a purpose-built space and with individual attention given to students by tutors.

- **A mixed response emerged in relation to what is the best curricular environment for the translation.** The revised Junior Cycle has introduced in addition to the traditional subjects also 100 hour short courses which can be designed by schools to introduce new subject areas. The stakeholders are almost equally divided between those who see a translation of the *Fighting Words* model to be suited to the incorporation in the English Syllabus and those who indicate that a short course could be entirely devoted to the development of a book based on the process and format devised by *Fighting Words*. While short courses offer more flexibility in terms of a possible integration their shorter duration has been considered a significant limitation thus leading some stakeholders to prefer the English syllabus as a hosting environment for the book project.
- **The translation is likely to require some modification of the original model.** Concerns were raised in relation to the compatibility of the model with specific aspects of the secondary school curriculum. In particular the necessity to associate summative assessment to the model, the unavailability of volunteers to deliver workshops and support students, and the unsuitability of the school environment to recreate the ‘out of school’ experience and the physical/emotional space created by *Fighting Words* are among the shared concerns expressed by the stakeholders. The production of a high profile publication endorsed by established writers may also prove difficult for schools. Some of these limitations have led to the suggestion that rather than translating the model in its entirety, it would be more achievable to consider the translation of the workshop approach adopted by *Fighting Words* into a teaching methodology that could be utilised by English teachers.
- ***Fighting Words* should be involved in the translation of the model in the secondary school system.** School principals and teachers interviewed have indicated that if the *Fighting Words* model were to be translated in some form in the school curriculum they would regard as important the opportunity to avail of *Fighting Words* support through training for teachers and support in the development of short courses inspired by the *Fighting Words* model and designed locally by various schools.

Future directions

It seems clear from this evaluation that *Fighting Words* is a worthwhile project both in terms of the benefits derived and its potential impact on the curriculum. *Fighting Words* offers a curriculum project which has unique attributes. It brings together interesting and innovative approaches to teaching and learning that can be easily replicated in the classroom. It provides a vehicle for project-centred learning, subject integration, team teaching and collaborative and co-operative learning. In so doing it offers a way to deliver some of the key areas and processes of the revised curriculum. Moreover, *Fighting Words* is consistent with the key principles of the revised Junior Cycle and as such offers a model that combines the key skills of the Junior Cycle. This makes it an attractive option for schools seeking to include short courses in the curriculum.

Finally, this evaluation has also indicated that *Fighting Words* may be of special value to students with special needs, students with poor language skills and students with challenging behaviour. The project allows opportunities for self-direction, peer collaboration, empowerment and the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy for all students.

While *Fighting Words* represents a successful model for the promotion and development of creative writing among participants of different ages and also specifically for secondary school students, its capacity to offer its services to a larger number of students is limited. *Fighting Words* workshops are over-subscribed and only one secondary school a year can participate in the year-long book project.

Furthermore, despite various activities outside Dublin, the core of the offering is to schools in the greater Dublin area. Yet its activities could benefit students nationwide if some alternative form of mainstreaming was possible. It is therefore worthwhile examining possibilities for the translation of the *Fighting Words* model in the school curriculum even if this translation might entail some loss of integrity. The translation of the model then would not mark the demise of *Fighting Words* which would continue to offer a reference model upon which schools can devise their own contextually appropriate translation.

The revised Junior Cycle English curriculum has been finalised and the consultation carried out by the NCCA has been completed and, at present, there is no opportunity to influence the content of the syllabus. However, the methodological approach adopted by *Fighting Words* could be integrated in the

Continuous Professional Development offered by the NCCA to English teachers thus achieving some partial mainstreaming of the model.

Short courses designed by schools themselves are also an option for the translation of the model. The mainstreaming in a short course could offer greater opportunities for a translation that presents a broader range of the core characteristics of the original model. The self-contained nature of short courses offers greater flexibility in terms of content and format of the activities that might be included in the syllabus. The consultation- particularly with principals- has revealed that schools still feel rather unequipped for the development of such courses and a need for *Fighting Words* to train and support teachers for the development of such courses inspired by the *Fighting Words* model was highlighted. Furthermore, the following additional challenges have been identified:

- The incompatibility of summative assessment with the model
- Difficulties in recreating the out of school experience due to a lack of specific space (within or outside the school).
- Lack of volunteers and therefore more school-like type of interaction (difficulty to recreate the emotional space experienced by students who attend *Fighting Words*).

