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An exploratory study on the impact of an early years' preschool intervention programme in the Republic of Ireland.

By

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B.Soc.Sc, Mphil

Thesis presented in fulfillment of the regulations governing the award of the degree of Ph.D

Submitted to the National University of Ireland, Cork.

Department of Education,

College of Art, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences.

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Supervised by Professor Francis Douglas

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Abstract

Early years' education has increasingly been identified as a mechanism to alleviate educational disadvantage in areas of social exclusion. Early years' intervention programmes are now a common government social policy for addressing social problems (Reynolds, Mann, Miedel, and Smokowski, 1997). In particular, state provided early years' programmes such as Head Start in the United States and Early Start in Ireland have been established to combat educational disadvantage for children experiencing poverty and socio-economic inequality. The focus of this research is on the long-term outcomes of an early years' intervention programme in Ireland. It aims to asses whether participation in the programme enhances the life course of children at-risk of educational disadvantage. It involves an in-depth analysis of one Early Start project which was included in the original eight projects established by the Department of Education and Science in 1994. The study utilises a multi-group design to provide a detailed analysis of both the academic and social progress of programme participants. It examines programme outcomes from a number of perspectives by collecting the views of the three main stakeholders involved in the education process; students who participated in Early Start in 1994/5, their parents and their teachers. To contribute to understanding the impact of the programme from a community perspective interviews were also conducted with local community educators and other local early years' services. In general, Early Start was perceived by all participants in this study as making a positive contribution to parent involvement in education and to strengthening educational capital in the local area. The study found that parents and primary school teachers identified aspects of school readiness as the main benefit of participation in Early Start and parents and teachers were very positive about the role of Early Start in preparing children for the transition to formal school. In addition to this, participation in Early Start appears to have made a positive contribution to academic attainment in Maths and Science at Junior Certificate level. Students who had participated in Early Start were also rated more highly by their second level teachers in terms of goal-setting and future orientation which are important factors in educational attainment. Early Start then can be viewed as providing a positive contribution to the long-term social and academic outcomes for its participants.

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Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation to all of the students, parents, teachers and community participants who were involved in this research and who generously shared their experiences with me. I would like to thank Professor Francis Douglas for all of his advice, support, guidance and inspiration. I would like to thank my colleagues you have so generously given me their time and advice and helped me to complete this thesis. I would also like to thank Barry for taking care of me and for all his love and support over the last ten years that we have shared together. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their unfaltering encouragement and support.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my Grandmother, Nora, who encouraged me to love learning at an early age and I wish that she could have had all the opportunities and freedoms that I have experienced.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Early years' education has increasingly been seen as a mechanism to alleviate educational disadvantage in areas of social exclusion. Early years' intervention programmes are now a common government policy for tacking social problems (Reynolds et al. 1997). In particular, state provided compensatory early years' programmes such as Head Start in the United States and Early Start in Ireland have been established to tackle educational disadvantage for children experiencing poverty and socio-economic inequality. The central aim of this study is to explore the long-term outcomes of participation in compensatory preschool education for children at-risk of educational disadvantage. On a personal level, prior to conducting this research, I spent two years working with children and young people aged between four and eighteen years who were considered 'at-risk' of early school leaving. Many of the children I worked with were on the verge of dropping out of the education system and their overall experience of education and relationships with teachers were very negative. This raised questions for me about the possibilities of earlier interventions which might have supported these students and provided a mechanism for early identification of any particular learning needs which they might have had.

The main focus of this study is on the academic achievement and school progress of Early Start participants and to asses whether participation in Early Start enhances the life course of children at-risk of educational disadvantage. Early Start is a compensatory preschool programme which was established by the Department of Education and Science in 1994/5 and is attached to forty primary schools throughout Ireland. The study examines whether Early Start participants are more orientated towards school achievement than their classmates who did not participate in an early education intervention programme. The focus of the study is on cognitive and social outcomes and examines Early Start participants' academic performance in the Junior Certificate examinations for a sample of Early Start participants who were aged fifteen at the time of data collection. The study also examines indicators of long-term benefits of Early Start with reference to a number of Head Start evaluations (Schweinhart et al., 1993) and the Rutland Street evaluation (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993). This chapter

examines the background and rationale for the study.

1.2 Background and rationale for the study

Clancy (1997) argues that the centrality of education in Irish public policy reflects the continuing belief in its relevance for economic development and societal development. There has been continued public support for modernisation of the education system since the 1960s with commitments to a restructured, diversified and greatly expanded educational system. The continued expansion in enrolment at all levels of the education system provides an indicator of the importance of education in Irish life. The participation rates for fifteen year olds in full time education has increased dramatically from fifty-five per cent in 1966 to ninety-six per cent in 1999 (Curry, 2003). Clancy (1995) demonstrates that comparative data from twenty OECD countries suggests education is a more crucial determinant of employment in Ireland than any other country. This is reflected in the fact that unemployment in Ireland is disproportionately concentrated among those with the lowest education credentials. Clancy (1995) also suggests that social destinations are closely linked to social origins and that the middle-classes pass on their professions to their children. These findings are borne out again in Clancy's (2001) analysis of the socio-economic background of college entrants which found that 21.6 per cent of all college entrants were from the Employers and Managers socio-economic group compared to 3.1 per cent of the college entrants belonging to the Unskilled socio-economic group. Drudy (2001) discusses the role of education as a mechanism through which resources in society are distributed and highlights two main concerns with this procedure. The first is the impact of this allocation of resources on individuals and communities and the inequality of this process highlighted by the disproportionate concentration of educational disadvantage among working-class communities. The second concern highlighted by Drudy (2001) is the impact on society and the fact that despite significant increases in funding of education since the1960s, educational inequality has not been eliminated.

The compensatory education movement has led to large scale intervention programmes which have been developed to give children more equitable access to the education

system and to enhance school readiness (O'Toole, 2000). Early intervention is seen as a means of improving educational attainment for disadvantaged children. This is reflected in the main objective of the Early Start programme which is to increase the basic cognitive skills of disadvantaged children in order to prevent school failure (Lewis and Archer, 2002). Reynolds et al. (1997) have identified a number of assumptions which they believe guide early childhood intervention programmes. Firstly, there is a basic assumption that the underlying conditions of poverty affect the child's development and are associated with a range of difficulties including school under-achievement and delinquency. Secondly, educational and social enrichment can address some of these disadvantages. The third assumption is that the child will experience future school success if they experience early childhood education interventions. Finally, the fourth assumption is that the child will experience longer-lasting effects associated with intervention such as improved primary school grades.

There is much evidence to show that in the US the early years' intervention programme, Head Start, produces immediate gains for children and families participating in the programme (Bronfenbrenner 1974; Barnett, 1995; Zigler and Styfco, 2004). The Schweinhart, Weikart and Larner (1986) study of the Perry Preschool Head Start project was expanded to include community behaviour at age fifteen and found some early intervention programmes had effects on acts of misconduct and engagement in positive social activities. The cost -benefit analysis of the project by Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart (1993) found that for every €1,000 invested in preventative preschool programmes approximately €7,000 was saved to society through cuts in costs such as income support and remedial education (cited in Fallon 2003). A follow-up study of the participants at age forty years revealed results consistent with those found at other stages of the study. According to Schweinhart (2004) there were higher rates of employment among the programme group at age 40 and the programme group had higher median month incomes than the control group. In a recent cost benefit analysis of the programme Schweinhart (2004) calculated that in current terms the value in economic returns to society from the Perry Preschool Project was approximately $17.00 for every dollar spent on the preschool programme. This

economic return to society comes about because of savings in the costs associated with welfare spending, crime and education and also in the collection of higher taxes from the program participants. The major conclusion that can be made from the study is that "high quality preschool programs*(sic)* for young children living in poverty contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime in adulthood" (Schweinhart, 2004, p5). However, it has been found that the long-term effects depend on programme quality (Barnett, 1995). Reynolds et al. (1997) in a review of early childhood intervention programmes found "substantial support for longer-term effects on children's development, especially school competence" (p7). Campbell and Ramey (1994) contend that the benefit such interventions are not just in higher academic results but can also be found in the changes in children behavioural style. They maintain that "treated children may relate to schools in a different way and, hence, be perceived differently by teachers, allowing them to avoid retention and special class placement" (ibid; p695).

Reynolds et al. (1997) state that social competence is the primary goal of the majority of early years' intervention programmes and cognitive development is only one of many indicators of success of such programmes. The over reliance on cognitive outcomes as measures of success has led to narrow definitions of the effects of early interventions and in particular the reported 'fade-out' effects of early cognitive ability. In fact Reynolds et al. (1997) assert that "program*(sic)* effects on the incidence of grade retention and special education do not fade. The early cognitive effects of participation in the program carry over to school competence, thereby resulting in longer-term effects" (p9). International evidence demonstrates that there are long term benefits from participation in compensatory preschool education and this can be referred to as the 'sleeper effect' with the resultant effects of intervention programmes "on the child's cognitive processes remaining dormant until triggered by new demands in the young person's life" (O'Toole, 2000, p140). The Rutland Street evaluation found changes in school related behaviour for parents, and the children were more likely to obtain formal school qualifications (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993).

There is some criticism that the current longitudinal research on early years' interventions comes mainly from model preschool programmes as opposed to the large-scale public programmes (Reynolds et al., 1997). There are a number of limitations in relying on this type of research such as the fact that these programmes are usually more expensive to operate than larger programmes. They have larger and better-trained staff and such evaluations are usually, limited in statistical power and generalisabilty. Penn and Lloyd (2007) in a recent review of longitudinal research on early years' interventions caution policy makers and researchers about drawing on the generalisations from US longitudinal students, including the Perry Preschool project. These studies are sight-specific and focus on samples of African-American children who were experiencing high levels of poverty and racial inequality and the findings may have become dated. In particular the authors are critical of using the cost-benefit analysis of these studies as a current benchmark because they findings are bound by a particular time and place and social and economic conditions have changed in the intervening years. It has been argued that the conditions of poverty in the USA have worsened since the 1960s as there has been "an increase in single parenthood, drug use, neighbourhood crime and poor schooling" (Currie, 2004 cited in Penn and Lloyd, 2007, p14). The authors are also critical about the focus on crime prevention within these studies which they view as specific to the US because of the high rate of incarceration and crime particularly among young African-American men. Instead Penn and Lloyd (2007) suggest that any future longitudinal evaluation of an early years' interventions should focus on the benefits to children in the 'here and now' and should be underpinned by a childrens rights perspective as framed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (p16).

To date there have been two evaluations of Early Start in Ireland. In 1998 children in the first eight schools participating in Early Start were tested in second class for numeracy and literacy and the results were mixed. Teachers judged the children to be more mature and more school-ready but actual test results found no difference (Educational Research Centre, 1998). The report also examined the extent of parental

involvement and the nature and duration of classroom activities (ibid). It found inadequacies concerning in-service training for teachers and the absence of curricular guidelines which were subsequently introduced in 1998. The second evaluation focused on the quality of the programme and the impacts of programme improvements since the first evaluation (Archer and Lewis, 2002). Neither evaluation examined the long-term benefits of programme participation.

Parental involvement is central to Early Start and it is encouraged at three distinct levels. Firstly, parents are part of an advisory group at each centre; secondly, parents participate in the everyday running of the centre; and, finally, parents participate in activities with their children in the centre (O'Toole, 2000). However, Lewis and Archer (2002) in the second evaluation of Early Start found that while there was a wide number of strategies in place to encourage parental involvement the level of parental involvement in the advisory groups in each Early Start school was very limited.

1.3 Description of the study

This study aims to add to the understanding of the nature and distribution of the long-term benefits of an early childhood intervention programme in Ireland. It involves an analysis of one Early Start project which was included in the original eight projects established by the Department of Education and Science in 1994. The study examines programme outcomes from a number of perspectives by collecting the views of the three main stakeholders involved in the education process; students, parents and teachers. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory has been drawn on as a theoretical framework for this study. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) have recently presented advances to the ecological systems theory. These changes, they claim, do not represent a paradigm shift but rather a shift in the centre of gravity within the model to make it more dynamic and complex and a move towards a bioecological model of child development which recognises the influence of the child's own biology. Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) in their follow-up evaluation of the Rutland Street Project affirm the need for 'new more ecologically valid criteria' to provide for the measurement of outcomes of early years' intervention programmes. The study is also concerned with

the contribution of Early Start to developing social capital and cultural capital for families who have participated in the programme. Field (2003) contends that social capital is concerned with membership of networks and a set of shared values and, central to the concept of social capital is the notion that 'relationships matter' (p1). The concept of cultural capital is associated with the work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, and refers to the primary conditions which foster cognitive and scholastic development and facilitate a child's adjustment to school and their subsequent academic achievement (Kellaghan, 2001).

Evaluating outcomes from a systems theory perspective is important in building up a holistic picture of the child's social and educational development. It is impossible to understand the long-term impact of a preschool programme without contextualising the child's environment and community and the changes that have taken place in the ten years since their participation in the preschool programme. To contribute to understanding the impact of the programme from a community perspective, interviews were also conducted with local community educators and other local early years' services such as the local youth services provider. Coleman (1998) contends that the types of social capital that have "value for a young person's development do not reside solely within the family. It can be found outside as well in the community consisting of the social relationships that exist among parents...and in the parents' relations within the institutions of community" (p101). Coleman also argued that community norms are one of the most influential factors in academic attainment and function "to endorse teachers' expectations, and he concluded that communities were therefore a source of social capital and could offset some of the impact of social and economic disadvantage within the family" (cited in Field, 2003, p23).

1.4 Aims and objectives

This study aims to add to the understanding of the nature and distribution of long-term benefits from early childhood intervention programmes and provides a detailed analysis of both the cognitive and non-cognitive progress of children from an Early Start project. Cognitive outcomes include Junior Certificate results and participation in special classes. Social outcomes include issues such as involvement in delinquency

behaviour, aggressive behaviour and altruistic outcomes and long-term benefits for children and for families. The study also examines the effects on parents whose children participate in Early Start and assess if the parents experience any benefits associated with their involvement in Early Start.

1.5 Research questions

There are a number of specific research questions which guide the data collection for this study.

- Does participation in Early Start have an impact on academic attainment as measured by the Junior Certificate results?
- What are the long-term social outcomes (such as community behaviour and attitude to school) of participation in Early Start?
- Does participation in Early Start have an impact on the students' self-esteem?
- What is the impact of participation in Early Start on parental participation in and parental attitude to education?
- What are teachers' perceptions of pupils who have participated in Early Start and their view of the long-term benefits of participation in an early years' intervention programme?
- How has Early Start impacted on the local community with respect to its contribution in building up social and cultural capital?

1.6 Methods of data collection

1.6.1 Methodology

According to Garbarino and Ganzel (2000) an ecological perspective on development demands a focus on both the interactions between the child and the immediate social environment, and an examination of the interplay of the broader social systems on the child's social environment. Relevant contexts in this study include the impact on the individual child, impacts on the child's family, school and community as well as the influence of the policy context on the individual child. Garbarino et al. (2005) contend that the family and the community "continually negotiate and re-negotiate their

relationships, each influencing, changing and depending on the other...there is a constant shifting and evolving interplay among the child's biology, the environment, and the parents' behaviour" (p297). The theoretical framework employed in the study requires a holistic inquiry and a rich description of the context of the study and in particular the community where the Early Start programme is located.

This study combines qualitative and quantitative research methods and, therefore, it is important to acknowledge and address the fact that each of the two research paradigms has a distinct philosophical base and any study which combines both can be open to criticism for 'diluting' either form. However, Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) claim that the combination of both methods can allow a study to use their strengths in a complementary way and generate balanced, in-depth understandings and outcomes. They also claim that a researcher who uses multi-methods is in a better position to generate credible and high-quality research. The data collected will be predominately qualitative data but there will also be quantitative data collected in the form of Junior Certificate results and data relating to absenteeism.

This study complies with the research ethical guidelines of the Sociological Association of Ireland (2002). The guidelines state that the researcher should safeguard the interests of the research participants and recognise any conflicting concerns, which may arise. It is the responsibility of the researcher to explain to the participants, in terms meaningful to them, all aspects of the research project. Every effort was made to clarify the aims and objectives of my study for the research participants and to clarify at the outset the purpose for which the resultant data will be used. Research participants should have their anonymity and privacy respected and personal information should be kept confidential. Any guarantee of anonymity or confidentiality should be strictly adhered to. In certain cases, as is the situation in the project, access to a research setting is gained through a 'gatekeeper'. In this study the school principals were the 'gatekeepers'. An important aspect of this study was gaining the trust of participants and gatekeepers and guaranteeing confidentiality.

1.6.2 Research sample

The sampling technique used for this study is purposive sampling to illuminate the research questions. This study uses a multiple-group design involving one group who have attended the Early Start programme, Group A, while the other group has not attended Early Start, the Comparison Group, Group B. Group A constitutes twenty children and their parents who attended Early Start in 1994-5, the first year of the programme. Group B constitutes fifteen students and their parents who enrolled in Junior Infants in 1994-5 and did not have the opportunity to enrol in Early Start. According to Anderson, Shinn, Fullilove, Scrimshaw, Fielding, Normand, and Carande-Kulis (2003) a comparison group is necessary to attribute effects and outcomes to an intervention programme and the use of a comparison group minimises internal and external threats to validity in the research design. The comparison group matched the study group in terms of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status of the family and would initially have met the selection criteria for participation in the Early Start programme. The methods of data collection were identical for both groups. A pilot study was conducted with students and parents in an alternative school in the same local area to assess the research methods. Participants for the study were initially contacted through the primary school with a letter sent by the school asking for research participants. This resulted in twelve participants agreeing to take part out of a possible 120 students who had enrolled in either Early Start or Junior Infants in that particular school in 1994-95. There was then follow-up contact through the local secondary schools in the area and the local youth projects and community-based education projects. This was a more successful strategy resulting in an additional twenty-three participants and, in addition, the socio-economic status of the participants became more reflective of the socio-economic status of the general population in the area in terms of employment status, housing tenure, educational attainment and family background.

1.7 Data Collection

Data collection stage1: In-depth Interviews with Parents (n=35)

The interview method used in this study was a semi-structured or standardised open-ended interview. The variables measured included background family information, education variables, parents' participation in their child's education, parents' perception of the benefits of Early Start and parents' aspirations for their children. Each interview took place in a venue chosen by the parent, normally the parents' home and lasted for between twenty minutes and forty-five minutes (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the Parent Questionnaire).

Data collection Stage 2: Structured Student Interviews (n=35)

Stage two of data collection was a standardised structured interview including the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale for the Early Start participants and the Comparison Group. A small number of open-ended questions were also included in the student interview schedule. Interviews took place in either the school, the child's home or a local community centre according to the child's wishes. The Junior Certificate results for each student were also collected. The Structured Student Interviews gathered both qualitative and quantitive types of data (see Appendix 5 for a copy of the Student Questionnaire).

Data collection Stage 3: Interviews with School Personnel (n=9)

Stage three of data collection was a structured interview conducted with teachers in both the primary and secondary schools which the Early Start participants and comparison group had attended. The variables measured included educational variables such as the number of participants who had already left formal education systems and the teacher perceptions of the achievements of Early Start participants. Interviews took place in the schools (see Appendix 6 for a copy of the School Personnel Questionnaire).

Data collection Stage 4; Interviews with community educators and local early years' services (n=5)

Five professionals working in educational disadvantage in the local community were interviewed to assess the perceived contribution of Early Start to building up social and cultural capital in the local community. Open-ended interviews were conducted with the Manager of the local community crèche, the local youth services, a School Completion Co-ordinator and two Community Workers involved in educational projects and youth projects in the area (see Appendix 7 for a copy of the Community Participants Questionnaire).

1.8 Outline of thesis

Chapter two, Exploring Educational Disadvantage, provides a context for the study by examining the concept of educational disadvantage and equality of opportunity in an educational context. The theoretical underpinning and political motivations of educational disadvantage policies in Ireland are considered and the social democratic ideology which has dominated Irish education policy since 1960s is explored.

Chapter three, Early Years' Interventions, examines literature concerning research on the long-term evaluations of early years' interventions and the lessons that can be learned from this research for this current study are considered. In particular, this chapter considers whether or not there is evidence to support the efficacy of early years' intervention. The centrality of parental involvement within such intervention programmes is also examined. The welfare aspect of early years' intervention programmes and the wider links to social policy are considered. The previous evaluations of Early Start are explored and any gaps identified in previous research guide this current study.