Some suggestion about replicating some of the core features of the model can however be advanced as shown by Figure 3.



Figure 3: Challenges and suggestions for the integration of the *Fighting Words* model in a Short Course

- **Assessment** – Assessment perhaps remains one of the biggest stumbling blocks for the translation. However, if the majority of the assessment of a short course inspired by the *Fighting Words* model is of a formative nature, this is likely to impact less negatively on the students learning experience and on the development of their creative writing skills.

- **Purpose-built space and 'out of school' experience** - As suggested by a principal a partnership with local libraries, but also community and art centres could offer suitable venues for recreating an 'out-of-school' experience which would also have the added benefit of familiarising students with local cultural venues and hopefully encouraging them to sustain their interest in visiting such venues regularly throughout life. The use of these "out of school" venues could help to recreate at least some elements of the emotional space discussed in this report, provided that teachers also reframe some elements of their relationship with students. Teachers were asked to provide advice to new teachers wishing to take part in *Fighting Words* and among the comments provided are mentioned "leaving school attitudes behind" and "letting go of control".
- **The method.** *The Fighting Words model utilises a team of volunteers for each of the workshops. It is not realistic for a teacher working alone to attempt to replicate the model. It is suggested that teachers working in teams could be engaged in these sessions. The facilitation of the generation of the story and the typing of the text as it is being developed collaboratively through student dialogue necessitate that at least two people at the time are involved in a session. Potentially an English teacher, an Art teacher and an ICT teacher could co-operate to different aspects of the delivery and implementation of the model and preparation of the book. Teachers themselves could be trained together with local volunteers in the delivery of the workshops thus transferring knowledge, skills and expertise accumulated by *Fighting Words* during the past few years of activity.*
- **The Volunteers** - Teachers remain assessors and therefore this would only be an approximation of the possibility of replicating a non-judgmental atmosphere that emerges as very strong feature of the emotional space created within *Fighting Words*. For this reason, in addition to teachers - support of locally based tutors trained by *Fighting Words* might be sought.
- **Access to established writers** – While some schools might count among their contacts writers who are willing to lend some of their time to endorse a student publication, it is unlikely that this opportunity would be available to most schools. *Fighting Words* might consider establishing a network of established writers who might lend their support to local schools.

- **A publication-** Partnership with local newspapers could be established by schools for the publication of short stories written by students. Furthermore web-publishing of an anthology of short stories written and illustrated by students could potentially harness the interdisciplinary expertise of English, Art and ICT teachers.

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Appendices

Section 1: Research Consent

Please confirm *

☐ I have read and understood the plain language statement

I have read and agree with the terms outlined in the consent form. I agree to take part in this research. I understand that my responses will be analysed for research purposes and may be quoted in a report to be published by *Fighting Words* and in a PhD study. I also understand that my personal details will not be disclosed and information I have offered will be treated confidentially and reported accurately. *

☐ I agree

☐ I disagree

Section 2: Biographical Information

Please complete the following details:

Age Bracket *

Gender *

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. Nationality *

4. Current Occupation *

5. Highest educational qualification *

☐ Primary

☐ Secondary

☐ Third level

☐ Postgraduate

☐ Other:

6. For how many years have you been a tutor for *Fighting Words*? *

7. Are you still volunteering as a tutor for *Fighting Words*? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. Have you any teaching experience? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

9. If yes, in what context? *

Section 3: Your role as a tutor

10. Rate the effectiveness of the training you received in supporting your role as tutor for *Fighting Words* *

1 2 3 4 5

Very Effective ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Not Effective at all

11. Why did you get involved in *Fighting Words*? *

12. What did you like most about being involved in this project? *Please say why.

13. What are the challenges of being a tutor for *Fighting Words*? *Please say why.

14. What is your biggest achievement as a *Fighting Words* tutor? *Please say why.

Section 4: Evaluation of the effectiveness of *Fighting Words* model

15. In what way do you think *Fighting Words* benefits students? *

16. As a result of being involved in *Fighting Words*... *Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the relevant box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students are more able to think for themselves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are more confident in their writing abilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are more confident asking questions in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are better listeners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are more respectful of	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
other people's ideas					
Students are more comfortable working with others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students visit the library more often	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students read more	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are more open to sharing ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students learned more about their strengths	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students learned more about their weaknesses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are not afraid to stand up for themselves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are not afraid of asking for help	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students have more confidence in their ability to be creative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students can put their point across more clearly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strongly
Agree

Agree

Don't Know

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

something
does not work
students are
more able to
think of an
alternative

17. I don't believe the *Fighting Words* model would work without the following elements:
*Tick the elements you consider essential

- ☐ Purpose built space
- ☐ Interaction with tutors other than own teacher
- ☐ No assessment
- ☐ Publication of a book
- ☐ Involvement of high profile writers
- ☐ Collaborative nature of the writing process
- ☐ Supportive atmosphere
- ☐ Individual support outside of group session
- ☐ Other:

18. Do you think that the *Fighting Words* model can be transferred to a formal school environment without compromising the integrity of the model? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

19. If you responded no or maybe to Question 18, please explain why.

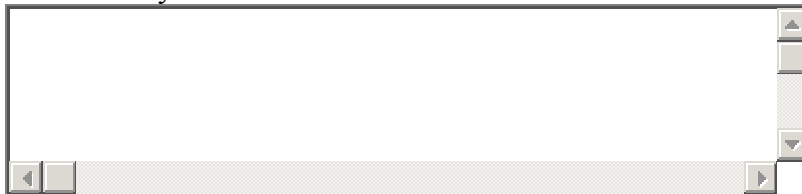
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20. If you responded yes to Question 18, do you think the model can be transferred without modification?

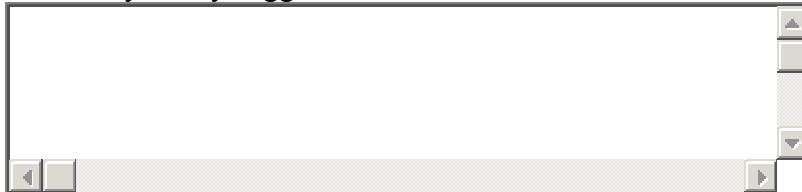
☐ Yes

☐ No

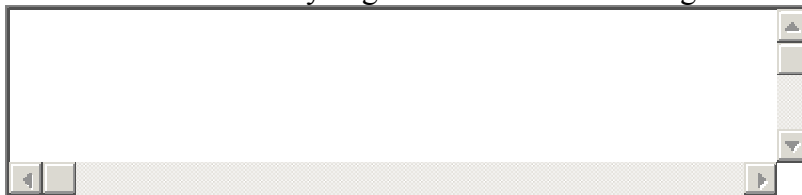
21. If you responded no to Question 20, please outline what changes you think may be necessary.

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22. Have you any suggestions on how the current format of the model might be improved? *

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23. What advice would you give to new tutors starting to volunteer with *Fighting Words*? *

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Student (Book Project)- Online Questionnaire

Section 1: Research Consent

Please tick the relevant box below: *

☐ I am over 18 and I have read and understood the plain language statement and the consent form

☐ I am under 18 and my parent/guardian has signed the consent form and I have returned it to my teacher

Please tick the relevant box below: *I agree to take part in this research. I understand that my responses will be analysed for research purposes and may be quoted in a report to be published by *Fighting Words* and in a PhD study. I also understand that my personal details will not be disclosed and information I have offered will be treated confidentially and reported accurately.