Chapter four, Research Design, provides an overview and discussion of the research methods used in this thesis. Analysis of the data is discussed and differences in quantitative and qualitative data analysis are considered. This chapter outlines the methodological procedures which were employed in this study. It is necessary to

explore why the methods chosen were considered to be the most appropriate methods for investigation of the research questions outlined in the Introduction to the thesis, thereby achieving the objective of providing a research work which contributes to the body of research on early years' interventions.

Chapter five, Student Interviews and Background Data, presents the results of the quantitative data from the study and in particular focuses on the students' structured interviews and background data for the families in the study.

Chapter six, Parent Perspectives on Early Start and their Child's Educational Journey, presents an analyses of the qualitative data generated from the in-depth interviews with parents in the study. The chapter is organised around the main themes which emerged from the data collected and the findings are linked to previous research findings.

Chapter seven, Teachers' and Community Perspectives on Early Start, presents an analysis of the qualitative data generated from the in-depth interviews with primary and secondary school teachers and community participants in the study.

Chapter eight, Conclusions and Recommendations, outlines the main conclusions that can be drawn from the data collected in this study and discusses the contribution that Early Start had made to the long-term social and academic outcomes for the Early Start students and their families. This chapter also outlines a number of recommendations which were deduced from the data relating to educational disadvantage in Ireland and the role of early years' interventions in combating educational inequality.

Chapter 2

Exploring Educational Disadvantage

2.1 Introduction.

Clancy (1995) states that the expansion of the education and training systems since the post-war period "stands out as perhaps the trend of OECD countries that historians in this field will chronicle and debate in future years" (p468). Clancy views education as an institution which is central to the project of modernity. Education has become the prevailing symbol and dominant strategy for the mastery of nature and society through rationality which has characterised the project of modernity from its origins in the enlightenment. Clancy (1995, p465) goes as far as to suggest that education "has come to stand for the possibility of individual and collective improvement, individual and collective emancipation". There has been a dramatic restructuring of the education system in Western economies during the last twenty-five years. According to Cullen (2000) two broad economic developments have given rise to this restructuring; firstly de-industrialisation, involving the collapse of the industrial economy in the 1970s and 1980s and the secondly; globalisation. The effect of these two processes on education has led to an expansion of third level education and a growing emphasis on life-long learning. It has also led to a growing convergence between academic and vocational education. According to Cullen this restructuring took place in an Irish context against the backdrop of a recession and cutbacks in the early 1980s, which demanded better educational outcomes with fewer resources.

> This was a politically conservative demand, fuelled by an analysis that suggested that education should be produced and distributed under free market rules, that it not have an egalitarian function and that it should be more concentrated on supporting competitiveness and economic development and growth. (ibid, p7)

Cullen (2000) suggests that the Irish State had a very limited role to play in combating educational disadvantage during this time and offered a residualist analysis of educational disadvantage. There have been few definitive definitions of educational disadvantage. However, Kellaghan et al. (1997) refer to a definition reached at a UNESCO meeting in 1967 which states that students are regarded as disadvantaged because of "sociocultural reasons, they entered the school system with knowledge,

skills ands attitudes that made adjustment difficult and impeded learning" (p27). The problem of disadvantage manifests itself in the school in poor educational performances

Tomlinson (2001) discussing the influence of human capital theory in post-welfare society has placed work-ethic and competition in the labour market at the centre of education policy. The goals of global capitalist economics have had a major influence on the needs of local and national economies, which required them to compete at a global level and led to governments rediscovering human capital theory. Tomlinson cites a speech by Tony Blair in 1999 which stated that there would be 'no more ceilings that prevent people from achieving their merit'. Tomlinson argues that despite a raft of social policies on educational equality, which may have had some effect on the working-class, it has not had any effect on the middle-class apart from ensuring that the future security and status of their children is secured and that they are educated apart from the poor. She argues that studies of social mobility found children of lower socio-economic groups have to demonstrate more 'merit' to enter desirable class positions. This is also highlighted in the analysis of the forty richest people in Britain in 2000, who far from representing a classless generation, for the most part attended private schools and had rich and influential parents. In relation to Ireland Clancy (1995) reports clear evidence of socio-economic class differences in the level of educational achievement and third level participation with the higher socio-economic classes benefiting more significantly from their participation within the education system (see section 2.5 for further discussion).

2.2 Sociology of education

2.2.1 Introduction

This section will explore sociological theories of education. According to Drudy and Lynch (1993), education plays a critical role in socialising the young and the transmission of culture and selects different individuals for different types of occupations through assessment and certification. According to Clancy (1995) most of

the sociological work carried out in the field of education in Ireland has been within a structuralist framework. Traditionally sociologists have taken society as a whole unit of analysis and sought to understand the contribution that education makes to the maintenance and development of that society. This macro approach leaves the social processes and internal dynamics of the school unexamined. More recently sociologists are using interpretative approaches and examining the functioning of school organisations and patterns of interaction in the classroom and the nature of curriculum through which explicit goals of schooling are realised. Two groups of scholars, functionalists and Marxists scholars, hold antithetical views about the function of education in contemporary society. However their approaches do have a lot in common and this section will explore these two sociological theories.

2.2.2 The Functionalist perspective

According to Drudy and Lynch (1993) the dominant approach in Irish educational research until the 1970s has been the functionalist perspective. Functionalism has its origins in early 20th century European sociologists such as Weber, Durkhiem and Parsons. Drudy and Lynch (1993) claim, that although functionalism does address conflict and social division, there is an assumption that society is based on co-operation and cohesiveness and there is normally a state of equilibrium. Functionalism is preoccupied with the question of order and how societies remain cohesive. The maintenance of this order is explained in terms of shared values and although many institutions are seen to play a part in this, education has a key role to play in the transmission of shared values. One of the most influential structural functionalist, Talcott Parsons, claimed that schools contend with a 'dual-problem' as they operate simultaneously as agencies of socialisation and selection (Clancy, 1995). As a socialisation agency the school is responsible for the development of the individuals' commitments and capacities which are prerequisites for their future role performance and this incorporates both a technical and moral component. The technical level teaches capacities and skills required for adult performance and the moral socialisation, even more crucial for Parsons as a normative functionalist, teaches that value consensus is essential if society is to operate. School is crucial as the place where young people

are socialised into basic values of society and the key value of school is to teach what is strategically important to society (Clancy, 1995). Parsons (1977) argues that functionalist theory views the expansion of schooling as a natural societal response to technical innovation and development and to the corresponding increased demand for skilled labour in the workplace. Schools are committed to meritocratic principles, which become the essential mechanism by which our society accepts the principles of differential rewards and favours those who strive for high academic grades. The norm of achievement is internalised and schools function as a crucial mechanism for the selection of individuals for their future occupational role in society (Clancy, 1995). According to Blackledge and Hunt education "inculcates the view that inequalities of income and status, which are a consequence of differences of educational attainment, are acceptable; that is proper for those who do well in education to be highly rewarded" (1985, p68).

According to Blackledge and Hunt (1985), Parsons argues that there has been an educational revolution which has transformed modern society. The major characterisation of this educational revolution is the extension of equality of opportunity, which brings inevitable differences in attainment, arising from differences in ability and family orientation (different aspirations and attitudes in the family in respect to education). The education system engenders new forms of inequality and potential division in society but also contracts this by legitimating these inequalities through the principle of meritocracy. Blackledge and Hunt (1985) maintain that this has led to the spread of the ideology of 'equal opportunity' and 'achievement' and these are key elements of common culture. The most enduring debate in Irish education is the equality of education opportunity debate which is embedded in a functionalist frame of reference (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). Functionalists often tend to discuss problems of education and social class in the liberal language of equality of educational opportunity. It rests on the idea that modern societies are or should be meritocratic, that achievement and success should be based on a combination of ability and talent, nurturing it and accreditating it and eventually assisting in slotting it into appropriate positions in the social and economic hierarchy. This view does not assume that inequalities can or

should be eliminated and sees a certain amount of social and economic inequality as both inevitable and necessary to the proper functioning of industrial societies. One of the principal functions of education is to encourage and facilitate social mobility. It is assumed by functionalists that occupations and social class are ranked according to prestige, rewards and skills attached to each. It is the task of education to make sure that every member of society has an equal chance to be unequal and can move according to skills attached to them and be in the social position most appropriate to their talents.

2.2.3 Neo-Marxist perspective

The principle challenge to the functionalist perspective comes from Neo-Marxism. Neo-Marxism as a theoretical approach arises from western European and American traditions of social and academic analysis of the contemporary capitalist economy and is often critical of the political philosophy of former eastern block states (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). Blackledge and Hunt (1985) claim that according to the neo-Marxist perspective the major aim of 'mass schooling' is not personal fulfilment as liberals claim but as a means of maintaining social hierarchy and controlling the social class and is the main device through which the labour market is provided with differentiated manpower. This perspective challenges the idea that education has an enriching function for children's minds. In contrast to functionalists, Neo-Marxists claim that social relations of capitalist societies are characterised by class-based conflict rather than consensus. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, together with other neo-Marxist theorist such as Bowles and Gintis, assert that the principal functions of education are the reproduction and legitimation of the social relationships of the capitalist economic order (Drudy and Lynch, 1993).

Blackledge and Hunt (1985) analyse the work of Bourdieu and argue that one of his main contributions to the sociology of education is in the area of how students are evaluated and identifying criteria used by staff to label students as excellent or weak. The child's progress in school is influenced by the culture the child receives from his/her family and families in the dominant or ruling class give their children 'cultural

capital' which allows them to do well in education. The culture of education is similar to the culture of the dominant class which defines criteria by which students are labelled good or bad (the concept of cultural capital is further explored in Section 2.4.4). Parsons (cited in Blackledge and Hunt, 1985) also contends that education does not explicitly teach what it examines. Education is therefore granted apparent authority from outside interference because it legitimates the power and culture of the dominant classes (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985). Bourdieu also discusses the concept of 'master patterns' which relate to culture and language acquired during socialisation. Thinking follows a pattern laid down in language and language determines thought. Different class groups within society have different languages and education has its own language which is closer to the language of the dominant class (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985). Children of dominant classes are given linguistic codes and master patterns relating to language and culture which allow them to be more successful in education. This is similar to the work of Basil Bernstein who explored the connections between social class difference in educational achievement and "class differences in language use of linguistic code" (Banks, 1976, p108). Blackledge and Hunt (1985) claim that it might be more realistic to assume that the culture of education is formed not by the rich and powerful as Bourdieu claims, but by teachers and civil servants.

The Bowles and Gintis (1976) book *Schooling in Capitalist America* contains some of the major ideas and characteristics of the neo-Marxist school of thought. Education maintains and/or reinforces the existing social order and therefore cannot act as a force for social change, promoting greater equality or social justice and the capitalist economy is at the root of the problem (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985). Education legitimates class structure and inequality by fostering the belief that economic success is dependent on the possession of appropriate skills or educational qualifications and by preparing young people for a place in a class-dominated capitalist economy. School rewards docility and obedience and penalises creativity and spontaneity rendering people incapable of acting together to control their economic and social activities and this process is referred to as the correspondence principal (ibid).

2.2.4 Divergence and similarities between functionalism and neo-Marxism.

According to Drudy and Lynch (1993) neo-Marxists, unlike functionalists, do not accept inequality as necessary for the orderly functioning of society but instead see it as inevitable under the capitalist system. This is based on an unequal and exploitive relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariat with education playing a vital role in maintaining these relations. From a functionalist perspective the education system is malfunctioning not to the extent where it fails to remove inequalities but to the extent it fails to identify talent or slot it into its various positions and this has led functionalist research to focus on the problem of social mobility. Clancy (1995) argues that functionalism is essentially an optimistic viewpoint which sees education as good and leads to individual emancipation and self-realisation. This is countered by the neo-Marxist viewpoint which stresses its repressive features. The main divergences between the two schools of thought then are acceptance of social inequality, idealisation of meritocracy and preoccupation with social mobility (Drudy and Lynch, 1993).

There are also a number of similarities between functionalism and neo-Marxism. Both are structuralist approaches to social order as most analysis is at a systems level and focus primarily on social structures such as class and occupation structures (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). The approaches use similar research methodologies and both use aggregate statistical data such as censuses and their findings tend to be broadly similar. According to Blackledge and Hunt (1985) both approaches attempt to explain how education contributes to the maintenance of the status-quo and both examine the relationship between education and the wider society, especially the economy. Blackledge and Hunt (1985) also claim that the work of Bowles and Gintis which identified the functions of education as *legitimation* and *socialisation* is similar to the functions of *selection* and *socialisation* identified by Parson, except that Parsons is in favour of the system. According to Drudy and Lynch (1993) both approaches also share the same weaknesses, such as neglect of the internal processes of schools and the dynamics of classroom interaction. Both have also failed to examine the interrelationship between class, gender, racial and disability related inequalities.

2.2.5 Neo-Weberian perspective

The third major perspective which has influenced sociological research in the field of education has been the Neo-Weberian perspective which is based on the theories of the German sociologist Max Weber. The neo-Weberian perspective is another attempt to understand capitalist society but unlike the two previous perspectives is much less inclined to see human behaviour as determined by social structures in which people participate (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). According to Blackledge and Hunt (1985) the neo-Weberian perspective takes into account individual actors definitions of the situation leading to an examination of how groups interact to construct, maintain and change the educational system. This perspective can bridge the gap between micro and macro approaches in sociological research. The state as the main administrative institution in society is continually engaged in the regulation of conflict between other structures in society and this is the extent to which the state can determine societal outcomes such as the distribution of life chances. In an Irish context the neo-Weberian perspective is most evident in the work of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) whose theoretical models attribute inequalities in income to the distribution of property, skills and education credentials (Drudy and Lynch, 1993).

The ESRI, similar to international research trends, has focused on two areas of educational research; the relationship between social inequality and education (particularly intergenerational mobility) and the links between gender and education (such as subject choice) and this research has tended to be qualitative and policy orientated (Tovey and Share, 2003). The neo-Weberian perspective focuses on individual and collective action and on intentions, purposes and goals and this also leads to the evaluation of the goals and actions of interest groups in educational change. Drudy and Lynch (1993) claim that there is substantial agreement between the neo-Weberian and the Neo-Marxist perspectives, especially in the area of class structures as class is seen as the important organising feature of capitalist society and power and domination are important explanatory concepts. The next section examines in more detail the concept of power is education.

2.3 Education and power

2.3.1 Political nature of education

Paulo Freires social pedagogy defines education as one place where the individual and society are constructed, a social action which can either empower or domesticate students (Shor, 1993). Freire wrote that he saw "educational practices infused with political objectives and to be reproductive of the existing, social, cultural and economic relations of oppression and exploitation" (Freire, 1985, p39). Politics is represented in schools in a number of ways, including the imposition of standardised tests, physical conditions of classrooms, and the punitive attitude of curriculum to everyday speech, diminished role of art, dance and music in lower income schools, unequal funding of schools and an unelected bureaucracy running most institutions (Shor, 1993). Traditional education produces a certain type of citizen who has been indoctrinated to accept their oppressive social situation and accept the authoritarian and dominant values of their oppressor. Freire sees society as controlled by an elite who impose their culture and values as standard and any knowledge taught is an expression of a historical moment where one group expresses dominant power over others. To challenge this, students should be engaged in a democratic process and be faced with critical problems which challenge the authoritarian values that they have learned and to question the official knowledge and the mainstream politics of their society. This reflective posture is referred to by Freire as an "epistemological relationship to reality" which is being a critical examiner of your experience, questioning and interpreting your life and education (Shor, 1993).

According to Apple (1995) the education system is an essential element in the maintenance of existing relations of domination and exploitation in societies. We need to understand the connection between education and the ideological, political and economic spheres of society and how the school partakes in them. Apple (1995) suggests that even if schools were transformed to equalise outcomes there is evidence to suggest it might not make a significant difference in the larger structural framework of which schools are part. While this does present a rather pessimistic view of the

powerlessness of schools which appear to fundamentally determine institutions, Apple (1995) also maintains that because of the location of the education system within the nexus of social relations there is some opportunity for actions to evolve. He contends that society is subject to multiple power relations which are a source of conflict and this conflict is not just caused by the 'holy trinity' of class, gender and race which are at the centre of most sociological research. He argues that we need to recognise when presenting a structural understanding of education that we live under capitalist relations and significant movements towards educational 'reform' such as national testing and marketisation are based on narrow economic discourse. Our own idea of democracy is altered by the process of marketisation which is perceived as an economic concept not a political concept and any serious sense of common good is marginalised. Democracy, asserts Apple (1995), is reduced to stimulating the conditions for consumer choice and the world becomes a vast supermarket. This results in the move towards a double peaked economy where the gap between rich and poor is growing larger.

Blackledge and Hunt (1985), in their examination of Apple's work, contend that there is a functional correspondence between what schools teach and the needs of an unequal society, demonstrated by the fact that industry requires docile workers and schools produce them. However, this simple concept of reproduction does not do justice to complexity of school life and Apple identifies resistance among pupils to this absorption of the hidden curriculum as it is mediated by the class culture of pupils. Pupils themselves possess a culture containing values and norms that are at odds with those of the dominant culture of wider society and this allows them to see through the capitalist ideological façade to a reality of inequality at its base and provides pupils with the means of challenging the system of control in their schools (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985). This may be evident in working-class schools where there can be a rejection of the hidden curriculum and such schools become sites of resistance, conflict and struggle. However, despite this resistance, or counter-culture, the power is unevenly distributed among teachers and pupils but the very existence of this conflict proves that pupils are not just bearers of the ideology that school enforces on them (Blackledge and Hunt, 1985). Examples of this resistance include pupils creatively

adapting their environment so they can smoke, get out of class and informally control the pace of teaching. The teacher and their subjects can often be ignored and the covert hidden curriculum teaching of punctuality, neatness, compliance and other economically rooted values are ignored. Apple's work abandons the view that education is simply determined by the economy and instead encourages us to view school and the culture of pupils as relatively autonomous. Gaine and George (1999) claim that differences in the 'social class' between pupil and teacher can lead to a clash between the teachers idealised view of what a pupil 'ought to be' and the 'reality' leading to discord between the two and even the development of a 'resistance' subculture. However, Blackledge and Hunt (1985) point out that this neo-Marxist theory of resistance lacks empirical support as the majority of working-class pupils are not part of a school counter-culture and many working-class people themselves possess values and attitudes which are at odds with those found in such sub-cultures.

2.3.2 Curriculum and Reproduction

Apple (1995) maintains that schools act as a state apparatus and perform important roles in assisting the creation of the conditions necessary for capital accumulation (they sort, select, and certify a hierarchically-organised student body) and legitimation (maintain an inaccurate meritocratic ideology), therefore, legitimate the ideological forms necessary for the recreation of inequality. However, the two functions of schools are often in conflict for example at times there may be an overproduction of credentialed individuals when the economy no longer 'requires' as many high salaried personnel. Apple (1995) identifies a problem with the relationship between power and culture. Culture has a dual form which is a lived experience; it is developed out of day to day lives and the interactions of specific groups. Another important characteristic of culture is the ability of certain groups in society to transform culture into a commodity to accumulate it and to make of it what Bourdieu called 'cultural capital'. Apple (1995) examines how particular aspects of a collective culture become represented in school as objective factual knowledge and found that the curriculum was the most important source of cultural domination which facilitated the distribution of ideological values and knowledge. Schools are responsible for producing a particular kind of 'legitimate'

knowledge and also create categories which label students as deviants or achievers. This allows the development of a complex filter through which pupils are stratified into their position in society. Apple's work examines educational institutions through the lens of multiple power relations which exist in society and his work is closely related to that of Paulo Freire who asserted that education is politics. Lynch and Lodge (2002) link the lack of student voice within schools to power-related injustices within the Irish education system and state that this lack of voice is particularly relevant for working-class students. In relation to this current thesis, it is important to consider these findings and to investigate the experiences of students in this study and consider whether participation in Early Start has enhanced their level participation within the education system.

2.4 Constructing educational inequality

2.4.1 Social construction of inequality

Pierson and Castles (2000) conceive education as a social good which is closely tied to basic needs and personal development and is essential to the concept of equality. Educational opportunity plays a key role in combating disadvantage which they view creating an "inherited, and an unfair situation in one generation" which lead to an unfair start for the next generation (ibid, p56). They claim that the idea of equality of opportunity is a very radical concept and would entail a restructuring of our society so that the most disadvantaged would have the same life chances as the most privileged. This understanding of equality of opportunity is linked to the concept of social citizenship propounded by T.H. Marshall (1950) who suggested the fact that when elementary education was made compulsory by the end of the 19th century it signalled a departure from laissez-faire social policy and the growth in political democracy required of an educated electorate. Marshall viewed free and compulsory education as the first step towards the establishment of the social rights of citizenship which dominated social policy developments in the twentieth century.

According to Foster, Gomm, and Hammersley (1996) inequality has been the focus of much sociological research on education. The involvement of psychologists in the development of intelligence tests in the first half of 20th century influenced how educational inequality was conceived.

> Central to this work was the idea that having intelligence is genetically determined, in large part; with different social classes varying in intelligence, and members of the lower classes being generally less intelligent than those of the middle and upper classes. (Foster et al, 1996, p7)

There was more attention given to the identification of individual working-class children with potential by making use of intelligence tests rather than equality for all and this system was believed to be fair. Tomlinson (2001) maintains that the functionalist notion of meritocracy has been significantly boosted by the reliance on intelligence testing throughout the 20th century. The use of these tests has supported the assumption that the selection processes for elite forms of education is meritocratic and the privileges associated with these forms of credentials are fair. By the 1960s claims that intelligence was inherited were challenged by theories relating to the influence of the social environment on the development of the child. Foster et al. (1996) point out that as there was increasing scepticism about the hereditary nature of intelligence that there was increased relevance placed on the home background of the children and the importation of the concept of cultural deprivation from the United States.

> Thus, the relative failure of working-class children in schools, compared to middle-class children, began to be explained by many in terms of the effects of culturally deficient home backgrounds which failed to provide the cognitive and attitudinal socialization (sic) believed to be a prerequisite for academic success. (Ibid, p9)

The result of this was the call for direct action by schools in the form of compensatory education and stronger links between home and school. Similarly the delivery of Early Start within the Irish education system can be viewed as resulting from a similar perspective and set of concerns.

Tomlinson (2000) discusses the theory of human capital in a post-industrial global economy and claims that governments are no longer in full control of their economies as transnational corporations encourage governments to compete for investments and jobs for their citizens. She describes this as a 'global auction' in which countries compete to offer an educated workforce for investment and this has led to a 'tightening bond' between education and the economy (p5). As work is increasingly more reliant on the mind rather than physical work, educated people are now considered the 'capital' of developed society. Governments are increasingly attempting to restructure education to increase levels of education and increase their attractiveness to transnational companies, simultaneously governments under the influence of neo-liberal ideologies, are attempting to reduce public costs. Tomlinson asserts that "one solution to this problem, has been to use human capital theory to persuade people that investing in themselves, through continuous education, training and lifelong learning, is in their own best interests, even more so if they pay for this" (p5). The drive to 'raise standards' and increase credentials has caused credential inflation and ensured that employers use the status of qualifications to screen potential candidates. She claims that the major characteristic of 20th century democratic society is that these credentials "must be acquired through mainstream education to legitimate occupational success, privilege and advancement" (p6). The significance of equality of opportunity needs to be understood in the wider context of equality in society.

2.4.2 Equality in society

According to Lynch and Lodge (2002) equality is a fundamental principle underpinning the operation of all democratic societies, and schools are major players in the determination of patterns of equality in society.

> As knowledge-based industries and services gain increasing pre-eminence in the global economy, schools have become increasingly powerful players in the determination of life's chances. Their role as producers and disseminators of cultural products has also meant they play a powerful role in determining the ordering of cultural relations in society, and in elevating and denigrating difficult cultural forms. (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p5)

Lynch and Lodge (2002) identify three strands of egalitarian thinking and claim that inequality is not generated from a single source but is generated from economic relations, political, socio-cultural or affective relations and from interaction between these societal structures.

1. The redistributive perspective; This strand of egalitarian thinking has most pre-eminence in egalitarian theory and is evident in the work of Rawls (1971) and Tawney (1964). Lynch and Lodge (2002) identify this perspective as giving primacy to the possession of material goods and services or having "opportunities to access, participate or succeed in particular spheres" (p7). This perspective is in line with materialistic and economically based concepts of social justice, and equality is defined as a redistributive problems. This perspective has dominated social science analysis of education and views education as a 'good', implying the more one receives the better. The result of this has been a number of large-scale studies tracking participation rates for various social groups within the education system which has focused the debate towards equality of opportunity and the need to equalise the distribution of educational credentials rather than the distribution of resources. However Lynch and Lodge (2002) point out that it is futile to encourage equality of opportunity without first ensuring equality of condition.

2. Recognition of difference; The second strand of egalitarian thought which Lynch and Lodge (2002) identify is the analysis of the problems of power as "derivative rather than generative in the distributive tradition" (p8). There is a growing recognition that inequality is not just an economic concept but can also be related to status issues such as gender and ethnic or religious beliefs. Since the 1990s there has been an increase in the 'politics of difference' and there has been a parallel growth in social cultural movements. As society becomes more complex and fragmented the traditional ideological perspectives based on capital and labour, have been replaced by an extensive range of social perspectives and the onset of postmodernism.

> The result of this is that neither politics nor ideology are focused any more primarily upon the left-right debate about the role of the state but rather there are a plethora of different political organisations pursuing their own interests and a range of new ideological perspectives emerging that do not fit the simplistic left-right continuum. (Alcock, 1996, p123-4)

Fitzpatrick (2001) also discusses the emergence of new social divisions based on gender, race and ethnicity, mental and physical abilities, age and sexuality and in line with this there is a change in the focus of welfare ideologies from a concern with the distribution of material resources to new social movements and a broadened concern with both more material and cultural resources. Lynch and Lodge (2002) indicate that this perspective follows the Weberian tradition by treating status as a separate and discrete entity from economic and political positions.

3. Power and the representation of interests; The third strand discussed by Lynch and Lodge (2002) identifies "power as an equality problem inter-related with, but separate from, distribution and recognition issues" and this is the least developed perspective (p9). Power-related issues of social justice draw on the work of theorists such as Foucault, and in the field of educational sociology the work of theorists such as Apple and Bowles and Gintis have been influential at a macro level, and Freire's social pedagogy at a micro level. However, Lynch and Lodge (2002) point out that there has been little sociological research focusing on the issue of power at a micro level such as examining the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. In particular, they highlight the fact that discourses on the issue of children's rights and participation are separate from mainstream educational debates. This strand of egalitarian theory allows for the re-conceptualisation of the dominance and subordinancy which is institutionalised into educational life by offering an opportunity to re-examine the teacher-student relationship as an equality consideration.

Recent ideologies which focused on equality of opportunity for previously marginalised groups such as women, or ethnic minorities have increased but a major obstacle in this is that there are now even more people competing for qualification and there are still a large number who are unable to compete on equal terms. Tomlinson (2000) argues that

since the 1980s, egalitarian ideologies began to disappear in a number of developed countries and were replaced by the 'school "choice" movements, creating an education market in which parents seek the "best buy" for their children' (p6). This agenda has been pushed onto educational agendas by powerful groups. Evidence of this in the UK emerges with the devolution of school budgets based on pupil intake and the competition fuelled by the release of annual league tables. Schools are punished or rewarded according to the pupils they attract and this has led to some schools being labelled 'failing schools'. Tomlinson (2000) asserts that there is international research evidence to show that the main outcome of school choice policies has been the increase in social class and racial segregation in schools.

The disappearance of egalitarian ideologies and the increased reliance on market positions for educational opportunities has reinforced the position education plays as a social class sorting mechanism. Tomlinson claims that middle-class parents are undermining the principal of equality of opportunity by using their resources as superior educational supports for their children such as private schooling and grinds. She claims that this middle-class is committed to the social and political system that gave them a 'good life' and are determined to pass this privilege onto their children.

> But this determination now goes beyond the transmission of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973), although parents and children determined to 'get on' know that not just qualifications, but appropriate social and personal skills are necessary to demonstrate their 'value added curriculum vitae'. (Ibid, p11)

These aspirant groups are no longer concerned with equality of opportunity but are now concerned with the exclusion of pupils who will affect the performance of their own children in school whom they wish to be associated with children from similar socio-economic backgrounds. Giddens (1997) in *The Third Way* also discusses the growth of two forms of exclusion which have marked modern society as "privileged groups start to live in fortress communities, and pull out from public education and public health systems" (p18). There is an exclusion at the bottom of the most disadvantaged and at

the top there is voluntary exclusion, or the 'revolt of the elites', where the most privileged have decided to live apart from the rest of society (Giddens, 1997, p103).

2.4.3 The equality continuum

Lynch (1999) claims that there is no set definition of what equality of opportunity means and to understand the realisation of equality there is a continuity along which the various principles of equality can be placed. Lynch (1999) constructs what she calls an equality continuum:

> Policies which promote some vague form of fairness or equity sit at one end of the continuum; moving on from this there are policies which promote liberal equal opportunities, those which are based on radical equal opportunities and finally policies which are directed towards the promotion of equality of condition and which claim that, it is only in an egalitarian society, in which there is equality of condition, that one can have true equality of opportunity. (Lynch, 1999, p29)

The minimal level of equality identified by Lynch (1999) refers to equity which has a somewhat ambiguous meaning and vaguely refers to something as being fair or reasonable. This vagueness of the meaning has allowed policy makers to be non-committed to ensuring equality for all. Drudy and Lynch (1993) argue that the concept of equity in the Department of Education and Sciences Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* (1992) has replaced the concept of equality and is subject to a broad interpretation. 'Fairness' in philosophical terms can mean something vague such as 'reasonableness'. This has been interpreted as a backward step because of the ambiguity attached to the meaning. Similarly the Combat Poverty Agency (1993) suggested that the Green Paper made little attempt to develop a commitment to social justice and instead has focused on the economic imperative of education policy. Drudy and Lynch (1993) cite Irish research by Greaney and Kellaghan (1984) which divides the concept of equality of opportunity into three phases; access, participation rates and rates of achievement. Up until 1960s educational equality was couched in terms of access from different social groups to different levels of the education system. The next stage of the continuum represents liberal egalitarians who view equality in education in terms of equality of opportunity. Liberal egalitarians recognise that

"society is stratified and proposed that equality policies should be directed towards equalising opportunities for various types of mobility (educational, occupational, career, intergenerational etc.) within a stratified system" (ibid). Equality of opportunity policies can also be located along a continuum, from equality of access, to equality of participation, to equality of outcome. Lynch (1999) critiques this concept of equality for ignoring structural inequalities in society and offering an essentially meritocratic viewpoint.

In relation to the maximum level of equality on the equality continuum, Lynch points to the work of radical egalitarians who challenge the notion that structural socio-economic inequalities in society are inescapable. The focus of radical egalitarians is on substantive economic and political equality and on the restructuring of institutions to promote equality. They focus especially on the importance of substantive economic and political equality and the need to eliminate inequalities altogether rather than just redistribute inequalities across different groups. Essential to all concepts of egalitarian theory and the social construction of equality is that it has mainly developed within institutional and political structures and Lynch claims that it can only be successfully developed and realised when it has been developed within a dialogical context. Lynch (1999) is very clear on how this dialogical construction of equality should take place and suggests it should not merely be with the academic and political structures but should include "the marginalised and excluded groups who are the subjects of equality-based research in education" (p4).

2.4.4 New forms of inequality

Lynch (2007) has recently expanded her work on equality to include the concepts of equality of solidarity, care and love and she argues that primary care in particular is dependent on love labour. Lynch reasons that society should develop a Care(ful) Model of Citizenship rather than the current Rational Economic Actor model of citizenship which in the education system emphasises the individual's acquisition of human capital for economic activity and does not take into consideration the dependency of human beings on others. Love, care and solidarity labour provide forms

of *nurturing capital* and create 'emotionally resourced family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours or partners' (p554). This leads to a sense of belonging and a sense of being appreciated for the individuals involved.

> All people have the capacity for intimacy, attachment and caring relationships. Bonds of friendship or kinship are frequently what bring meaning, warmth and joy to life. Being deprived of the capacity to develop such supportive affective relations, or the experience of engaging in them when one has the capacity, is therefore a serious human deprivation and injustice (ibid, p553).

Lynch's work reflects some of the concepts of social capital, particularly in relation to the importance of nurturing relationships and networks in local communities such as the work of Coleman (1988). Lynch claims that love, care and solidarity labour are often absent in communities which are "broken by conflict or violence" (2007, p555). These concepts are important to consider for this study as the research will examine the impact of the Early Start programme on the community and in particular if it has been a source of social capital in the community through strengthening relationships for the stakeholders involved in the education process.

2.4.5 Social and cultural capital in educational disadvantage

The 1998 Education Act defined disadvantage as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education" (Section 32(9)). According to Kellaghan (2001) there are a number of limitations with this definition. This definition is very broad and does not offer any insight into the actual difficulties that a child would face in a school context and offers no guidance on appropriate educational interventions. Kellaghan argues that the current definitions of educational disadvantage are frequently too broad and non-specific and he attempts to present a new definition which focuses on the nature of educational disadvantage which incorporates the concepts of social and cultural capital.

Kellaghan's definition proposes that children are educationally disadvantaged when discontinuities exist between the competencies and dispositions a child develops in

their home life and the competencies and dispositions which are seen as necessary for successful adaptation to school life. Kellaghan identifies a number of factors which influence the development of children's competencies and dispositions. He conceptualises these factors in terms of three types of a capital; economic, cultural and social. Educational disadvantage is defined in terms of (i) discontinuities between the competencies and dispositions which children bring to school and the competencies and dispositions valued in schools, and (ii) factors, conceptualised in terms of three forms of 'capital' (economic, cultural, social), which influence development of competencies and dispositions (Ibid, p3).

Economic or financial capital refers to material resources and the impact of income poverty on children's educational attainment. Kellaghan states that this form of capital has received most attention in the identification of disadvantage. Cultural capital refers to the primary conditions which foster cognitive and scholastic development and three forms of cultural capital have been identified. The first form refers to personal dispositions which are "an array of cognitive and non-cognitive competencies which are influenced by past experience (especially within the family) and are used to organise future experience" (ibid, p9). The second form is signified by cultural goods such as books and dictionaries and the third form of cultural capital is institutionalised such as educational qualifications. Kellaghan cites a number of components which have been proposed as elements of cultural capital which improve competencies related to school success. These include; modelling (the use of language in organising time and space); stimulation to explore ideas and events; high value placed on academic expectations; guidance and motivation for school related maters and finally ensuring that the child engages in activities which are developmentally appropriate. Kellaghan (2001), similar to the work of the neo-Marxists such as Bourdieu, points out that that cultural capital is defined by the dominant social group in society. Bourdieu was particularly interested in how economic capital combined with other forms of capital such as social and cultural can create and reproduce inequality (Field, 2003).

Social capital is located in the family and the child's local community and refers to issues such as conduct (including moral development), identity (including self-concept), social behaviour, attitudes and motivation. Kellaghan (2001) maintains that definitions of social capital can be imprecise and ambiguous and various definitions of social capital exist.

> In most definitions, social capital is considered to be embedded in relationships between individuals in informal networks. Furthermore it is defined primarily by its function, which is represented as the ability of individuals to secure benefits by virtue of their membership of the networks. (Ibid, p10)

Social capital can be understood as consisting of shared values and norms and is based on trust between members of a network and also provides access to information for its members. It provides an important source of social control and support such as parental support. Social capital can also be used in a negative way when it is used as a form of social control and means of exclusion "when outsiders are denied access to resources, and when social capital, as Bourdieu (1986) proposes, becomes a toll of reproduction for the dominant classes" (Kellaghan, 2001, p11). Bourdieu's exploration of the links between social capital and educational attainment is further developed by the work of the American sociologist, James Coleman whose work was grounded in large scale survey data on educational attainment. Through his work, Coleman, demonstrated that social capital was not just limited to the powerful but could also convey benefits to marginalised communities (Field, 2003). Coleman (1994, p300) defines social capital as; "the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisations and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital" (p24). Social capital plays a role in the cognitive development of children and in addition it contributes to the evolution of a secure sense of self for the individual child. Field (2003) contends that the concepts of social and cultural capital are closely related to human capital theory as the concepts utilise the "ideas of investment, accumulation and exploitation that have been seized upon in such areas as global

development and anti-poverty strategies or the study of business innovation and technological change" (p4, Field, 2003). Kellaghan's definition of education disadvantage incorporates the three types of capital discussed; economic, cultural and social and reflects a multi-dimensional understanding of educational disadvantage. This multi-dimensional understanding of educational disadvantage is reflected in the research questions and data collection for this study as students, parents, teachers and community educators are consulted in the data collection to contribute to holistic understanding of the outcomes Early Start participation. The next section explores evidence of educational disadvantage in Irish society.

2.5 Irish research on educational inequality

2.5.1 Introduction

There is much evidence to suggest that education has increased in significance as a determinant of future status and is closely linked to changes in the occupational structures of Irish society. In 1926, fifty-three per cent of the workforce was employed in agriculture but by 1991 this figure had dropped to fourteen per cent with the main areas of growth being in white-collar occupations. The percentage of the workforce classified as employees had risen from forty-four per cent in 1926 to an estimated seventy-seven per cent in 1991 (Clancy, 1995). Clancy highlights research by Rottman and Hannan (1982) which concluded that in Ireland during the twentieth century there was a change in the basic structuring principle of the stratification system. As the determining role of family property and inheritance has been replaced by wage bargaining, education is now a major determinant of adult life chances and this has also increased the role education plays in perpetuating wider structural inequalities. Clancy (1997) argues that the centrality of education in Irish public policy reflects continuing belief in its relevance for economic and societal development. There has been continued public support for the modernisation of the education system since the 1960s with a commitment to a restructured, diversified and greatly expanded educational system.

2.5.2 The Investment in Education Report

The 1966 *Investment in Education Report* (IIE) Report was initiated in 1962 by the Department of Education in cooperation with the OECD and provides the foundation document of the modern Irish education system. It included an evaluation of existing educational provision and plans for future educational development and offered the first comprehensive Irish analysis of the relationship between social class and educational attainment (Coolahan, 1981). An intensive programme of primary school rationalisation was embarked on which is exemplified by the reduction in one-to-two teacher schools which in 1967 represented over sixty per cent of schools but by the 1990s this had declined to twenty-five percent (Curry, 2003). The rationalisation of the primary school system was influenced by an important link which lies between this spirit of economic reform and the reform that took place in education during the 1960s. The IIE Report found that without reform in the education system there would be a considerable shortfall in the number of suitably qualified workers needed for economic growth in the 1970s. This was linked to the other significant finding of the report concerning the large social class and regional disparities in education participation rates.

The IIE Report highlighted the low participation rate of certain socio-economic groups in post primary and higher education and, in particular, the below average proportion of children from the semi and unskilled occupational groups who proceeded to post-primary education. The report found a very high drop-out rate with thirty-six per cent of students not completing their junior post-primary certificate and the majority of students, who did drop-out, were from the occupational categories compromising of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers (Coolahan, 1981, p167). The IIE Report recommended many changes in educational planning in Ireland including "schemes for improving participation levels, co-ordination of post-primary schooling within a matrix of catchment areas, rationalisation of national school provision, including the merging of many of the small one- and two-teacher schools" (Coolahan, 1981, p168). The report is recognised as being the catalyst for a paradigmatic shift in the Irish educational policy. The report is often credited with introducing the principle of equality of opportunity into Irish educational dialogue and the current concern for social justice and combating disadvantage through educational

policy found its first expression in the IIE Report (Clancy, 2001). According to Drudy and Lynch (1993) 'Human capital' theory is a functionalist theory and is evident in the *Investment in Education Report* (1966). Human capital theory implies that increasing investment in education brings about automatic economic benefits both at personal and societal levels, implying that increasing trends towards more technically-orientated education is both natural and inevitable.

O'Sullivan (1992) claims that one of the major outcomes of the IIE Report was to normalise the link between education and the economy and redefine educational investment away from personal development and towards investment in human capital. Equality of opportunity increased participation rates for all social classes and plans for a more vocationally oriented system were presented as being essential for future Irish economic success. The report was soon followed by the introduction by Donagh O'Malley in 1967 of the "Free Education Scheme" for post-primary schools which was not subject to a means-test and also the introduction of a free school transport scheme (Powell, 1992). Powell (1992) identifies three main education policy initiatives introduced by O'Malley as a result of the IIE Report; firstly increase access to education, secondly reduce geographical and social inequalities and finally re-orientate the curriculum away from academic focus towards a vocational and practical training. These were radical changes and were central social policy changes in an era that was significant for welfare reforms. Following these changes there were significant improvements in second level participation rates for all social classes. In 1960/61 the participation rate in full time education for fifteen to nineteen year olds was 29.8 per cent and had risen to 55.9 per cent by 1981. For the semi/unskilled manual group participation had risen from 9.8 per cent to 30.1 per cent (Breen et al, 1990). By the 1990s the completion rate for Leaving Certificate was eighty per cent, the current level is approximately eighty-two per cent (McCoy, 2007).