☐ I agree

☐ I disagree

Section 2: Biographical Information

Please complete the following details:

Age *

Gender *

☐ Male

☐ Female

Nationality *

School *

Mother's Occupation *

Father's Occupation *

Mother's highest educational qualification *

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Third level
- ☐ Postgraduate
- ☐ Other:

Father's highest educational qualification *

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Third level
- ☐ Postgraduate
- ☐ Other:

Section 3: Project Feedback

After participating in *Fighting Words*, how would you rate the following *

	Very well	Well	Not sure	Poorly	Very poorly
I am now better able to write in English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am now better able to speak in English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Did you have a choice on whether to get involved in the *Fighting Words* project? *

- ☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, why did you choose to get involved in this project?

If no, how did you feel about getting involved?

What did you like most about being involved in this project? *Please say why.

What did you like least about being involved in this project? *Please say why.

As a result of being involved in *Fighting Words* which of the following do you think have improved? *Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the relevant box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am more able to think for myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more confident in my writing abilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more confident asking questions in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am a better listener	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more respectful of other people's ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more comfortable working with others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I visit the library more often	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I read more	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoy sharing my ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learned more about my strengths	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learned more about my weaknesses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am not afraid to stand up for myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am not afraid of asking for help	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have more confidence in my ability to be creative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can put my point across more clearly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When something does not work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strongly
Agree

Agree

Don't Know

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

I am more
able to think
of an
alternative

If you were given the choice, would you take part in *Fighting Words* again? *

☐ Yes

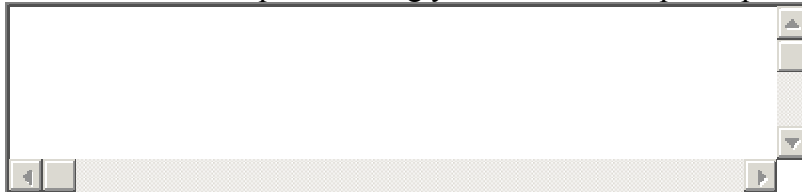
☐ No

☐ Maybe

Please explain why.



What is the most important thing you learned from participating in *Fighting Words*? *



What is your biggest achievement from participating in *Fighting Words*? *Please explain why



Have you continued writing after finishing the *Fighting Words* project? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what are you writing at the moment?

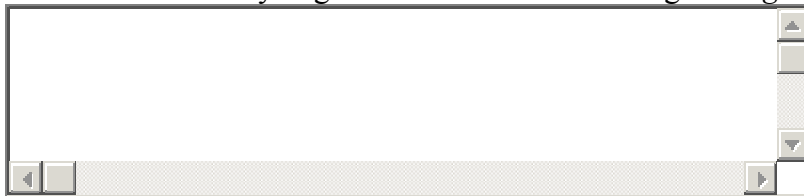
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Are you still in contact with *Fighting Words*? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

What advice would you give to new students starting the *Fighting Words* project? *

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Section 1: Research Consent

Please tick the relevant box below: *

☐ I am over 18 and I have read and understood the plain language statement and the consent form

☐ I am under 18 and my parent/guardian has signed the consent form and returned it to *Fighting Words* Centre

Please tick the relevant box below: *I agree to take part in this research. I understand that my responses will be analysed for research purposes and may be quoted in a report to be published by *Fighting Words* and in a PhD study. I also understand that my personal details will not be disclosed and information I have offered will be treated confidentially and reported accurately.

☐ I agree

☐ I disagree

Section 2: Biographical Information

Please complete the following details:

Age *

Gender *

☐ Male

☐ Female

Nationality *

School *

Mother's Occupation *

Father's Occupation *

Mother's highest educational qualification *

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Third level
- ☐ Postgraduate
- ☐ Other:

Father's highest educational qualification *

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Third level
- ☐ Postgraduate
- ☐ Other:

Section 3: Project Feedback

How did you initially get involved in *Fighting Words*? *

- ☐ Book Project
- ☐ Once off school afternoon session
- ☐ Summer Workshop
- ☐ Other:

Why are you still in contact with *Fighting Words*? *

What do you like most about being involved in *Fighting Words*? *

Why? *

What do you like least about being involved in *Fighting Words*? *

Why? *

As a result of being involved in *Fighting Words* which of the following do you think have improved? *Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the relevant box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am more able to think for myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more confident in my writing abilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more confident	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
asking questions in the classroom					
I am a better listener	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more respectful of other people's ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am more comfortable working with others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I visit the library more often	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I read more	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoy sharing my ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learned more about my strengths	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I learned more about my weaknesses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am not afraid to stand up for myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am not afraid of asking for help	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have more confidence in my ability to be creative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can put my point across more clearly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strongly
Disagree[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

Student (Once-off workshops) - Questionnaires – Hard copy

This questionnaire is part of a research project carried out by Dublin City University researchers Irene White and Francesca Lorenzi. The purpose of this questionnaire is to evaluate your experience of participating in the *Fighting Words* project.

Section 1: Research Consent

I agree to take part in this research. I understand that my responses will be analysed for research purposes and may be quoted in a report to be published by *Fighting Words* and in a PhD study. I also understand that my personal details will not be disclosed and information I have offered will be treated confidentially and reported accurately. Please tick the relevant box below:

I agree ☐ I disagree ☐

Section 2: Biographical Information

Please complete the following details:

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
3. Nationality: _____
4. School: _____
5. Mother's occupation: _____
6. Father's occupation: _____
7. Mother's highest educational qualification:
 - Primary ☐
 - Secondary ☐
 - Third Level ☐
 - Postgraduate ☐
 - Other ☐ Please specify: _____
8. Father's highest educational qualification:
 - Primary ☐
 - Secondary ☐
 - Third Level ☐
 - Postgraduate ☐
 - Other ☐
 - Please specify: _____

Section 3: Project Feedback

9. Did you have a choice on whether to participate in the *Fighting Words* workshop?
Yes ☐ No ☐

10. If yes, why did you choose to participate?

11. If no, how did you feel about participating?

12. What did you like most about being involved in this *Fighting Words* workshop?

13. Why?

14. What did you like least about being involved in this *Fighting Words* workshop?

15. Why?

16. I think *Fighting Words* workshop:

(Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the relevant box)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
helps me to think for myself					
helps me to be more confident in my writing abilities					
helps me to be more confident asking questions in the classroom					
helps me to be a better listener					
helps me to be more respectful of other people's ideas					
helps me to be more comfortable working with others					
encourages me to visit the library more often					
encourages me to read more					
encourages me to share my ideas					
helps me to learn more about my strengths					
helps me to be learn more about my weaknesses					

encourages me to to stand up for myself					
encourages me to ask for help					
encourages me to have more confidence in my ability to be creative					
helps me to put my point across more clearly					
helps me to think of alternatives when something does not work					

17. If you were given the choice, would you take part in *Fighting Words* workshop again?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe ☐

18. Why?

19. What is the most important thing you learned from participating in the *Fighting Words* workshop?

20. What is your biggest achievement from participating in the *Fighting Words* workshop?

21. Why?

22. Do you plan to continue writing creatively as a result of this experience?

Yes ☐ No ☐

23. What would you say to your friends about your experience of participating in *Fighting Words*?

Section 1: Research Consent

Please confirm *

☐ I have read and understood the plain language statement

I have read and agree with the terms outlined in the consent form. I agree to take part in this research. I understand that my responses will be analysed for research purposes and may be quoted in a report to be published by *Fighting Words* and in a PhD study. I also understand that my personal details will not be disclosed and information I have offered will be treated confidentially and reported accurately. *

☐ I agree

☐ I disagree

Section 2: Biographical Information

Please complete the following details:

1. Age Bracket *

2. Gender *

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. Highest educational qualification *

☐ Primary

☐ Secondary

☐ Third level

☐ Postgraduate

☐ Other:

4. Name of school *

5. How long have you been teaching? *

6. Are you the group's: *

- ☐ Accompanying Teacher
- ☐ English Teacher
- ☐ Both

Section 3: Your role as a teacher

7. Why did you get involved in *Fighting Words*? *

8. What did you like most about being involved in this project? *Please say why.

Section 4: Evaluation of the effectiveness of *Fighting Words* model

9. In what way do you think *Fighting Words* benefits students? *

10. As a result of being involved in *Fighting Words*... *Please indicate your level of agreement by ticking the relevant box