Despite the significant achievement in participation rates for all social groups since the introduction of free post primary education in 1967, Clancy (1995) cites a number of Irish studies which have found evidence of clear class differences in the level of

educational achievement both at primary and post-primary since this time. At primary level, Kellaghan et al (1977) found children from lower socio-economic groups more likely to have literacy problems. At post-primary level, Swan (1978) found thirty per cent of children of unskilled manual workers were retarded in reading compared with less than five per cent of children from upper middle-class groups. Research by Breen et al (1990) on participation rates found a near doubling of participation rates but they also contended that there were continuing class disparities and at the most optimistic level class differences had only been reduced by twenty per cent. Clancy (1995) maintains that the middle-class has benefited most from the introduction of free education and policies for educational opportunity have provided an increase in subsidies to the better-off. Clancy (2001) examined the distribution of school leavers by fathers' socio-economic group and found that sixty-five per cent of the Unskilled Manual groups completed the Leaving Certificate compared to over ninety per cent of the three Higher Professional groups. He also found differences in educational achievement relating to the socio-economic class of the father. Clancy found that while over fifty-five per cent of the Higher Professional groups received 'honours' in five or more subjects in the Leaving Certificate only twelve per cent of the Unskilled Manual group received these same results. Also the Unskilled and Semi-skilled Manual groups were significantly more likely to fail their Leaving Certificate compared to all other socio-economic groups. These findings are borne out again in Clancy's (2001) analysis of the socio-economic background of college entrants which found that 21.6 per cent of all college entrants were from the Employers and Managers socio-economic group compared to 3.1 per cent of the college entrants belonging to the Unskilled socio-economic group. The clear links between social class and educational attainment illustrates the fact that the education system clearly favours the already privileged.

2.5.3 Cultural explanations of educational inequality

Clancy (1995) claims that in order to explain socio-economic differences in educational attainment much educational research has focused on differences in family backgrounds. Initially research examined material differences of home such as income, family size, housing conditions. Then research began to focus on the cultural features

of the family and in particular parental attitude to education. Craft's 1974 study of the relationship between value orientations of parents and educational achievement (cited in Drudy and Lynch, 1993) was conducted in a working-class Dublin suburb and concluded that the value orientations of parents (especially mothers) influenced whether or not their child left school early. There has been much research evidence in the last decade that has indicated the "necessity for parents to maintain close links with their child's educational institution" (Laloumi-Vidali, p19, 1998). Dale (1996) claims that during the 1980s there was widespread discussion and approval of the concept of partnership. According to Cullen (2000) parent associations are an important national lobby group in Ireland, but the main parental influence currently exercised is underlined by their choice of school. Partnership between parents and educators is further discussed in Section 2.7.

According to research conducted by Cullen (2000) in Irish second-level schools, disruptions between the life worlds of students and teachers led to disharmony and disruption in the classroom. Issues identified by Cullen (2001) which led to these disruptions included the child not being ready for secondary school, the child being unable to adapt to the organisation of the school and the teaching structure, bullying being more pronounced in second level and the child feeling less protected at second level. The lack of family engagement during transition from primary to secondary school was identified as a negative issue in the study as was lack of school personnel charged with making family-school connections. Children in the study were positive about special activities in school and for children who had fallen behind these activities facilitated greater engagement with the school. Cullen (2001) affirmed that from an ecological systems perspective it is crucial to support the family as one of the child's systems and there is a need to further explore the partnership between parents and teachers at second level in Ireland.

Similarly, research by Lynch (1999) found that teachers and working-class students had conflicting views of educational alienation and "teachers drew heavily on the cultural deficit model to explain working-class alienation from schooling" (p121). Community

activists in the same working-class areas viewed educational alienation as a problem rooted in cultural differences between middle-class teachers and working-class students. This led Lynch (1999, p121) to the assertion that there can be different interpretations of educational alienation according to 'theorist' and the 'truth' can be a contested issue. While working-class students and community activists held teachers accountable for low expectations and poor learning climates, teachers viewed it as a result of lack of interest. Similarly, what teachers perceived as a 'choice' by working-class parents was not perceived as a 'real' choice by working-class students or community workers. The working-class students and parents in the study felt limited in their education choices and were dependent on information they received from the school regarding educational options. This is similar to Kellaghan's (2001) article on the importance of social networks in accessing educational information and choices which are discussed in Section 2.4.4.

2.5.4 Early school leaving in Ireland

Hersholt, De Felic and Baptiste (1992) points out that the term drop-out which has been used extensively in educational research, particularly in the US is problematic as it implies a single decision made by the students. In reality, many students fade out after a period of alienation, while others are pushed out by school personnel or pulled out by demands on their time from parents or negative community factors. The term early school leaver is the most frequently used in current Irish research and normally refers to students who leave school without completing their Leaving Certificate. According to Boldt (1997) approximately 13,000 pupils in Ireland leave school every year without a qualification or with 'Junior Certificate only'. In comparison to other OECD countries, a relatively high percentage of the Irish adult population are early school leavers. In the Irish adult population forty-nine per cent have left school before the age of sixteen. In the US fourteen per cent of the adult population left school before the upper secondary level. While in Norway eighteen per cent left and in the UK twenty-four per cent (Fleming and Murphy, 2000). While the scale of early school leaving has decreased the problem still persists and is now particularly concentrated in designated disadvantaged areas (Drudy and Lynch, 1993).

According to Fleming and Murphy (2000) a striking characteristic among early school leavers is their socio-economic background. Eighty-five per cent of early school leavers come from working-class or small farm backgrounds. Smyth (1999) found in a review of *The School Leavers' Surveys*, which are conducted annually by the Economic and Social Research Unit, that between 1979-1994 second level completion rates were particularly high among the professional groups. Rates of early school leaving or leaving school without a qualification were highest among the manual and in particular the non-skilled manual group. One-tenth of men from unskilled manual backgrounds left school during this period without any formal qualifications while less than one per cent of those from higher professional backgrounds did so. While the scale of early school leaving has decreased, the problem still persists resulting in continuous major impacts on the future of those who leave school early. The 2006 Annual School Leavers' Survey reported that the number of early school leavers has remained relatively stable since the early nineties, with eighty-two per cent of school leavers in 2006 who completed the Leaving Certificate, fourteen per cent who completed the Junior Certificate and four per cent who left with no qualifications. The annual percentage of students who completed their Leaving Certificate since 1991 has remained at between seventy-nine and eighty-two per cent "despite the fact that there has been considerable policy attention over recent years focused on boosting second-level retention rates" including Early Start and the School Completion Programme (McCoy et al., 2007, p21). The authors of the report caution that the figures do not take into account students who have left the formal second level system but have pursued alternative educational routes such as Fetac and Youth Reach.

Early school leaving is a complex process influenced by a range of interrelated factors "including home background influences, school related factors, the opportunity to work or earn money by participating in a training programme and pressure from peers" (Boldt, 1997, p11). The consequences for early school leavers are also multi-dimensional and according to Drudy and Lynch (1993) the most vulnerable group in the Irish labour market are those who leave school without a qualification and are the most prone to unemployment. Boldt (1997) argued that early school leavers found the transition to adulthood more difficult than those who completed second level education

and early school leavers faced poor employment prospects and a greater risk of poverty. According to Dryfoss (1990), low academic achievement at school is a predictor and a consequence of other kinds of risk behaviour and cites delinquency, substance abuse and early childbearing as examples of such behaviour. Dryfoss refers to school failure as a process rather than an event and is the result of an array of forces, many of which are outside of the child's control and states that certain schools and communities are generators of school failure and produce high-risk children. According to Fleming and Murphy (2000), gender also constitutes a significant variable in describing the profile of early school leavers. A higher proportion of boys (sixty-four per cent) leave school without a qualification compared to girls (thirty-six per cent).

Cullen (2000) found in a study of Irish students deemed at-risk of educational disadvantage that "the school experiences of would-be early school-leavers are fraught with difficulties concerning school transitions, adaptations to new learning environments and lack of family contact or engagement" (p34). Cullen also claims that these students had a strong sense of their predicament and there were indications of a pathway to early school leaving. Central to this pathway was a breakdown in their relationship with certain teachers and subjects "along with a clearly expressed frustration and a sense of not being listened to or taken seriously" (ibid, p34). Other contributing factors were family breakdown, traumas and a failure on the schools part to make connections between the effects of trauma and explanations for difficulties at school. Cullen claims that early identification would make a difference as some of these children were crying out for intervention. The young people in the study also placed great value on the knowledge that their parents, teachers and other adults in the community were making young peoples' welfare central to their concerns and acting accordingly.

2.5.5 Explanations of Early School Leaving

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) *Early School Leavers Forum Report* (2002) identifies a number of models which have been used to explain the causes of early school leaving. The first is the *'Deficit model'* which labels pupils who drop out

of the system as failures and blames the students themselves for non-completion. According to this model, factors which lead to early school leaving include low academic performance and low self-esteem. The second model identified by the NESF (2002) is the *'Push-out'* model. This model examines institutional factors as the root cause of early school leaving including school type, curriculum, pupil-teacher interaction and disciplinary procedures. The NESF (2002) claim that neither model adequately explains early school leaving and the reality of early school leaving is a combination of both of these modes and a 'mutual process of rejection' from both the institution and the individual pupil (ibid, p7). The final model identified is the *'Rational Choice' model* which examines the costs and benefits associated with participation in education including the direct cost of education and income foregone while in education. This model explains early school leaving as an individual choice, particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not see "much benefit in staying on in school and may opt for the immediacy of accessible but low-paid employment" (ibid, p8). However, in order to explore the nature of early school leaving in Ireland the NESF present a more complex model than the three mentioned above.

The NESF (2002) present a *Systems Approach to Early School Leaving* which incorporates a wide range of factors which affect the decision to leave school. This is in recognition of the fact that early school leaving is a complex multi-dimensional issue requiring multi-faceted responses. The factors identified include individual factors such as learning difficulties, family factors such as addiction and parental attitude, school factors such as school type and ethos, community factors such as local resources and finally factors relating to further education, training and work opportunities. The NESF (2002) identify early school leaving as a complex process influenced by a range of interrelated factors and this view is also recognised by Eivers et al (2000) in their development of a template to identify pupils 'at-risk' of early school leaving. The template was developed as part of a review of the Department of Education and Science's *8-15 Early School Leavers Initiative* which was conducted by the Educational Research Centre. The template, which is proposed for use in primary schools, contains

a number of variables including family structure, gender (male), father's employment status, school attendance, academic ability, behaviour and retention in a grade. Some of the variables are given more weight than others including family structure and behaviour which are viewed as more indicative of early school leaving. The template is grounded in previous research on early school leaving both in an Irish and international context. Also the template is useful in considering which variables might be considered as important in the data collection process for this study as the template is developed in an Irish context and similar to the research questions for this thesis considers educational disadvantage to be multi-dimensional in nature.

2.6 Current programmes for combating educational disadvantage

2.6.1 Overview of current policy

Cullen (2000) points out that schools are not in a position to effectively support children at-risk of early school leaving as children spend only twelve per cent of their time at school. Thus it is important for collaboration to prevent early school leaving and this has led to the development of interagency collaboration.

> The project of interagency collaboration, bringing together new partnerships of school and non-school services and other influences on children's lives is premised on achieving greater harmony in the nature and structure of these influences, as they impact on educational outcomes. (ibid, p8)

The focus on service integration has come about due to a number of national and international trends. These trends include an acceptance that service integration is an inevitable outcome of increasing decentralisation and a tendency for central government to pass budgets to localised institutions. This is particularly evident in the School Completion Programme, which was established in 2001 by the Department of Education and Science, to target children 'at-risk' of early school leaving at both primary and secondary level. The annual budget for each individual School Completion Programme is managed by a local management committee which is comprised of parents and both voluntary and statutory representatives (see Appendix 1

for further information on this and other initiatives which target educational disadvantage at primary school level). There have also been changes in family structure and roles in relation to schooling leading to additional linkages such as youth services, community services and after-schools services. This has led to greater demands on the schools to develop links with these systems. This approach to combating early school leaving is consistent with theoretical perspectives which link educational disadvantage to the social and economic characteristics of where the child lives and does not treat early school leaving solely as a personal problem. Cullen (2000) cites both human development (ecological theory) and sociological theory to support this approach. He claims that in the sociology of education, service integration "is seen as contributing to developing and sustaining informal organisations and networks of social and educational support and change at local level" (p8).

2.6.2 Current responses to educational disadvantage

According to the NESF (2002) there has been an increase in policy attention given to educational disadvantage in recognition of the role education plays in providing human capital for the 'knowledge economy' and programmes have been developed at all levels of the formal education system. Initiatives to counteract educational disadvantage have included Early Start, Home School Community Liaison Scheme, Breaking the Cycle, The 8-15 Early School Leavers Initiative, the Stay in School Initiative and the School Completion Programme (see Appendix 1 for further information). The National Anti-Poverty Strategy has emphasised "early school leaving as a priority issue within its strategic framework for tackling educational disadvantage" (Boldt, 1997, p.34). It identified educational disadvantage as one of its five strategic aims and promotes the development of integrated, area-based responses to address the problem of early school leaving. Cullen (2000) claims that there is much evidence to demonstrate that early school leaving has a growing significance in the national policy arena. In recent years there have been a number of key policy documents and initiatives which have demonstrated a growing commitment to tackling the problem of early school leaving and the wider issue of educational disadvantage;

• *The New Deal. A Plan for Education* (1999) is a landmark policy initiative designed to counteract educational disadvantage which committed £180m over 3 years through all levels of education system.

• *The National Development Plan 2000-2006* (1999) sets out a national strategy to sustain and develop Ireland's economic and social development. It emphasises the promotion of social inclusion as a central objective and commits substantial national resources to strategies that promote education and service integration to meet the needs of those areas and groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion throughout the country.

• *The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000) is a national agreement between government and social partners which emphasises the case for increased priority of social inclusion measures in public spending. It emphasises the value of life-long learning and sets objectives that target the reduction of educational disadvantage from early childhood to adult education.

• *The Education (Welfare) Act,* 2000 attempts to provide a new and structured approach to school attendance and the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) was established in 2002 to monitor school attendance and has a statutory function to ensure that every child either attends a school or otherwise receives an education. In a recent report on Children's Rights in Ireland, Kilkenny (2007) is critical of the lack of resources for the NEWB which she views as currently under resourced and unable to fulfill all of its statutory functions.

> Although the NEWB has responsibility for the continuing education of young people aged sixteen and seventeen who leave school to take up employment, no progress has been made in relation to this part of its remit arguably due to the lack of resources. At present, there are only eighty-three Education Welfare Officers nationwide and although fifteen posts were announced in 2007, the workload of existing officers is very heavy. The impact of this is worst felt by those in low-income communities. (ibid, p73-74)

• *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) was launched by the Department of Education and Science in 2005 and aims to provide a more integrated approach to tackling educational inclusion. According to the Department of Education

and Science (2007) DEIS "is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a comprehensive package of supports, while ensuring that others continue to get support in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils". Hyland (2007) asserts that the current criteria used to identify schools for inclusion in DEIS "appear to reward failure rather than success" (p.xii) as schools in disadvantaged areas who have achieved high levels of retention and improved exam results risk losing resources under the new DEIS criteria.

There have been a substantial number of resources pledged to tackle education disadvantage since the 1990s which have primarily targeted additional resources to areas where inequality and disadvantage have been identified. An important development which has been previously mentioned but merits further attention is the development of integrative responses to educational disadvantage and in particular growing recognition of the need to involve home, school and community in educational initiatives. Hanafin and Lynch (2002) are critical of the government response to educational disadvantage in primary school which has targeted children in economically disadvantaged areas with family or community focused schemes such as Early Start and the Home-School Community Liaison Scheme. The focus of these programmes is on the family or the individual as the main cause of educational disadvantage which has "led to the suggestion that they are largely informed by concepts of deficit and dissonance" which "fail to examine rigorously the school as the primary reason for educational failure" (ibid, p37). Hanafin and Lynch are also critical of the fact that most of these programmes were established without meaningful consultation and partnership, with the working-class parents who are the main target group for such programmes. This critique raises a number a number of issues which are important for consideration in this thesis and in particular what is the role of Early Start in the community being studied and how do parents and others in the local schools and community perceive the objectives of the Early Start programme and its role in combating educational disadvantage.

2.7 Partnership in education

2.7.1 Involving parents and students in education

The Irish government has made a clear commitment to involving parents in all stages of their child's education by giving parental involvement statutory underpinning in the Education Act of 1998. Article 42.1 of the Irish Constitution states that parents are the primary educators of their children and have the right to be involved in their child's care and education. This view is also reflected in the Commission on the Family (1998), which claims that parents are the first educators of their children and the role of the State is to support parents in this role. The White Paper on Early Education (1999), recognising the benefits of parental involvement for all of the stakeholders, seeks to involve parents, strengthen parental voice and develop "a strong and expert interest group which will participate in the consultation partnership process" (p115).

Partnership accord to Pugh and De'Ath (1989) is an elusive and complex practice, both in theory and practice. True partnership requires parents, teachers and students to have a relationship characterised by openness and mutual respect. Pugh and D'Ath (1989) define partnership as a "working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate" (p35-36). Parents and teachers are to regard each other as colleagues and confidants, sharing information, confidences and goals for the children. A key word is reciprocity, which underlines the spirit of partnership. According to Dale (1996) partnership is not a fixed term and can vary structurally. The degree of cooperation can vary and in some partnerships, partners work separately while in others partners do little without consulting each other. Partnership is based on the distribution of power and "each partnership has an internal power balance which will predispose the members towards a more egalitarian or more unequal relationship" (ibid, p2).

Dale maintains that the term partnership itself does not provide an indication of the extent of cooperation and reciprocity between two or more partners and the term can be used loosely without "telling us the extent of shared-decision making, degree of

consensus' or the degree power sharing that is taking place" (1996, p2). There are a number of theoretical frameworks which set out the minimum prerequisites for a partnership relationship and illustrate the concept of partnership in more concrete terms i.e. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. Epstein's framework of parental involvement can also be used to categorise the variety of dimensions that parental participation may take. The framework consists of three categories of parental involvement, proximal, intermediate and distal. These categories demonstrate the degree to which parental participation activities relate to formal learning and teaching (Kellaghan et al, 1997).

Crozier (1999) claims that while there is much research to demonstrate the value of parental participation at primary level there has been little done to assess whether it is useful or desirable at second level. This view is also supported by Vincent (1996) who carried out research on five second level schools and found that parental participation was affected by feeling disassociated from the school and these feelings were exasperated at second level. It was particularly difficult for working-class parents to have their views heard by teachers. Working-class parents also felt that they were rarely consulted about their childrens' needs and felt distanced from the academic dimension of the school, as the curriculum becomes more complicated. Middle-class parents were in a better position to provide support for their children such as extra tutoring and the Internet. The study also found the parental participation made younger students feel more 'cared-for'. According to Cullen (2000) many working-class parents are inhibited from meaningful partnerships because they lack the understanding of how important it is for them to engage with their childrens' school. This is further compounded by "conditions of poverty and exclusion (which) inhibit parental capacities to formulate deeper relationships with schools" (ibid, p37). This is especially evident in communities, which lack social capital due to a lack of civic associations, or the lack of income generally inhibits the families capacity to improve social and education choices.

Hanafin and Lynch (2002) in a study of parent involvement among a small group of working-class parents in Ireland found that parents were dissatisfied with their home-school relations and felt "unwelcome when visiting school premises, and parents reported feelings of anxiety, nervousness and intimidation when visiting individual teachers" (p46). They suggest in their research that parents had shown themselves to be informed and interested in their child's education and that parents failure to participate more fully in their childs' primary school education is attributed to "the structures and practices of the school system as it operates, at least in the working-class areas of our community" (ibid, p46). The authors claim that their research contradicts the common cultural deficit explanation for limited working-class parent involvement, as the parents in their study show a good understanding of the school system but are prohibited from greater involvement because of structural issues and their lack of interest in tokenistic forms of involvement such as parent councils which lacked any input into school policy. They are also critical of the lack of working-class parent input into national educational policy.