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students are more able to think for themselves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
more confident in their writing abilities					
Students are more confident asking questions in the classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are better listeners	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are more respectful of other people's ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are more comfortable working with others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students visit the library more often	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students read more	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are more open to sharing ideas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students learned more about their strengths	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students learned more about their weaknesses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are not afraid to stand up for themselves	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students are not afraid of asking for help	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students have more confidence in their ability to be creative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students can put their point across more clearly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When something does not work students are more able to think of an alternative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Student literacy has improved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Performance in written continuous assessment has improved	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students show a greater interest in literature	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students demonstrate a better ability to critically analyse literary texts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students show a greater ability to critically analyse a	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strongly
Agree

Agree

Don't Know

Disagree

Strongly
Disagree

broad range of
written texts

11. I don't believe the *Fighting Words* model would work without the following elements:

*Tick the elements you consider essential

- ☐ Purpose built space
- ☐ Interaction with tutors other than own teacher
- ☐ No assessment
- ☐ Publication of a book
- ☐ Involvement of high profile writers
- ☐ Collaborative nature of the writing process
- ☐ Supportive atmosphere
- ☐ Individual support outside of group session
- ☐ Other:

12. Do you think that the *Fighting Words* model can be transferred to a formal school environment without compromising the integrity of the model? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

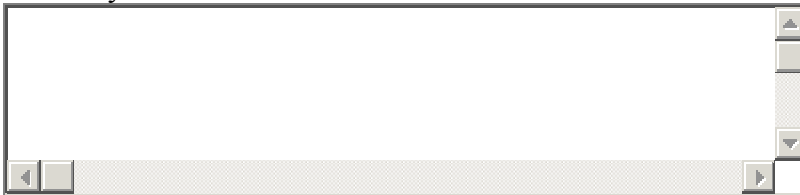
13. If you responded no or maybe to Question 12, please explain why.

14. If you responded yes to Question 12, do you think the model can be transferred without modification?

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. If you responded no to Question 14, please outline what changes you think may be necessary.

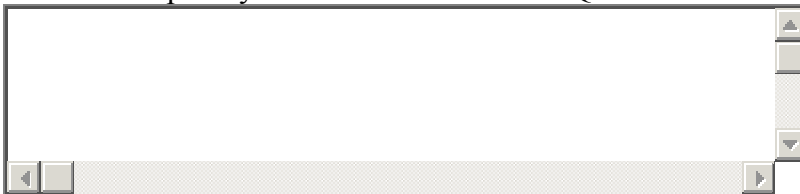


16. If the *Fighting Words* model were to be incorporated in the Junior Cycle, to which of the following do you think it is most suited? *

☐ English syllabus

☐ Short course

17. Please explain your choice in relation to Question 16. *



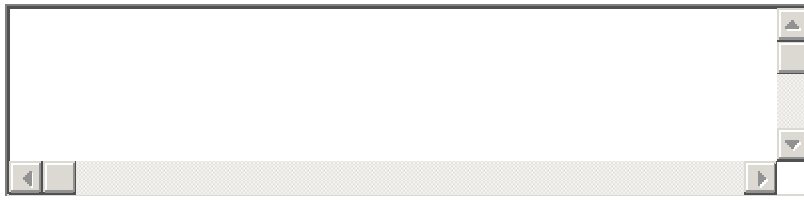
18. Have you any suggestions on how the current format of the model might be improved? *



19. What advice would you give to new teachers getting involved with *Fighting Words*? *



20. Has your relationship with your students changed in any way as a result of *Fighting Words*? *

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21. Is there any final comment you wish to make about the impact of *Fighting Words* on your students? *

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Interview questions (Roddy Doyle & Séan Love)