> With few exceptions, the idea that schools serve as sites for cultural reproduction has seldom been a focus of research. An examination of interventions, policies, and practices aimed at reducing educational disadvantage reveals an almost total lack of opinion and input from the point of view of those who are the focus of the intervention attention...Parents voices are mediated mainly through the middle-class National Parents Council. (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002, p47)

The authors claim that there are currently two strands of parental involvement in operation with two distinct rationales. The first strand is directed at working-class parents and is derived from the 'cultural deficit model' of explaining educational disadvantage and comprises "interventions such as Early Start programmes, home-school community links and early school leaving interventions...it is explicitly 'classed', and it seeks to involve parents who are perceived to be on the periphery" (ibid, p35). The second strand of parent involvement is directed at all parents in the form of parent councils and school board of managements and is driven by the assumption that parent involvement has a positive impact on the child's educational

attainment and school effectiveness. Hanafin and Lynch state that while this form of involvement is not explicitly 'classed' "it is middle-class parents who are most involved, most visible and who are, therefore, proximal to schools" (p36). They stress the importance of including parent voice in research and in particular the 'peripheral' voice of working-class parents.

Facilitating students and parents to become active participants would profoundly alter their relationship with the education system. Furthermore it would result in increased lay participation in a welfare state institution, which is seen as an integral part of citizenship in a fully participative democracy. This is also agreement with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. According to Cullen (2000), this theory places emphasis on bringing about change or adjustment to the surrounding systems which are seen as influencing children's development and in relation to education might be useful in identifying hidden obstacles to remaining in school. The NESF (2002) also highlighted the importance of the 'whole child approach' which is central to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) and the National Children's Strategy (2000). This approach calls for a more 'joined up' delivery of services which is delivered in consultation with children. However, the NESF (2002) contended that Early School Leavers have very few opportunities for any kind of meaningful engagement on issues which affect them.

2.7.2 Parent involvement and cultural capital

Lareau (2000) discusses the ways parents use different sources available to them to get the best for their children from school. She utilises Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and using it in the American context, she moves the understanding of it from something solely controlled by the elite to a more general concept, which is similar to the work of Coleman (1988). Passing on cultural capital is not a passive process but an active one. Middle-class parents use their own jobs to monitor their child's education. At each stage of education "children's access to the next step may be limited or enhanced by their class position because middle-class and working-class parents interact differently with the institutions in which their children compete" (ibid, p.viii).

Working-class parents interviewed by Lareau felt that they should leave the academic matters to the teachers. Incompetent teachers have a particularly detrimental impact on working-class families who do not have the resources to counteract their negative effects. The study found that working–class parents "seldom try to influence the core of the education system" and are often "intimidated by teachers' professional authority, these parents fear teaching their children the wrong things or instructing them the wrong way. They see home and school as separate spheres" (ibid, p.viii). Lareau argues that in working-class communities there is a separation between family and school. Parents did prepare their children for school by teaching them manners and rudimentary educational skills and perceived themselves as being supportive.

> Even the most active working-class parents, however, did not supervise, compensate for, or attempt to intervene in their children's programme. Instead, parents 'trusted' the school to educate their children. Parents and children viewed education as something which took place at school, under the supervision of the teacher. (ibid, p169)

There was more interconnectedness between home and school in middle-class communities and parents spent more time preparing their child academically, particularly their verbal skills. Middle-class parents monitored their child's homework more, provided extra tutoring and specialists during the summer and sought a more individualised education for their children. This study resonates with some of the findings from the work by Irish researchers discussed previously in this chapter such as Cullen (2000) and Lynch and Hannifin (2002) who also highlighted the difficulties which working class parents experienced in participating meaningfully in the Irish education system.

2.8 Conclusions

To summarise, considerable work has been done to understand the issue of educational disadvantage. In particular, there is much quantitative data available from equality and methodological empirists examining the participation rates for the various socio-economic groups. Sociological explanations of educational disadvantage have been influential and notably functionalist explanations of inequality have dominated Irish

research and educational policy decisions and in particular human capital theory has influenced the development of the Irish education system. Despite the significant achievement in participation rates for all social groups since the introduction of free post primary education in 1967, there is clear evidence of class differences in the levels of educational achievement both at primary and post-primary and it could be argued that the education system acts to reinforce and maintain the existing relations of domination and exploitation in society. Discourses on equality have been central to many of the education policy developments in Irish education since the 1960s and these discourses reinforce the role that schools play in the determination of the patterns of equality in Irish society. Particularly influential in Ireland has been the work of Kathleen Lynch in expanding the notion of equality and moving beyond the basic concept of 'equality of opportunity' to embrace a continuum of equality which includes an analysis of power-related issues of social justice. The concepts of social and cultural capital were explored and their contribution to understanding the multi-dimensional nature of educational disadvantage was examined. There have been a substantial number of resources pledged to tackle education disadvantage since the 1990s which have primarily targeted additional resources to areas where inequality and disadvantage have been identified. The focus of many of the recent policies has been on the integration of services and partnership with parents and local community agencies, in recognition of the fact that focusing solely on the education system is not sufficient to tackle early school leaving (Fleming and Murphy, 2000). The next chapter will focus on the role of early years' intervention programmes in combating educational disadvantage in both an Irish and international context.

Chapter 3

Early Years' Interventions

3.1 Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapter there is substantial evidence to indicate that educational outcomes are linked to socio-economic origins. Children from lower socio-economic classes are denied a fair start in the education system and thus life itself. O'Flaherty (1995) questions whether there is "a solution to this dysfunction of education systems, which, throughout the world, almost always proclaim equality of chances and yet manage to favour children of the elite" (p.vii). Early interventions are based on the belief that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" (Currie, 2000, p8) and develop as a means of preventing poor academic performance and social pathology. O'Flaherty (1995) states that in countries such as Belgium and France the programmes are centre based while in Sweden, the Netherlands and much of Latin-America the programmes are focused on supporting the family in the child's home. All of these programmes share the common goal of supporting the child's social and cognitive development and promoting school readiness. O'Flaherty (1995) identifies a number of aims of preschool programmes including care and protection for disadvantaged children, providing a secure and safe environment, cognitive and language development and support to parents.

> Implicit in some of these services is the additional aim of trying to redress social inequality by providing extra help to children from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds, in the belief that this will enable them to enter formal schooling on a more equal footing with their peers. (O'Flaherty, 1995, p7)

O'Toole (2000) asserts that the philosophical underpinning of the Department of Education's approach to preventative Early Childhood Care and Education initiatives has also been compensatory. The concept of 'compensation' which implies "making up for deprivation in other areas of the child's life" has been challenged by research on other forms of deprivation (O'Toole, 2000). O'Flaherty (1995) identified two main reasons for early childhood interventions including evidence identifying the positive impact of preschool education on later education achievement and also the social arguments in favour of such programmes.

3.2 Compensatory education and welfare reform

Demaine (1980) claims that the concept of compensatory education is associated with Project Head Start in the US or the 1969 Plowden Report in the UK which specifically asked for 'positive discrimination' for the equalisation of resources among all children.

> The notion of compensatory education involves the idea of the 'lack' of something which has to be 'compensated' for and it invariably involves the idea of 'need'. Compensatory education is usually conceived in terms of 'positive discrimination' in favour of groups or individuals in need. (Demaine, 1980, p107)

Demaine views education as a welfare provision based on a 'need' identified by social policy and the provision of compensatory education programmes are viewed as a remedy to this 'need'. Demaine argues that there is a taken for granted assumption in compensatory education that the working-class child is 'culturally deprived' which he views as a derivation of the 'culture of poverty'. The emphasis then is on culture such as shared norms and values and ignores the material and economic aspects of poverty. Demaine (1980) considers what exactly compensatory education has set out to achieve and claims that implicit in compensatory education is the notion that educational inequality is one of the main causes of economic inequality which ignores the fact that by widening educational access there is not a parallel decrease in the number of low paid occupations.

According to O'Flaherty (1995), in relation to early years' education, compensatory education is specifically aimed at "children who are from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds" to compensate "for possible deficits at home, such that children will be on a par with their more advantaged peers when they start school" (p9). Early examples of such research cited by O'Flaherty include a preschool programme which was part of the 'Arid Zone Project' in New South Wales, Australia which worked with an equal number of Aboriginal and white children under the direct instructional method. An evaluation of the programme found gains in most measures but subsequent erosion of these gains. However, follow-up tests 10 years later found participants had IQ gains beyond non-participants in the preschool programme.

O'Flaherty cites similar studies from Malaysia, Colombia, Brazil, Haiti, India and Thailand which found preschool programmes improved social and cognitive gains for disadvantaged children. O'Flaherty traces the interest in compensatory education in the US to the 1930s and 1940s and the debate surrounding the heritability and alterability of intelligence. In particular, research by Skeels and Fillmore (1937) "demonstrated the cumulative effect of inadequate home environments on the intelligence of children" and the positive impact of participating in preschool during the early childhood (O'Flaherty, 1995, p12). At the time this research was the subject of much critique and it was not until the 1960s following subsequent research into the status of the study participants as adults that the research was widely accepted. Since then there have been hundreds of similar studies, however, O'Flaherty (1995) claims that some of these studies have been subject to serious methodological flaws including "narrow definition of outcomes and/or inadequately implemented interventions" (p12). Also as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis (see section 1.2) Penn and Lloyd (2007) in a recent review of longitudinal research on early years interventions caution policy makers and researchers on generalising from such studies because of the use site-specific samples which may have led to the findings becoming dated.

Demaine (2003) points out that the concern over 'social reproduction' has long been at the heart of the social sciences. Basil Bernstein first coined the phrase 'Education cannot compensate for society' in 1970. Education is central to this concern because of its role in the reproduction of hierarchies and its association with "knowledges, skills, understandings, value orientations, ideology, etc., acquired through learning in school as well as in the family and other formal and informal social institutions" (ibid, p125). Demaine (2003) questions whether or not sociologists of education are naive to focus on school centred solutions such as school-improvement studies while ignoring wider political and economic issues. He also claims that the older discourse of deprivation has been replaced with disadvantage and references to a cycle of poverty which can be broken with intervention programmes such as Sure Start in the UK. Demaine (2003) describes the position of New Labour in the UK as one which does not ignore the 'social reproduction thesis' but replaces it with 'breaking the cycle' of reproduction of

deprivation through intervention in the early years. The Irish Government appear to follow a similar path with the introduction of programmes such as Breaking the Cycle introduced in 1996 to tackle disadvantage in rural and urban primary schools.

Kellaghan and Greaney (1993) address the critique of compensatory programmes and the implication that the child is some how deficit in their home-life by responding that "whatever view one adopts about deficits, few would doubt that there are differences between children when they enter school in their ability to adapt to the work of the school, differences which are due, at least in part, to the varying familial experience of the children" (p3). The emphasis is on how differences are valued rather than their recognition.

Karweit (1994) argues that many factors have created demand for early interventions including the growth in the number of children living in poverty, the increasing number of children from culturally diverse and multi-lingual backgrounds and the increased need for child-care arrangements.

> The role of preschool, then, in promoting the long-term school success of disadvantaged children is currently the topic of some debate. While few would argue that preschool is without merit, the widely held view that high quality preschool can ameliorate the effects of poverty is being challenged. Instead, it is suggested, preschool should be seen as only one strategy, not a miracle cure. (Ibid, p60)

Woodhead (2004) asserts that early intervention programmes are one of the most evaluated areas of education and social policy due to a number of reasons but especially due to the marginal nature of early childhood programmes on the policy agenda. Woodhead points to that fact that universal schooling is a fact of Western society but governments have "remained ambivalent about the desirability of providing a comprehensive pattern of services to support families with young children. Even when preschool services have been developed, the goals of enhancing children's welfare and their development per se have frequently been subsumed within a more compelling political priority" (ibid, p29). Examples of these priorities cited by Woodhead include

women's participation in the labour force, equal opportunities for working parents or as part of the pursuit for social justice and redistribution such as the War on Poverty in the case of Head Start.

Moss and Petrie (2002) question the current heightened interest in interventions for young children in the English speaking world. Historic reasons for interventions have been driven by concern for the "conditions and practices of the poor and anxiety about their consequences for social stability and national performance, military, colonial or economic" (Moss and Petrie, 2002, p3). The authors question the use of 'social interventions' by countries in attempt to be competitive in the globalised world and of seeking "technical solutions to social damage caused by neo-liberal market capitalism" (Moss and Petrie, 2002, p3). They identify three dominant discourses which had led to this situation, firstly that children are the *private* responsibility of their parents, secondly that children are *passive* dependents and finally that parents are *consumers* in the childcare market. They recommend a new approach which views the child as a citizen with the child's participation in children's services as a central component of this discourse. In Sweden for example provision is not targeted at children considered at-risk but instead there is a universal system of provision "within a strong discourse of democracy, participation and children's rights" and the child is seen as an active citizen in their own right (Moss and Petrie, 2002, p7).

3.3 Early childhood care and education in Ireland

There has been growing recognition in Ireland of the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as demonstrated by the publication of the White Paper on ECCE 'Ready to Learn' by the Irish government in 1999. ECCE infrastructure in Ireland is relatively underdeveloped compared to other OCED countries. According to a recent NESF report (NESF, 2005) Ireland spends less than 0.2 per cent of its GNP on ECCE compared to the OECD country average of 0.4 per cent of GNP. The recent OECD review of ECCE in Ireland (OECD, 2004) describes childcare infrastructure in Ireland as being at a very early stage of development. Traditionally childcare and early education in Ireland did not receive significant attention from government policy or

dialogue. Coolahan (1998) states that the main reason for this is because early childhood matters, both care and education were predominately seen as a matter for the family and more specifically the mother.

> Very little research on early childhood education has taken place in Ireland. It was as if the problems of little people were also regarded as little, and not meriting the serious attention of politicians and others in the real adult world. (Ibid, p7)

The NESF report also points out that ideologically early childhood care and education was considered to be a private family issue in Ireland which did not necessitate state intervention (see NESF, 2005). This gap in provision has meant that the voluntary and private sector have made a major contribution to Irish early childhood policy. The only exceptions to this are a very small number of projects such as the Rutland Street Project, Early Start and preschools for Travellers, which are predominately targeted provisions. Countries with relatively underdeveloped ECCE infrastructure tend to have higher levels of child poverty (NESF, 2005). Ireland scores fifth highest in terms of child poverty out of twenty-four OECD countries with 15.7 per cent of children considered to be living in poverty. Hayes and Hanlon (2005) highlight the most recent National Anti-Poverty Strategy which was revised in 2005 and now recognises the importance of early years' experiences. The revised strategy explicitly links child poverty with educational disadvantage and is specifically targeting disadvantaged children with additional early care and education provision as a way of tackling overall poverty reduction.

The emergence of ECCE issues into the social domain in Ireland has made much slower progress than its European Union counterparts. However, a key development in the rapid social changes occurring in Ireland has been the increase in the number of mothers in paid employment and these changing employment patterns call for new ideas and new thinking. The OCED (2004) assert that Irish ECCE policy at different times has been an instrument for supporting social inclusion and gender equality but the main focus of ECCE policy is on supporting families to pursue employment and training opportunities such as the objectives set out in the National Development Plan

(2003) on reconciling work and family life. The focus then is on childcare rather than early education. Despite the Irish Governments recognition of the need for early years' intervention in various policy documents overall commitment to action in the sector is lacking (OCED, 2004). Much of the focus on early years' education in Ireland has been on the infant classes in the primary school where all 5 year olds and over half of Irish 4 year olds are enrolled. The OCED (2004) critiques this approach and is particularly critical of teacher training in Ireland which has remained "predominantly geared to primary schooling, while classroom practice has remained didactic, targeting primarily cognitive skills and school outcomes" (section 25). Fallon points out that outside of the state primary school system there is "virtually no direct state involvement in establishing ECCE services in Ireland" (Fallon, 2005, p291). Instead the state provides a fragmented system of funding to programmes through a number of funding initiatives established by a variety of government departments including the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Equality Justice and Law Reform and the Department of Education and Science. Except for the primary school system the majority of early years' interventions focused on disadvantage are provided by the community and voluntary sector. In the 1990s the Department of Education and Science (DES) established two targeted interventions to address the issues of educational disadvantage and social exclusion among young children, Early Start (see Section 3.5.4 for further discussion of Early Start) and Pre-schools for Traveller Children. The OCED (2004) critiques the government for still considering both these programmes pilot projects and therefore showing no commitment to extending them. This leaves the programmes in somewhat of a precarious position as they are not considered an 'integral' part of the Irish early childhood system. Another criticism is the lack of evaluation for existing interventions and lack of clarity about what "constitutes effective intervention" (Fallon, 2003, p308).

Internationally, there has been a growing interest in the role of ECCE in enhancing children's social and educational opportunities and the debate has also focused on the rights of children to equality of care and education (Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999, p7). Since joining the European Union, ECCE services in Ireland

have come under examination and have been subject to some legislation from the Irish government as well as recommendations developed by the European Union and the United Nations. In addition to international factors influencing ECCE policy in Ireland, a number of national developments have been influential particularly the introduction of a social partnership approach to the development of economic and social policy (Fallon, 2005). The five social partnership agreements since 1987 have been instrumental in establishing ECCE as a central pillar of national social policy (Hayes, 2001). Sustaining Progress 2003-2005 the recent social partnership document emphasises the importance of ECCE for disadvantaged families.

The development of ECCE then has been on the public agenda since the late 1980s and in response to this there have been a number of national reports, legislative changes and initiatives undertaken. The major issues identified in these reports have been childcare costs, inadequacy of existing services, need for regulation and standards, poor pay and funding, tax relief on expenditure and training of personnel. A number of groups have been established which have examined and reported on childcare issues in Ireland such as the Expert Working Group on Childcare, Commission on the Family and the National Forum for Childhood Education. According to Kernan (2000, p183) these initiatives have a number of common features:

1) All reports were designed to be inclusive and consultative;
2) All reports are family-centered and child-centered and placed the rights of the child as foremost and recognised the parent as the primary carer and educator of the child;
3) All reports recognised the particular needs of families experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion;
4) All the reports emphasise the importance of supporting families in their parenting responsibilities. A number of key policy developments are outlined below.

The Expert Working Group on Childcare was established under Partnership 2000 in order to promote equality for women and opportunities in employment. The group has published *The National Childcare Strategy* (1999) as part of the process of developing a national framework for gender equality and promotion of childcare. According to the OECD (2004) the focus of the *National Childcare Strategy* is on employment policy

and accommodating the needs of working parents and it is not a move towards universal early years' provision in Ireland.

The National Childcare Strategy (1999) influenced the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) which is under the auspice of the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform. The aim is to provide quality care and increase the current number of ECCE places. Under the National Development Plan (2000-2006) €450m has been made available to the EOCP sourced largely from the European Union Structural Funds. Fallon (2005) critiques the EOCP for treating children's interests as a "peripheral to the rationale of the programme" which is reflected "in the fact that the child outcomes do not feature either in the programmes indicators, or in the evaluation document" (p303). The main focus of the programme is on increasing labor force participation and training opportunities for parents and increasing equality of opportunity.

According to the OECD the White Paper on ECCE (1999) represents "one of the most comprehensive documents ever produced on early education in Ireland" (OCED, 2002, p19). The White Paper emphasises the importance of targeting ECCE services for children considered 'at-risk' and children with special needs. The White Paper also proposes the development of a Quality in Education mark to be awarded to early education services which meet defined standards concerning staff qualifications, training, learning objectives, methodologies and curriculum. The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CEDCE) was launched in 2002 arising from a recommendation of the White Paper. The main objectives of the centre include developing a quality framework for early childhood education, enhancing early education provision including parental involvement and undertaking and commissioning research on aspects of quality early years' education. The CEDCE has advanced the quality agenda in ECCE and in 2006 produced *Síolta,* a *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education,* which establishes a common set of quality standards across a diverse range of settings for children aged birth to six years.

Interestingly the OCED report (2004) points out that while there is detailed analysis and discussion on early childhood policy in Ireland available in government documents such as the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Department of Education and Science, 1999) there has been little public debate on the issue. In particular the OECD (2004) argues that Ireland has not engaged in public debates around childcare and early years' education in Ireland. This lack of public debate reinforces the assertion in the NESF report (2005) that childcare in Ireland is a private family matter and not up for discussion in the public sphere. O'Toole (2000) acknowledges that the National Forum on Early Childhood Education (1998) has 'made a case for' the inclusion of ECCE in broader educational policy debates, policy and research. The development of a White Paper (1999) on ECCE was obviously an important step towards this but ECCE policy is still at the periphery of Irish educational policy debates. Hayes and Hanlon (2005) are critical of the Irish Government's limited support at local and national level for ECCE and identify this as a weakness in the Government's approach to combating educational disadvantage. The recent Educational Disadvantage Committee Report (2005) sets out a number of key strategic goals to guide its future work including provision of quality early care and education opportunities for all children and offering parents a choice of ECCE provision in their own community. This is important because it marks a move towards consideration of ECCE as part of wider educational policy. Hayes and Hanlon (2005) highlight the latest action plan by the Department of Education and Science report *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)* (2005) which addresses educational disadvantage. While the plan does support the importance of early intervention for children at-risk of later educational failure its main focus in on equality of opportunity at schools and does not move beyond school-based education. There continues to be limited development of ECCE in Ireland and the education and care of children under-three years is still not a priority for the Department of Education and Science as demonstrated by the recent DEIS (2005) report.