1. If you were to describe *Fighting Words* to someone who has never heard about it what would you say?
2. Why did you choose the name *Fighting Words*?
3. We understand that the *Fighting Words* model is connected to Valencia 826, what drew you to that model?
4. In what way, if any, is *Fighting Words* different from Valencia 826?
5. Do you think your model is original in an Irish context?
6. What do you see as the primary purpose of *Fighting Words*?
7. What is good about *Fighting Words*?
8. What do you think is the biggest achievement for the students taking part in *Fighting Words*?
9. Have there been any unanticipated benefits from *Fighting Words*?
10. Do you think *Fighting Words* is currently impacting on formal education?
11. [Do you envisage stronger impact in the future?]
12. [What do you think *Fighting Words* has to offer that's not already included in the current educational experience?]
13. Do you think that the *Fighting Words* model can be translated in the formal school curriculum without compromising its integrity?
14. Which of the following options do you think would best translate the *Fighting Words* model in the school curriculum and why?
 - a. Transition year module run by the school
 - b. Junior Cycle Short Course
 - c. As part of the English curriculum
15. What do you envisage might be the benefits of incorporating the *Fighting Words* model in the formal school curriculum?
16. What do you envisage might be the challenges of incorporating the *Fighting Words* model in the formal school curriculum?
17. Have you any suggestions on how schools could meet these challenges?
18. Do you envisage the *Fighting Words* centre and its staff playing any specific role in the implementation of the model in the formal school system?
19. If the *Fighting Words* model were to be mainstreamed in schools would it make the *Fighting Words* centre redundant?
20. What is the biggest achievement of the *Fighting Words* project?
21. What are your long term hopes and aspirations for the project?

Interview questions (Dr. Anne Looney)

1. What do you know about the *Fighting Words* model?
 2. What do you think *Fighting Words* has to offer that's not already included in the current educational experience?
 3. What do you see as the primary purpose of *Fighting Words*?
 4. Do you think students benefit from *Fighting Words* and if so in what ways?
 5. Do you see any similarity or points of contact between the key skills that informed the revision of the Junior Cycle and the principles which underpin the *Fighting Words* model?
 6. Do you think that the *Fighting Words* model could be translated in the formal school curriculum?
 7. Do you think there would be benefits in incorporating the *Fighting Words* model in the formal school curriculum?
 8. Which of the following options do you think would best translate the *Fighting Words* model in the school curriculum and why?
 - a. Transition year module run by the school
 - b. Junior Cycle Short Course
 - c. As part of the English curriculum
- [If reply is that *Fighting Words* is more suited as a short course... On Website there is a video from Mercy College, Sligo where an English teacher uses a similar collaborative writing process as part of the English curriculum. Why then do you think it is best suited as a short course?]
9. If the model were to be translated as a short course, do you envisage that it would become an off the shelf short course drafted by the NCCA?
 10. If it were to be translated in to the school curriculum, do you envisage assessment being a difficulty?
 11. Are there any other specific difficulties that you envisage?

Interview questions (School Principals)

1. How did your school become involved in *Fighting Words*?
2. What do you see as the primary purpose of *Fighting Words*?
3. Do you think students benefit from *Fighting Words* and if so in what ways?
4. Have there been unanticipated outcomes arising from *Fighting Words*?
5. What do you think makes *Fighting Words* successful?
6. Were there any administrative and organisational challenges in facilitating students to participate in the project?
7. Were there any benefits for the school as a whole arising from participating in *Fighting Words*?
8. Do you think that the *Fighting Words* model could be translated in the formal school curriculum?

[If answering yes to question 8],

- a) How do you think it could be incorporated?
- b) Could the *Fighting Words* model be delivered as a transition year module within the school?
- c) If yes, should it be delivered by outside volunteer tutors or by teachers?
- d) If it were to be translated in to the school curriculum, do you think the model is more suited as a short course as per the revised Junior Cycle or as part of the English curriculum? Why?
- e) Do you think there would be benefits in incorporating the *Fighting Words* model in the formal school curriculum?

[If answering no to question 8],

Why not?

9. What compromises do you envisage may be necessary to translate *Fighting Words* in the formal school curriculum and to what extent do you find these problematic?
10. *[Only ask if not already addressed in response to question 9]* Would you envisage any administrative and organisational challenges in incorporating the model in the school curriculum?
11. If your school was offered the opportunity to participate in *Fighting Words* again, would you welcome the offer?