3.4 Investigating the efficacy of early years' programmes

3.4.1 US early years' intervention programmes

There has been research conducted worldwide into both the short and long-term outcomes of early years' intervention programmes with the US as leader in longitudinal evaluations. The relationship between poverty, cognitive development and academic behaviour has been well-established according to Campbell and Ramey (1994) and they point to the fact that early years' intervention programmes for disadvantaged children have been a focus of social policy in the US for over three decades. According to Slavin (1994) many of the developments in Early Childhood Studies in the US are taking place "against a backdrop of growing concern about the effectiveness of our nation's schools, particularly for the children of the poor" (p2). Karweit (1994) identifies six preschool programmes for 4 year olds which have been evaluated using randomised designs or employ other methodologically stringent control in the research design. These high quality studies include the Yisplanti Perry Preschool Project, the Early Training Project, the Milwaukee Project and the Carolina Abecedarian Project which will be reviewed in this current study. The Chicago Child-Parent Centre will also be examined. Firstly it is important to look at Project Head Start and the influence of this programme on early years' intervention.

3.4.2 Project Head Start

Head Start is the one of the oldest and largest early intervention programme in the US for parents and families living in poverty and was a key component in Lyndon Johnson's War against Poverty in the 1960s. According to Ramey and Ramey (2004) in 1965 the national vision for Head Start was to improve the real-world intelligence of children from economically improvised homes by giving them access to some of the learning opportunities that were available to their advantaged peers. Today, two-third of the participants in Head Start are ethnic-minorities and the vast majority are economically disadvantaged.

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Head Start has been subject to ongoing longitudinal research including the large scale collaborative project The Consortium of Longitudinal Studies which includes results from the Yisplanti Perry Preschool Project (Later the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project) and ten other studies. According to O'Flaherty (1995) results from these longitudinal studies show that participation in a high quality and cognitively orientated preschool programme has demonstrated benefits for the child in their later school competence. Research on parent's attitude revealed that mothers of the Head Start children were more satisfied with their children's school performance and wanted more managerial and skilled jobs for their children (O'Flaherty, 1995). Attitudinal changes suggested that participation in preschool had changed the achievement orientation of the families and consequently as parents expected more from their children, these expectations were fulfilled. One of the most consistent findings of these studies was that children are less likely to be placed in special needs education or be retained in a grade in school for an additional year. According to Woodhead (2004) the data from the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies strengthened the public support in the US for early years' intervention programmes. The next section will examine in more detail some of the most influential of these studies.

3.4.3 Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Project

The Perry Preschool Project was launched in 1962 and has been subject to extensive longitudinal research over almost four decades. It superseded the launch of the National Head Start programme in 1965. The Perry Preschool Project is, according to Currie (2000) the most influential study on the long-term effects of preschool. Karweit (1994) points out that there are two distinct areas of the Perry Preschool project, one focusing on the effects of participation in a preschool programme and the other focusing on the effects of participation in a particular preschool curricula, High/Scope. High/Scope is based on the development theories of Jean Piaget and this approach "emphasized (sic) developmentally appropriate activities and stressed the role of students' in planning and initiation in their learning" (ibid, p65). The original sample for the project consisted of 123 socio-economically disadvantaged African-American children with a low IQ from Ypsilanti, Michigan. The children were randomly

assigned to either the treatment group (programme group) or the control group at three years of age. This project involved a half-day preschool programme and weekly home visits for eight months of the year over a two year period.

Between 1962 and 1967 there were five waves of this study with fifty-eight students assigned to the preschool group and sixty-five in the control group who received no preschool. The students in the preschool programme made an IQ gain of on average eleven points over the control group and the enrolment in special education was also lower for the preschool group compared to the control group (forty-five per cent compared to thirty-one per cent). The students were also assessed at the ages of fourteen to fifteen years and at nineteen years of age. The programme group performed better on school achievement scores at age fourteen and were more likely to complete their homework and at age nineteen the percentage of programme participants who had average or better literacy levels was sixty-four per cent compared to thirty-eight per cent of the control group (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, 1993). According to Karweit (1994) the most significant difference between the groups was in terms of high school graduation with sixty-seven per cent of the programme group graduating compared to the forty-nine per cent of the control group.

A follow-up of the study participants at age twenty-seven showed that the programme group had significantly higher earnings than the control group and significantly higher rates of home-ownership and second-car ownership. The programme participants were also less likely to be arrested by age twenty-seven and a lower percentage of the programme group (fifty-nine per cent) compared to the control group (eighty per cent) had received support from social services in the ten years prior to the study (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, 1993). Some interesting gender differences emerged among the groups. Females who had participated in the preschool were significantly more likely to be married (forty per cent versus eight per cent) and were less likely to have given birth outside of marriage (fifty-seven per cent versus eighty-three per cent). Programme females also had higher educational attainment levels with

eight-four per cent completing twelfth grade compared to thirty-five per cent of the control group.

> Early childhood education seems to produce its long-term effects not by producing sustained improvements in intelligence or immediate improvements in school achievement, as was once hoped, but by engendering the dispositions in children that enable them to achieve greater success as they begin at school. This early success breeds motivation, better performance, and higher regard from teachers and classmate'. (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, 1993)

Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart (1993) contend that this experience of success in their school career leads to higher levels of employment, higher educational attainment and lower rates of involvement in criminal activities. A possible reason for these positive outcomes is that the preschool programmes come at a time in the child's development "that is opportune for preventing the deleterious effects of family poverty and school performance" (Ibid, p18).

A follow-up study of the participants at age forty revealed results consistent with those found at other stages of the study. According to Schweinhart (2004) there were higher rates of employment among the programme group and the programme group had higher median monthly incomes than the control group. There were significant difference in the rates of arrest for both groups and the "the program group had participated in significantly fewer of three of the seventy-eight crimes cited at arrest; dangerous drugs (three per cent versus twenty per cent), assault and/or battery (nineteen per cent versus thirty-seven per cent), and larceny under $100 (nine per cent versus twenty-two per cent)" than the programme group (ibid, p3).

Significantly, the programme group were less likely to be arrested and those who had been arrested in the programme group served fewer months in prison than the non-programme group. In a recent cost benefit analysis of the programme Schweinhart (2004) calculated that in current terms the value in economic returns to society from the Perry Preschool Project was approximately $17.00 for every dollar spent on the preschool programme. This economic return to society comes about because of savings

in the costs associated with welfare spending, crime and education and also in the collection of higher taxes from the programme participants. Schweinhart (2004) states that the major conclusion that can be made from the study is that "high quality preschool programmes for young children living in poverty contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime in adulthood"(p5). Haskins (1989 cited in Karweit, 1994) cautions "about limitations to the generalizability (sic) of the cost-benefit analysis to ordinary preschool or Head Start programs" as this is an instrumental way of viewing a preschool programme and it reduces the complex benefits of preschool to merely a monetary value (p59).

3.4.5 Carolina Abecedarian Project

Campbell and Ramey (1994) evaluated the Carolina Abecedarian Project, a five to eight year intervention programme, which targeted children from low income families and randomly assigned them to either an Experimental Preschool Group (E) or a Control Group (C). The Carolina Abecedarian Project is not part of the Consortium of Longitudinal Studies. The subjects were admitted to the study between 1974 and 1977 and ninety-eight per cent of study participants were African-American which according to the researchers reflects "the confounding nature of poverty and race generally found in the United States" (ibid, p686). The treatment group received an intensive centre-based child care service from birth to five years for over fifty weeks of the year while the control group did not receive this. These groups were then further divided with half of each group receiving a school-age intervention programme and the other group being provided with a home-school resource teacher.

An early adolescent follow-up study was carried out after the children had completed seven years in public school to test scholastic and IQ achievements for ninety-three of the study participants. Methods of data collection for this study included IQ and academic tests administered to the twelve year olds and interviews with parents. The preschool E group maintained an IQ advantage over the preschool C group who showed more variability in patterns of change over time. Campbell and Ramey (1994) claim

that this study is in contrast to the findings of the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies which found that IQ gains eroded within three years of school entry while the IQ gains in this study persisted for the first seven year and found IQ gains slightly more pronounced at age twelve than age eight. The study found that children who had received the preschool treatment were less likely to be placed in special education. Children with preschool treatment retained an IQ advantage over children without this treatment. The length of treatment was identified as one of the reasons that the IQ gains were so significant and consistent, as in contrast to other Head Start programmes, this programme began in infancy and continued until the child was age eight. The authors assert that for disadvantaged children 'the earlier in the life span education occurs, the greater its benefits is likely to be" (ibid, p694). They also maintain that their findings indicate that "although family involvement in the educational process has been associated with better school progress in low-income children (Comer, 1985; Epstein, 1984), the present results indicate that preschool intervention had the stronger impact" (ibid, p695). The study also found that the biological mothers IQ was highly related to academic outcomes for the child but treatment effects still remain strong despite the inheritance issue of IQ. An important point raised by Campbell and Ramey (1994) is that preschool programmes main benefit may not be higher academic achievement but changing children's behavioural styles so that "treated children may relate to schools in a different way and, hence, be perceived differently by teachers, allowing them to avoid retention in special class placement" (p695). The research found there was little significant impact of the school-age interventions.

Campbell and Ramey (1994) make the point that their study participants were mainly African-American and it is only to low-income African-Americans that the results of their study can be generalised. An important policy implication of the study that good quality early childhood interventions for disadvantaged children can have long-term benefits especially in terms of improved cognitive results.

> If we are to provide truly fair opportunities for children born into poverty, we must see to it that adequate resources exist to enable their families to support them and enhance their cognitive growth. Better early environments can

> improve the chances that poor children will acquire the preparation they need for academic success. (Campbell and Ramey, 1994, p696)

Karweit (1994) claims that this study demonstrates that supplementing a preschool and infant intervention with a school-age programme did little to add to the effectiveness of the programme. The children in the study who had only received the school-age intervention did not reach the same level as the children who had only received the interventions during infancy and preschool. According to Curry (2000) subsequent follow-up studies of the participants at age twenty-one found that the preschool treatment group were twice as likely to still be in school or to have attended a four year college course.

3.4.6 The Milwaukee Project

The Milwaukee project was a more intensive project with children participating from the age of two for up to six years. The project involved an early education programme which emphasised "language and problem solving and academic readiness" and also included the mother (Karweit, 1994, p69). The evaluation of the project found that children had higher IQ levels at age eight compared to the control group and fewer of the experimental group were placed in special education. In comparison to a low risk group the experimental group "was close to this group in terms of IQ scores at first through fourth grade" (ibid, p70). This is significant as most evaluations of intervention groups do not compare the experimental group with children from higher socio-economic backgrounds. The experimental group were seven months ahead in reading performance compared to the control group in the study.

3.4.7 Chicago Child-Parent Centre

Reynolds and Temple (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of the government funded Chicago Child-Parent Centre and Expansion programme which provided a compensatory education programme for over 500 inner city African-American children. An important corner stone of the Chicago Child-Parent Centre and Expansion programme was the belief that parental involvement was crucial for the child's socialisation and development. The programme employed parent-resource teachers and

provided parent-resource rooms for educational activities and parent-child interactions. According to Reynolds and Temple (1998) there is increasing evidence that the duration of programme participation is an important factor in increasing the effectiveness of early childhood interventions and their study looks at the effects of an extended education intervention. A significant finding in this study was that children who had participated in a follow-on programme after kindergarten for over three years had significantly higher achievements in reading and maths. The study found longitudinal positive benefits of participation in an extended early childhood intervention programme.

> Despite the relatively modest funding and the availability of fewer human resources, large-scale programs that provide both educational and family support services can match the effects of model programs, even in terms of the magnitude of effect size. (Reynolds and Temple, 1998, p242)

Reynolds and Temple (1998) found that girls scored higher than boys in reading and maths. Children of high school graduates also scored higher at maths and reading compared to children of non-high school graduates. The study also found that children who had participated in early childhood interventions for more than two or three years were significantly less likely to be placed in a special education placement or to be retained for a grade. Reynolds and Temple (1998) found the extended early intervention programme to be beneficial for a number of reasons including increasing school stability, smoothing school transition and finally parental involvement was found to be a key component. Parents involved in the programme were more likely to participate in school activities such as volunteering in the classroom. This they claim can be related to previous studies which found that parental involvement is associated with greater school achievement.

Reynolds and Temple (1998) assert that their study found that follow on intervention from preschool can add significantly to the overall effects of participation in a compensatory preschool programme. There were positive effects on several indicators of school performance such as maths and reading achievements and reduced special

education placement. They claim that their study supports the "importance of continued longitudinal follow-up across several outcomes, even if differences are not observed at an earlier time" (ibid, p243).

3.4.8 The Early Training Project

The Early Training Project consisted of a summer programme which ran for ten weeks during which the students met for five days per week for four hours per day and was originally evaluated by Gray, Ramsey and Klaus (1983 cited in Karweit, 1994). The programme was aimed at four and five year olds and included weekly home visit and a ten week half-day preschool programme for either two or three summers (Currie, 2000). In addition to the summer component, a home visitor worked with each family for one hour a week during the school year. The Early Training Project "focused on perceptual/cognitive language development using a traditional nursery school format, but with activities sequenced to become increasingly complex and carefully focused on increasing language use" (Karweit, 1994, p61).

The research design consisted of four randomly assigned groups two control group (one in another city) who did not receive the programme and two groups who did receive the program but at different ages. The study found initial IQ gains for the programme participants at the age of five but by the age of fifteen IQ scores of all study groups were relatively similar. The study did find significant differences in terms of placement in special education with 2.3 per cent of the programme children placed in special education compared to 23.8 per cent of the control group. Also a slightly higher number of the control group (sixty-nine per cent) were retained in a grade compared to fifty-six per cent of the programme children. The programme also had a significant impact on school completion with only twenty-two per cent of the programme children dropping out of high school compared to forty-three per cent of the control group (Karweit, 1994). The study found little difference in terms of achievement in maths or reading between the groups and interestingly the programme appears to have benefited girls more than boys.

3.4.9 Discussion of US intervention programmes

Currie (2000) claims that since it "is often difficult to track the long-run outcomes of early intervention, evaluations generally focus on intermediate goals, such as producing children who arrive at school 'ready to learn" (p4). Most of the evidence supporting early interventions is based on 'model programmes' which were provided with higher levels of funding and supervision than large scale public programmes. Currie (2000) claims that few model programmes have been subject to rigorous evaluations and in particular the use of randomised trials are the most common type of evaluation utilised for these programmes. However, Reynolds and Temple (1998) claim that there is much evidence to suggest that early childhood programmes improve "children's cognitive development and school achievement in the short term and often enhance school competencies in the longer term"(p231). However, it has become increasingly clear that short programmes provide insufficient barriers for long-term poor academic achievements for socio-economically disadvantaged children. Reynolds and Temple (1998) indicate that this is especially true for large-scale Government-funded programmes such as Head Start in the US due to the fact that the majority of these initiatives rely on limited human and financial resources. There is also a very low level of commitment towards evaluating the outcomes of these large scale programmes and the majority of research into compensatory preschool programmes is based on model programmes. Longer term interventions are considered more effective for a number of reasons including giving economically disadvantaged children more time to benefit from educational interventions and provision of additional services such as health and parental involvement which require significant organisation (ibid, 1998). The effects of any intervention programmes are compounded by the negative effects of poverty on the child. Also the stability of a long-term programme is conducive to creating a learning environment to increase school performance and social functioning. It is also important to aid the transition between kindergarten and primary school which Reynolds and Temple (1998) claim has a significant influence on later school success.

A limitation of the generalisabilty of the results of these studies is that successful demonstration projects are funded at higher levels compared to Head Start and are

normally for a longer duration. The Perry Preschool Project, for example, was a two year intervention programme which cost $12,884 (in 1999 dollars) per annum compared to $5,021 to send a child to a half-day Head Start programme for one year (Currie, 2000). The Carolina Abecedarian project is estimated to cost $15,000 per child per year (Currie, 2000). Currie cites the Currie and Thomas (1995) study which uses a national sample of Head Start participants from the National Longitudinal Survey's Child-Mother data set. Siblings were used as a control in this evaluation and, in contrast to other US early years' intervention studies, sixty per cent of the sample were not African-American. The study found "fade-out" in the initial gains in reading and vocabulary test scores and found that the real impact of Head Start was most apparent when the participants left the programme.

> In conjunction with Reynolds' work and with evidence that Head Start children often go in to attend poor schools (Lee and Leob, 1995; Currie and Thomas, 1999) these results suggest that fade out may be due not to the deficiencies in the Head Start program, but to problems of subsequent school quality. (Currie, 2000, p14)

Currie and Thomas (1995) found that black children were more likely to attend poorer quality formal education than white children following participation in Head Start and this they assert may offer a "potential explanation for fade out of Head Start effects among black children" (Currie, 2000, p14).

Slavin et al (1994) reviewed a number of programmes aimed at preventing school failure including the Perry Preschool project and the Carolina Abecedarian Project and draw the conclusion that almost all children can be successful in the early school grades. Of the eleven programmes reviewed by Slavin et al. (1994) eight showed positive results immediately after the intervention and those with follow-up continued to have long-term benefits for children. According to Slavin et al. (1994) this provides clear evidence that early interventions with follow-up can help socio-economically disadvantaged children and therefore early school failure is potentially solvable.

3.4.10 The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (UK)

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project was a UK longitudinal study of early childhood experiences which was conducted from 1997 to 2004 and included a national sample of children in a variety of early years' settings. The main aims of the EPPE project included investigating the impact of pre-school on children's intellectual and social/behavioural development and assessing if some pre-schools were more effective than others in promoting children's development. The methodology involved both qualitative and qualitative methods and the sample included 3000 children, their parents, their home environments and the pre-schools they attended which included a range of types of preschool provision. Overall, the EPPE project research found positive benefits associated with childrens participation in preschool programmes in the UK and also concluded that quality was an important factor in the level of benefits which children received from participating in preschool programmes. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly benefited from high quality provision. According to Sylva at al. (2004) the results from the EPPE study have demonstrated the positive effects of high quality provision on children's intellectual and social/behavioural developmental and these findings are particularly important and robust given the size of the sample in the study.

> The EPPE research indicates that pre-school can play an important part in combating social exclusion and promoting inclusion by offering disadvantaged children, in particular, a better start to primary school. The findings indicate pre-school has a positive impact on children's progress over and above important family influences. The quality of the pre-school setting experience as well as the quantity (more months but not necessarily more hours/day) are both influential. (Sylva et al., 2004, p.15).

Interestingly the study found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefited more from settings that catered for children from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. This finding may be significant for Early Start because the programme is targeted at children from disadvantaged backgrounds and its location and remit do not facilitate the programme children mixing with children from other socio-economic

backgrounds. Another finding which might be relevant to Early Start is the programme duration has an impact on programme outcomes.

3.5 Irish early years' intervention programmes

3.5.1 Rutland Street evaluation

Kellaghan and Greaney (1993) assert that the notion of the child coming from a 'disadvantaged' inner city area came to attention in the 1960s.

> These areas were usually located in cities and were characterised by heavy concentrations of poor housing, high proportions of unskilled and unemployed workers, and a high rate of educational failure. The poor educational performance of children in these areas was seen as a cause of serious concern in the context of achieving equality of educational opportunity and in terms if serious loss of talent to the nation. (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993, p1)

Attention was paid particularly in the US to preparing these children for school through the Head Start movement. The Rutland Street Project in Dublin is identified as one of the earliest of these programmes in Europe. The Rutland Street Preschool Project was established in inner city Dublin in 1969 and was funded by the Department of Education and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation of Holland. The Rutland Street Project was located in an area of high male unemployment where part-time work among women was common and there was a very low level of parent education. There was also concern at the time that children in the area aged between nine and thirteen years were scoring well below average on academic achievement tests (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993).

According to Lewis and Archer (2002) the Rutland Street Project had two main aims;

1. Provide children in a preschool setting with experiences that would facilitate the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes appropriate to later school success;
2. Increase the involvement of parents in the education of their children.

The project was based in the Rutland Street Junior Primary School and Preschool and was established specifically for children aged three to five years to prepare the children for entrance to primary school by assisting them in the development of their cognitive skills. Children attended the project for two and a half hours daily for either a morning or afternoon session in groups of fifteen which were lead by a primary school teacher and a classroom aide. There were also three social workers attached to the project who worked closely with the parents. Parental involvement was seen as a central tenant of the project and there was an emphasis on building a relationship with parents based on "understanding and mutual respect to convince them that they had an important contribution to make to their children's success at school" (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993, p8). The main influences for the project at the time of its establishment were a number of small-scale American projects including the Early Training Project at George Peabody College, the Perry Preschool Project at Ypsilanti and the Early Intervention Project in Gainesville, Florida. Activities in the Rutland Street Project were also influenced by Piaget's principles of development with a particular emphasis on school readiness. According to the OECD (2004) the project is today well regarded and has been successful in meeting the needs of the participating children. The project has been the subject of an ongoing evaluation.

The first evaluation of the project was carried out by the Education and Research Centre with the first cohort of children during the first five years of the project. The evaluation found that the children had made good progress while attending the preschool centre but this progress tended to fade at primary school, which is similar to the findings of other such studies (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993). The research methods for the evaluation involved a quasi-experimental design with two groups, the experimental group (programme participants) and the control group (judged equivalent to experimental group but did not participate in the preschool programme). The groups were compared on a range of issues including home, achievement and personality variables and the participants took part in psychological and educational tests on entrance to the programme and also at the end of each academic year. The views of parents were also collected for the evaluation. Teachers rated children on a range of

personality variables and social workers undertook assessments of the child's home. At the end of the preschool period the evaluation found "significant improvements had occurred in their performance on tests of scholastic ability, vocabulary, their ability to respond to verbal communication, and their knowledge of numerical concepts" (ibid, p9). However, three years later subsequent tests revealed that the level of scholastic achievement has deteriorated and were under the achievements of the standard population but still above that of the control group. At the end of the first five year period the homes of the experimental group were rated more highly by the researchers in terms of quality of language used by parents and guidance relating to school work and a higher proportion reading to their children daily. These findings were similar to the findings of a number of Head Start evaluations in the US.

Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) give a number of reasons for conducting a follow-up study on the experimental groups. Their rationale for such a study includes their belief that the conclusions from the Head Start studies were overly pessimistic and may not be applicable to more focused programmes. Secondly, they highlight the growing concern that the importance of the early years' experience may be underestimated because of the initial evaluation findings which may lead to reduced government funding. Thirdly the development of "new more ecologically valid criteria could be developed" to provide for the measurement of outcome against a more appropriate model. Such a study according to the authors would make an important contribution to educational and social policy. In the follow-up study the educational careers, work experience and aspects of attitudes, leisure activities and social deviance of the control group and the experimental group were measured and compared at the age of sixteen for the experimental group. Follow-up information on educational careers was later collected. Methods of data collection for this study were interviews with the participants and questionnaires sent to schools which they attended. In relation to school experience the study found that placement in special education was not significantly different for both groups. Variables examined in the follow-up study included placement in special education, encouragement to attend secondary school, absenteeism from school, truancy, behaviour in school, persistence in school and achievement. The experimental

group reported that significantly more of them received encouragement to go to second level from their homes. There was no difference in absenteeism at age eight years between the groups but there was considerable variation found within each group. In relation to behaviour at second level there was a slight difference in the number of participants reporting bad behaviour with sixty per cent of the experimental group and seventy-seven per cent of the control group reporting being removed from the classroom for bad behaviour between five and ten times throughout the year. In terms of persistence at school a higher number of the control group (thirty-three per cent) compared to the experimental group (twenty per cent) left school before the end of primary school. The reasons cited for non-completion of school included dislike of school, economic factors and family factors. The most common factor cited for persistence at school was parental influence. Kellaghan and Greaney (1993) also found that "lack of success at primary level was an important predictor of early school leaving" (p15).

The achievements measures used in the follow-up study were the results of public examinations which were justified on the grounds that they are nationally recognised qualifications and they are central to the student's future educational and vocational careers. The Experimental Group were twice as likely as the control group to take the Day-Group Certificate Exam at age fourteen years. The Experimental Group (30.5 per cent) were three times more likely than the Control Group (11.8 per cent) to take the Intermediate Certificate level (age fifteen to sixteen). However these rates of exam take-up were much lower than the national average which at the time of the study was eighty per cent for girls and seventy per cent for boys. Finally ten per cent of Experimental group and zero per cent of the control group took the Leaving Certificate Examination. In the labour force both groups reported similar findings in that most were involved in manual occupations. The majority of the girls were in semi-skilled jobs while approximately fifty per cent of the boys were trainees and apprentices and the remainder worked in partly skilled or unskilled jobs.

The study did find significant differences in terms of leisure activities between the groups. The Experimental group were more likely to have a hobby, particularly sport, and were more likely to be members of a team, club or group. There were no significant differences found in terms of leisure reading patterns between the groups but the experimental group were more likely to have read a book in the three months before the interview and were more likely to have read fiction books that would be classified as adult. Differences emerged in the "quality of material that was read, they reflected a higher level of cultural activity among participants than among non-participants" (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993, p21). The most common type of reading for both groups was newspapers but the authors maintained it was mainly of a cursory nature confined to information gathering on TV schedules and entertainment events. Magazine reading was more popular among the control group. There was no significant difference between both groups in terms of social deviance but there were gender differences with boys being more likely to be in trouble with the police than girls and the study found a correlation between delinquency and early school leaving.

Kellaghan and Greaney (1993) conclude from their study that an early childhood programme such as the Rutland Street Project can "partially offset the negative effects of disadvantage and produce significant educational benefits for some children" (p20). The results of the study found only marginal differences in the performance of both groups in terms of school experience, placement in special education, extent of absenteeism and truancy, behavioural problems in school and leisure activities. Girls seemed to benefit more than boys from participation in the preschool project as they stayed at school longer. The authors contend that these findings highlight the significant social and educational problems that children in disadvantaged areas experience. The two main areas where the Experimental Group perform better than the control group are in terms of public examination and participation in third level with two of the Experimental Group being offered places (only one accepted a place) compared to none of the control group.

> Given the relationship between educational achievement, employment, and delinquent behaviour, documented not only in our study but in many other studies, it is clear that the success of the project in raising the educational attainment and achievement levels of its participants was likely to have important economic and social consequences for some students. (Ibid, p2)

Kellaghan and Greaney conclude that while there appears to be benefits for those who participated in the preschool programme, the study also highlights "the limited value of a single intervention for children growing up in an environment which is beset by a great variety of problems" (p23). The authors also point out that at the time of the project there was little emphasis on parental involvement at a national level which since then has been addressed by the introduction of the Home-School-Community-Liaison Teacher Scheme (HSCL). At the time of the project there was also little involvement of the broader community which is also something more common now which may contribute to sustaining the positive outcomes of involvement in a preschool programme for children with continuing support. The authors also suggest that there is now a more supportive school environment for recognising children's special needs than there was at the time of this study for the participants.

3.5.2 Moyross Intervention Education Pilot Project

In September 1990 the Moyross Intervention Education Pilot Project was launched by Mary Immaculate College in Limerick to "bring about 'sustainable improvements in the educational attainment of seventy-five infant children' in an area of high early school leaving and unemployment" (Broderick and Coughlan, 2002, p65). The project provided educational intervention for the first four years of the childrens primary education including the implementation of specific curriculum support to meet the needs of the children involved. An evaluation of the project commenced in September 1995 and found a number of positive outcomes for all the stakeholders involved in the project. Parents reported that they had established a relationship with their child's teachers and became more aware of their children school work and progress. Participation in adult education classes had provided parents with the opportunity to become more assertive and more knowledgeable about the education system.

> Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the initiative was the way in which it empowered parents and increased their involvement in their children's education at every level, including classroom participation. This development showed that the principle requirement for combating educational disadvantage is the provision of opportunities for parents to exercise their right to direct and enhance the education of their children. (Ibid, p66)

Teachers in the evaluation reported that "the increased availability of materials and equipment during the project" was positive for the children involved and they noted improvements in the children's linguistic and social competences (ibid, p65). Children in the study reported high levels of future aspirations for themselves.

3.5.3 Irish Evaluation of High/Scope Project

O'Flaherty (1995) conducted a study of a High/Scope project in a disadvantaged area of Dublin which was run by Barnardos, a children's charity in the UK and Ireland. The sample for the study consisted of Group A; twenty-one children which had attended the programme and Group B; twenty children matched to Group A in terms of socio-economic circumstances and on a nursery waiting list but who did not get a place. The study examined how well prepared children were for primary school, children's progress in the first two years of primary school and a comparison of Group A and Group Bs cognitive and socio-emotional functioning. The study was strongly influenced by the American Perry Preschool Project. Research methods included in-depth interviews with nursery staff and parents and psychological and educational testing of the children. Tests used for data collection included the British Ability Scales, Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales and the Child Behaviour Questionnaire. The types of achievements identified by Flaherty were progress in school through various classes, feelings of contentment children felt while in the nursery environment, growth of personal competence, sociability and adaptive behaviour.

> Despite the predisposition to educational disadvantage, educational and psychological testing indicated that, after a year at the nursery, overall the children were performing well and within the norm or their age; this confirmed the assessment of staff that the children were well prepared for school. (O'Flaherty, 1995, p107)

The study did not find any significant differences between Group A and Group B in terms of their "cognitive/academic, self-esteem, or socio/emotional functioning one or two years into school, although both groups of children were progressing well" (ibid, p107). Parent evaluations of the programme were varied and findings were compounded by the fact that many parents refused to take part in the study. There was an impression that parents did not have a clear picture of what High/Scope involved. All parents were positive regarding their child's progress and positive benefits identified by parents included the acquisition of concrete knowledge and parents were positive about how their child settled into school. Primary school teachers reported "no apparent differences in functioning between the two groups" (ibid, p97).

In general, the findings differ from the results of the Perry Preschool study but O'Flaherty points out that this study is on a more limited scale compared to the US study, particularly, as the Perry preschool Project was for two years while this project was only for one year. Also O'Flaherty (1995) suggests that the American research has highlighted the fact that it is only during adolescence and adulthood that significant differences emerge between the groups.

> Longitudinal research may demonstrate such differences between the two groups....although caution must be exercised in making any such assumption, if only because American children are exposed to experiences which are culturally different to those of Irish children.(Ibid, p108)

It is important to consider the experience of preschool in its own right and the long-term impact on attitudinal change.

3.5.4 Early Start

The Early Start programme which was established by the Department of Education and Science in 1994 was informed by the Rutland Street Project and in particular the curricular guidelines of Early Start are influenced by the Rutland Street Project (OECD, 2004). Lewis and Archer (2002) state that Early Start is "broadly concerned with the developments of the whole child; it is primarily an intervention that was designed to promote language and cognitive development and to prevent school failure" (p4).

There is a strong emphasis on parental involvement and "it was also intended that Early Start would evolve in association with other community-based agencies and individuals involved in dealing with disadvantage at local level" (ibid, p5). According to Ryan et al. (1998) the proposed links between Early Start and the wider community is in recognition of the broadening understanding of educational disadvantage which has occurred since the 1960s.

> While educational provision is still seen as playing a role in dealing with problems of disadvantage, perceptions of disadvantage have shifted from individual children, first to families and then to the wider communities which children and families inhabit. As a result of this change of focus, today's proposed solutions, as reflected in Early Start, are likely to involve a range of agencies in addition to the school. (Ibid, p5)

O'Toole (2000) contends that the main aim of the Early Start is to "expose young children to an educational programme which will enhance their overall development and lay a foundation for successful educational attainment in future years: to compensate for background deprivation" (p139). Children are viewed as "active agents in their own development" with the provision of a creative learning environment (ibid). There are three levels of parent involvement encouraged at the Early Start centres; firstly parents belong to the advisory groups, secondly parents participate in everyday activities and organisation at the centres and finally parents have opportunities to join in with their child's activities. According to the OECD (2004) there are 1,617 children attending Early Start in 40 centres operating in primary schools throughout Ireland. Each Early Start classroom operates a separate morning and afternoon session and the school in this study operates two Early Start classrooms. Each session is attended by fifteen children and is staffed by a teacher and a Child Care worker.

According to Lewis and Archer (2002) the curriculum for Early Start was still in the process of development during the initial year of the programme in 1995. A draft curriculum document entitled, *Early Start pre-school intervention project: Curricular guidelines for good practice,* has been available to Early Start providers since 1998 and were update in 2000. This may have an impact on the generalisabilty of the

findings from this study as the research sample attended the project in the first year of Early Start and while aspects of the curriculum were in place the curriculum was not fully available to the Early Start practitioners. The Early Start curriculum guidelines are influenced by the work of Piaget and Vygotsky and advocate an approach which is structured, child-centered, play-oriented and facilitates self-directed learning experience. The main elements of the conceptual framework of the Early Start curriculum are described as the following;

> Key concepts are 'learning outcomes' (specific tasks to be mastered by the child), 'contexts' (grouping arrangements and materials to be used) 'strategies' (types of adult-directed activity) and 'structure' (the time, specific interaction, and follow-up learning specifications for each activity). Reference is also made to the 'interactive style' of adults (e.g., provoking, questioning, seeking clarification). (Lewis and Archer, 2002, p25)

According to Lewis and Archer (2002) play is central to the Early Start curriculum guidelines and play is viewed not just as a curriculum methodology but as central aspect of the curriculum itself. Children engage in structured play activities with specific learning objectives for each child set by the Early Start personnel. Play and positive adult-child interaction are central to the Early Start programme and curriculum. This curricular approach was criticised by the OECD (2004) in their *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Ireland* because of the predominantly didactic approach of the Early Start guidelines and practices.

Short-term evaluations of Early Start by the Educational Research Centre have found mixed results. The standardised test scores showed no marked improvement in cognitive and academic achievements (Lewis and Archer, 2002). The first evaluation of Early Start found that while teachers reported that the Early Start participants appeared to be more school ready in terms of cognitive and language development than non-Early Start participants, standardised test scores demonstrated no significant differences.

> Comparisons between the performance of children who had participated in Early Start (when they reached Junior Infants) and the performance of Junior

> Infants who have lived in the area prior to the introduction of the intervention programme revealed practically no differences in achievement on measures of cognition, language, or motor skills. (Ryan et al, 1998, p64)

Kelly and Kellaghan's (1999) follow-up evaluation of these students when they reached second class (age seven to eight years) also found no significant differences in the cognitive achievements for Early Start participants. Ryan et al. (1998) reported in their evaluation of the eight original Early Start projects that school principals reported Early Start children appeared to be more "confident, friendly, and independent and better able to settle into school when they entered Junior Infants"(p35). Junior Infants teachers in the study reported that Early Start participants had high levels of social and emotional maturity and twelve of the seventeen teachers interviewed had a "favourable impression of their Early Start participants" and viewed them as having "superior cognitive ability, were better able to interact with others, and were better adapted to classroom procedures" (ibid, p68-69). Other positive outcomes found in the Early Start evaluations included "the integration of Early Start into the participating schools and parental satisfaction with the involvement in the programme" (OECD, 2004, p32).

The most common types of parent involvement reported were centre-based such as working with the child in the classroom while other activities such as 'shared-reading' at home were less common. Ryan et al. (1998) reported that parent involvement ranged from "observing activities and working with their own child to running an activity with a small group of children" (p44). They also stated that two principals in their study felt that children should be able to attend Early Start for a second year particularly if the child experienced behavioural or emotional problems. There were also some criticisms among principals about the nature of the dual-day in the Early Start classroom and some perceived the length of the sessions (2 ½ hours) as too short. While the majority of mothers seemed to be involved at some level in Early Start, there were a very limited number of fathers involved and there was also some concern expressed by school personnel in the study about the difficulties in reaching all parents. Lewis and Archer (2002) found in their subsequent evaluation of thirty-seven Early Start projects that only seven of the thirty-seven projects reported parental participation in an advisory

group for Early Start at the school. They also reported that school principals were very enthusiastic about parental involvement but their main concern was timetabling as some parents were working during school hours.

Lewis and Archer (2006) in an evaluation of the role of the Home-School-Community-Liaison coordinators (HSCLs) in Early Start schools found that the most successful type of parent involvement activity in Early Start was parent-child learning activities. These activities allowed the teacher promote learning through play, reading, maths and story telling. The study also found that "there was a good deal of support among coordinators for the view that Early Start had improved the involvement of parents in subsequent years as their child/children progressed through school" (ibid, p23). Coordinators perceived Early Start as a contributing factor to parents developing good will towards school initiatives and a positive attitude to school. The coordinators also reported that "it was not unusual for a core group of supporters to form during the Early Start year and to remain supportive as their child progressed through school" particularly those who had been involved in classroom activities during Early Start (ibid, p24).

> While parents who get involved were perceived to have learned about the importance of play, gained an appreciation of language development, and become aware of their own role as educators, several coordinators expressed doubts about the extent to which parents, even those who were committed at the outset, would be able to sustain their interest in their child's progress at school beyond the early years. Levels of deprivation and the absence of appropriate supports were identified as the main barriers to sustained parent involvement. (Ibid, 2006, p31)

The coordinators reported a number of positive outcomes linked to their involvement in Early Start such as early identification of disadvantage and early intervention, making contacts with parents and building support for intervention and increasing contact with community groups and agencies. They identified a number of remaining challenges such as the difficulty of targeting the most marginalised and the increasing challenges of working with parents from different nationalities and backgrounds.

The OECD (2004) in their review of Irish ECCE policy and practice recommend that Early Start should be extended with a number of changes including provision of full day sessions rather than half day sessions as are currently provided and in particular to expand the service in partnership with local community and voluntary agencies. The main rationale for increasing to a full day is to help counteract the negative impact of the environment where many of the children in the programme are growing-up. McGough (2007) also contends that the current half-day sessions offered by the Early Start programme "does not meet the requirements for programme duration advised in the literature and this remains a weakness in the provision" (p289). The OCED (2004) also point out that the original objective of the programme to be part of the wider community response to education disadvantage has never come to fruition and it is currently operating in isolation from other statutory and community supports. Fallon (2005) also highlights some criticisms of the Department of Education and Science's commitment to supporting in career development in Early Start such as the lack of full-time personnel "to support the curriculum and teaching, and to disseminate methods of innovative practice to all centres included in the Early Start programme" (p299). Early years' interventions according to the OECD are more successful in breaking the poverty cycle when part of a more general anti-poverty and community development strategy including links to job training, housing policy, substance misuse programmes and other social and community supports. Another important aspect of a successful intervention programme is that they are intensive and full-day programmes and at least a year long, not just a term. The OECD (2004) point to substantial international evidence which demonstrates that well-funded and integrated socio-educational programmes "do improve the cognitive functioning of disadvantaged children, and almost always yield positive outcomes with regard to socio-emotional development" (Section 145).

3.6 Issues emerging from research

3.6.1 Why are some programmes more effective than others?

> It is disappointing that numerous studies have not produced more consistent evidence of the long term effectiveness (or lack of effectiveness) of early intervention. However, all studies are not created equal, and better studies tend to find larger and more significant effects of early intervention programmes. (Currie, 2000, p26)

Wasik and Karweit (1994) contend that a successful programme requires intensive centre-based activities for the child for at least one year and an intensive parent support programme. Examples include the Milwaukee Project and Project CARE which had included extensive parent education components such as job-training skills or decision making skills. Parent education is not sufficient by itself. The enriching environment of a daycare centre can provide more effective child-care experiences than home-based models as experiences in a centre may provide stimulation for the child and in-addition parents can observe and model effective parenting skills. It also emerges from the available research that the longer duration and the earlier the intervention the better the results. Wasik and Karweit (1994) conclude that investment in children early on is required to prevent later school failure. Other important issues identified which impact on the outcomes of an intervention include; quality, curricula and non-curricula issues such as positive attitude and parental involvement.

> Children in high quality centres have fewer behavioural problems and better cognitive and language development than children in poorer centres, but it is not clear to what extent this is due to unobserved aspects of family background that are associated with being places in higher quality care. (Currie, 2000, p18)

In relation to quality Currie (2000) contends that socio-economically disadvantaged children benefit disproportionately from high quality care.

Currie (2000) discusses the issue of an optimal age for intervention and draws on findings from the Carolina Abecedarian project which found that from birth to five

years was a more effective time for intervention rather than later. Currie argues that this study does not provide definite evidence that the years zero to three are the key for intervention and highlights the Infant Health and Development Project to substantiate her argument. The Infant Health and Development Project found that the participation of children in centre-based care from ages twelve to thirty-six months had no effect on placement in special education or grade retention at age eight.

Karweit (1994, p75) concludes that from reviewing the available research it appears that preschool interventions alone are not sufficient to "create the magnitude of effect that is needed" and instead a continuing intervention that includes infancy, preschool and elementary school is required. While the children in the Milwaukee and Abecedarian Projects did receive continuing interventions which resulted in larger effects across the various measures compared to the control groups, the experimental groups were still performing below the national grade level.

> This should be sobering information for those who see one year of preschool as a primary means to reduce the education gap. It should temper the optimistic view that a brief stint in an ordinary prekindergarten class in inner-city public schools run in the normal way by normal teachers is likely to produce the life changing sort of effects that have often been suggested and trumpeted in the literature, the popular press, and in the political arena. (Karweit, 1994, pg. 76)

It can be argued then that preschool intervention is not by itself enough to tackle the wider structural inequalities that a child may experience.

3.6.2 The Concept of School-readiness

According to O'Flaherty (1995) the main rationale for compensatory education for three to five year olds is to prepare children for transition to school "thereby affecting some of the problems associated with the transition" (p36). This notion of preparing a child for school is often encapsulated, particularly in relation to American literature, as the concept of school readiness. In the forward to 'Head Start Debates' (2004) Schorr describes school readiness as "a many-splendored thing, which requires attention to children's physical, cognitive, and interpersonal development as well as attention to

family and neighbourhood surroundings" (p.xvi). Schorr discusses the need to immerse children in an environment which is safe, stimulating, knowledge-based and rich in language and cultivates children's eagerness to learn.

In the 1970s *social competence* was identified by the US government agency in charge of Head Start as the main goal of the programme and the focus of future evaluations and not just focus on cognitive developments. The exact measurement of social competence led to intense academic debate during the 1970s but there was a growing consensus by the end of this decade that social competence was composed of four main features:

1. Physical Health;
2. Cognition (measured by standardised intelligence tests);
3. Achievement (also measured by standardised tests);
4. Socio-emotional Factors (motivation, self-image, attitudes, social-relationships, evaluated using variety of measures) (Zigler and Trickett (1978) cited in Schrag et al. 2004).

This definition of social competence became widely accepted and was incorporated in a number of early intervention evaluations. Schrag et al. (2004) contend that there has been a major change in the goals of Head Start since 1989 when the then President George Bush Senior adopted a new national goal which was that all children in the US would start school ready to learn and thus school readiness become the main focus. Again the concept of school readiness like social competence is not a concrete construct and has been the source of some debate. The debate centres on whether school readiness refers to a state of physical developmental maturation or an environmental notion of readiness.

> Children living in poverty are at a heightened risk for school failure, which has serious and long-lasting consequences. There is mounting evidence that school problems begin as early as kindergarten and first grade (Alexander and Entwistle, 1998; Lewitt and Baker, 1995; Luster and McAdoo, 1996). (Piotrkowski et al, 2000, p537)

Piotrkowski at al. (2000) suggest that while school readiness has been accepted as a universal goal of education policy in the US there is controversy over the exact meaning and nature of school readiness.

> It has been criticized (sic) for being thought of as a static attribute of children; for ignoring individual differences, inequities in children's experiences and opportunities, and the responsibility of schools to teach children appropriately; for the downward shift of academic expectations to increasingly younger children; and for measurement-driven instruction. (Piotrkowski et al, 2000, p538)

Piotrkowski (2004) describes school readiness in terms of resources such as political, social, organisational, educational, financial and individual which prepare the child for school and describes it as a non-static concept which incorporates the multi-dimensional nature of the child's development. It is a responsibility that should be equally shared among school, family and the community. At a community level the resources identified that support school readiness include local libraries, quality preschool and early years' provision, safety in playground and the streets in the area. In tandem with these other local resources that support school readiness would include "strong accountable leadership; transition programming and parent involvement activities; on-going professional development and support for teachers; high quality, individualised instruction" (Piotrkowski et al, 2000, p540). At a family level "a rich literacy environment, nurturing parenting, financial resources, and social support for child rearing" (ibid, p540). Personal attributes of a child that would support school readiness include good health and age appropriate self care, ability to control ones behaviour and emotions, ability to communicate needs and feelings "interest and engagement with the world around him or her, to motivate learning; motor skills; cognitive knowledge; and the ability to adjust to the demands of the kindergarten classroom setting" (ibid, p540).

Piotrkowski et al. (2000) examined the differences between parents and preschool teachers' perceptions of school readiness and the perceptions of kindergarten teachers were also included in the study. This study looks at the understanding of school

readiness in a high-need urban school district in New York. The sample for the study included 355 parents whose children were born in 1993-94 and were attending community based preschools or parents of preschoolers in two elementary schools. Also included in the study were the children's preschool teachers and their future kindergarten teachers in the district school. Piotrkowski et al (2000, p537) argue that school readiness is 'locally constituted' because the child is prepared for school based on locally made day-to-day decisions and this period of initial adjustment to school for a child is particularly important in high-need communities. A particular problem identified in the study is the lack of communication between the parents and preschool teachers and the kindergarten teacher. Often parents and preschool teachers are preparing children for school based on their own implicit beliefs of what the child needs rather than "empirically documented criteria of what young children should know and be able to do when they are four or five years old" (ibid, p538). Teachers perception of school readiness are important because they may influence the grade a child is placed in and whether the child is placed in special needs classes and therefore influence the child's "subsequent achievement trajectories" (ibid, p539).

The study found that parents beliefs about school readiness were unrelated to the parents own educational attainment. Parents in the study with all education levels cited basic knowledge "as more important than how children approach learning" (ibid, p553). Piotrkowski et al. (2000) claims that this is in contrast to similar studies which found that parents with lower educational attainment had greater expectations of academically-orientated skills than parents with higher educational attainment. Parents in the study had high expectations of "concrete classroom-related readiness resources" (ibid, p554) which differed from the views of teachers and may be considered developmentally inappropriate. Piotrkowski proposes that in a low-income community "parents' elevated readiness beliefs regarding the resources children need for kindergarten may be a function not of developmentally inappropriate expectations but of realistic concerns that their child may not succeed in a resource-poor local schools" (2000, p554). Parents react to these apprehensions by developing "a compensatory strategy that de-emphasizes (sic) interest and curiosity and, instead, emphasizes the

acquisition of concrete skills to help children adjust quickly and successfully to classroom demands" (ibid, p554).

> In high-need communities, where families and school readiness resources are limited, children's readiness resources may be viewed as especially critical, in order to compensate for resource-poor families and school. Thus children in these communities may be expected to have more extensive and concrete readiness resources at school entry than children in more affluent families and communities. (ibid, p541)

Piotrkowski refers to this as the resource model of school readiness. The study did find differences in parent and teacher opinions relating to Classroom-related Readiness Resources. Parents placed more emphasis than teachers on children being able to comply with the teachers' authority and on the child being able to communicate their needs and feelings in English. The study also found that preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers had differing beliefs, with preschool teachers viewing knowledge as more important for the entry to school than the kindergarten teachers and Piotrkowski et al. (2000) contend that this highlights the lack of communication between these groups. The study found that kindergarten teachers "were more likely to emphasize (sic) a child's ability to not disrupt the class; families and providers emphasized school-like skills such as knowing English, knowing the letters of the alphabet and counting; while childcare providers were most likely to emphasize problem-solving skills" (p539). Piotrkowski et al. (2000) also conclude that the voices of parents in 'high-need communities' must be listened to because "it is their children who are at increased risk of failing in school" (p555).

> Involving parents in the community dialogue means that their emphasis on concrete academic skills should not be dismissed as developmentally inappropriate, but as an indicator of their legitimate concerns about failing schools and failing children.....Parents' high readiness expectations offer an entrée for intervention. (Ibid, p555)

Piotrkowski et al. (2000) argue that despite the fact that their research highlights parents' high expectations there is also evidence to indicate that parents with low

educational attainment are less likely to read to their children at home and may expect preschool teachers to have primary responsibility for preparing children for school.

> Despite its negative connotations, the term "school readiness" can be a useful concept if (a) it is not treated as a static attribute of children; (b) it incorporates the multiple aspects of children's functioning that are important for school success; and (c) it takes into account the joint responsibilities that families, communities, and schools have in providing caring environments that promote children's learning. (Ibid, p540)

The debates about the ultimate goal of the programme convey the difficulty in measuring the success of the programme itself. An important theoretical standpoint which is raised by Hebbeler (1985) (cited in Schrag et al., 2004) is that the majority of the Head Start evaluations measures the progress of students against similar control groups from the same disadvantaged socio-economic background which are not representative of the majority of the population of preschoolers. Hebbeler tried to readdress this issue by comparing Head Start graduates with a control group of similar socio-economic background and a control group from a middle-class school in the locality. The study found that Head Start graduates performed poorly compared to the middle-class children in the study.

> From a theoretical standpoint, Hebbeler's study raises the questions of how to employ appropriate standards by which to judge the effectiveness of a program such as Head Start. As Hebbeler herself notes, "Improved performance is a possible program goal, but so is attainment of an absolute level of performance". (Schrag et al., 2004, p24).

As previously discussed the Milwaukee evaluation is one of the few studies to measure programme participant achievements against a group of students from a higher socio-economic background and it found that the programme children underperformed compared to this group. While there is much discussion on the importance of school-readiness for individual children, Hayes (2008) draws attention to the importance of ready schools and the increasing need to consider the impact of the transitions that children experience and "the readiness of the schools to guide individual children" (p23).

3.6.3 The Fade-Out Debate

Barnett (2004) states that it is generally accepted that preschool intervention programmes such as Head Start produce short-terms positive effects but there is also a perception that these effects 'fade-out' after a number of years and some reports "have gone so far as to label Head Start a 'scam' " (p221). Barnett (2004) reviewed the research to date on cognitive gains for Head Start participants and found that of the twelve model programme studies which reported achievement tests scores or grades, six found "statistically positive effects at or beyond grade three" (p238). The Abecedarian and the Perry Preschool studies both reported positive cognitive gains beyond High School.

> A false fade-out in achievement is most likely to be found when there are substantial program effects on grade retention and special education that produce biased attrition in the achievement data (i.e., failure to test the appropriate sample). This resolves the apparent conflict between fade-out in achievement and persistently improved school outcomes. (Ibid, p243)

The only clear evidence of fade-out is apparent in the gains children have made in intelligence tests (Schweinhart et al, 1993; Barnett, 2004). Barnett (2004) draws attention to the criticisms of the narrow focus of IQ tests which ignore broader intelligences and the fact that other cognitive and academic affects of early years' intervention programmes have endured. According to Schweinhart et al. (1993) there is no evidence of fade-out from the effects of a good quality preschool programme on children's special education placement, high school graduation, or delinquency; fade-out evidence is mixed for effects on children's socio-emotional behaviour and school achievement. O'Toole (2000, p140) also draws attention to the 'sleeper effect' where improvements in the childs "cognitive processes remain dormant until triggered by new demands in the young person's life" which has been identified in longitudinal research into preschool intervention programmes.

> Preschool education may indeed change the lives of young children; it appears to do this by fostering positive attitudes, and inspiring motivation and a healthy need for achievement. This in turn allows the child a sense of control and

> responsibility in his or her own life, crucial factors in the development of self-worth and self-esteem. (O'Flaherty, 1995, p 23)

Pre-school may also trigger other changes for the child and the family and may improve quality of life and empower parents.

3.7 Parents and early years' intervention programmes

3.7.1 Supporting Parents

Ghate and Hazel (2002) in their study of parenting in poor environments explore the concept of resilience and the types of supports which help parents. They have adopted Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the theoretical framework for their research design. The research focused on social supports available to parents in both formal (statutory supports), semi-formal supports (community supports) and informal social supports (family, friends and neighbours). The study consisted of a nationally representative sample of 1,754 parents in the UK and a follow up qualitative study of forty parents. In the context of semi-formal supports, the study found that the most common type of support used by parents was services offering care or activities for children and in particular parent/toddler groups and playgroups. In contrast services that offered parent support rather than childcare were much less frequently used. Another important issue that emerged was that once parents had made initial contact with a service they tended to utilise more of the facilities in that service. The most important reason that parents gave for making contact with such services was to allow their child "an opportunity to mix with other children" (ibid, p133). Parents with preschool children in the study were also more likely to use semi-formal supports, with fifty-six per cent of parents of preschool children using semi-formal supports compared with twenty-six per cent of parents with older children. Parents also identified the chance to socialise with other adults and therefore provide "an opportunity to increase their formal social support network" as an indirect benefit of preschool service (ibid, p137).

3.7.2 Evidence supporting Parent Involvement in Early years' Intervention

Pizzo et al. (2004) examined the impact of Head Start on parents by analysing the results of forty-one longitudinal studies on Head Start involving over 3,000 families and found "a persistent pattern of Head Start parent progress in the skills needed to promote children's educational success in our school system" (p194). The study found improvements in parent outcomes in two main areas; parents ability to promote early learning skills and greater participation of parents in their child's later school experience. Pizzo et al. (2004) conclude that Head Start systematically helps parents and that their review of previous studies strongly suggest that enrolment in Head Start has a considerable impact of parent participation in their child's education and that this influence persists beyond Junior school. O'Flaherty (1995) highlights Hayes and McCarthy's (1992) evaluation of St Audeon's Parent/Child Health Promotion Project in a preschool in Dublin which found evidence of strong parental involvement and qualitative data suggested that past parents are still involved in the running of the project.

> To reduce poverty significantly, the political equation has to change, and one way to contribute to changing it is to maximise the participation of poor parents and poor communities in authentic decision making on issues that are meaningful to them- not decision making about who will bake what for the fundraiser. (Greenberg, 1998, p50)

While parental involvement is overwhelmingly viewed as a positive and crucial aspect of early years' intervention programmes there are different theoretical understandings of parental involvement (Greenberg, 1998). Much of the literature offers a traditional functionalist conceptual framework best exemplified in Joyce Epstein's (1995) framework of parental involvement which describes how the school, family and community represent "overlapping spheres of influence" in which the child develops (cited by Greenberg, 1998). Using such a conceptual framework then the task of an early years' intervention project, such as Head Start, is to equip children with the support they need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the current 'fair' social system. Head Start does not challenge the inequality within the system but merely assists children to function more successfully within such a system and

therefore is in line with a meritocratic view of the education system. Greenberg (1998) contends that conflict theory, which represents a neo-Marxist critique of the education system, views social systems as having inbuilt inequalities which must be challenged and exposed and he provides an alternative conceptual approach which presents a challenge to the functionalist perception of a meritocratic society. Greenberg (1998) cites Lareau's (1987) analysis of parental involvement which relied on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Lareau was particularly interested in the links between socio-economic status and parental involvement and compared lower and upper income schools and the levels of parent involvement.

> If upper income parents activate their resources (invest their capital), there is often an educational pay-off for their children. In other words, Lareau is arguing that lower levels of low-income parent involvement are not a result of low-income parents valuing education less than high-income families; nor is the lack of involvement a result of institutional discrimination in the form of teachers expecting and asking for less or different kinds of involvement from low income families. Rather the different levels and kinds of involvement are a result of social class inequalities. (Greenberg, 1998, p75)

Social class as discussed in the previous chapter is an advantage in complying with school standards which are dominated by middle-class values. Greenberg (1998) examines inequality in parental involvement from both a gender and a social class perspective and is particularly concerned with the success of Head Start in challenging societal inequalities. The gender dimension is important in the context that more women than men live in poverty which has resulted in the feminisation of poverty. Greenberg (1998) offers in-depth profiles of the mothers in his study because he proposes that it is important to contextualise the experience of parental involvement for these women as "such contextualisation is critical to understanding the parent involvement experiences in terms of their meaning and implications for the women and their children, as well as for the schools and society" (p82). The study found that while parents were involved it was only in non-academic ways. Greenberg (1998) found that in some cases school personnel "make the mistake of looking down on parents-particularly low income parents, seeing them as clients of services rather than as valuable resources....parent education often consisted of zealous and disrespectful

attempts to "fix" working-class parents" (p105). Greenberg (1998) highlights Bruner's(1996) contention that Head Start developed models of parental involvement that are often guilty of deficit-based assumptions about the parents and instead of overcoming 'cultural deprivation', the parents are blamed in a condescending manner for their child's educational failure. Greenberg's study would support this view.

Evans and Fuller (1999) in their study of parental involvement also set out to challenge the decontextualised presentation of parent's views of their childs' education. Instead they offer an analysis of parents views by exploring "the social contextual nature of parents' perceptions of nursery through the adoption of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory" (ibid, p155).

> Using this framework, development of perceptions at the microsystem level (the most proximal e.g. in the case of the present study, the nursery class) are considered here, together with acknowledgement of interactions with the mesosystem (home-school), the exosystem (experiences of significant others which have occurred others which have occurred, or are occurring, outside the microsystem) and the macrosystems (the broader social milieu e.g. local education authority, government, socio-cultural group). Bronfenbrenner argues for a process-person-context model to be adopted in research designs concerned with human development. (Ibid, p157)

They interpret findings of their study within both the social context of the nursery and within the broader social milieu. Their research focused on three nurseries attached to primary schools in designated 'Educational Priority Areas' in the UK. The study cites previous research by Evans (1997) which found negative attitudes towards parents from lower-socio-economic groups among early years' workers in local authority nursery classes. Evans and Fuller (1999) argue that it is mainly the voice of the white middle-class parents which is prioritised over the voices of minorities and the working-class parents. Parents are often considered a homogenous group within educational research and in particular the voice of the father is missing from research studies.

> It is perhaps professionals' notions, or expectations, that parents from lower socio-economic groups are inarticulate which prevents such parents' voices from being heard within schools. Alternatively it may be that the power

> relationships that exist within the context of the school are such that certain parents are rendered 'inarticulate'. Yet if parents are to be considered an intrinsic part of nursery education and children's first educators (Ball, 1994), it is important that the voices of all parents are heard. (Ibid, p156)

Evans and Fuller (1999) through their research assert that parents clear expression of their views on nursery education challenge the perception that parents from lower-socio-economic groups are inarticulate compared to middle-class parents. They also found that in the nursery classes where staff had higher expectations of parents they spoke more freely and did not just concentrate on academic issues. The parents in the study who admitted having had bad experiences in school were all working-class and emphasised the importance of "emotional preparation for school" (ibid, p172).

> This parents' perceptions may indicate the cultural adaptive problems which 'working-class' children experience at school. Therefore within Bronfenbrenner's (1992) paradigm, two system interactions are evident; that of the mesosystem (home-school relationships), and also the macrosystem in the form of culturally instigated belief systems. (Ibid, p172)

Evans and Fuller contend that parents in the study might have been 'renegotiating' their own negative relationships with education through their positive experiences of their children's nursery classes.

Fallon (2003) asserts that the voices of parents experiencing disadvantage "are not currently heard to any degree" (p3). It is clear from the work of Evans and Fuller that these parents have a unique and important contribution to make to research on early years' intervention programmes and the role of parents. Hannan and Chibucos (1999) discuss the importance of giving parents a voice in terms of research into welfare reforms as families who rely on welfare very often have no input into the debate and thus "policy discussions about welfare are often framed in terms which are closer to caricature than to accurate characterization (sic)" (p3).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter sought to illustrate the variety of variables and findings which have been considered in previous longitudinal research on early years' interventions and to highlight the key issues which are important in the current investigation of the Early Start programme which is the focus of this thesis. There is strong evidence that a high quality early years' intervention programme can have lasting positive benefits for the childs educational attainment and future employment status. In particular, the longitudinal evaluations from the US such as the Perry Preschool Project offer excellent validation of the importance of investment in the early years for children at-risk of future educational failure. However, this research is predominantly based on model preschool programmes with a longer duration than Early Start and with a greater investment per programme participant. While the research provides some interesting indicators in terms of possible variables to examine for this research it would be unrealistic to expect similar outcomes from Early Start as found for example in the Perry Preschool Project. O' Flaherty (1995) states that one needs to be cautious in other studies about overestimating the effect of a one year preschool programme as the majority of the programmes which received the most evaluation were high quality, well planned and had a high staff ratio. O'Flaherty (1995) also points to concerns regarding comparisons of early years' programmes across countries because of different cultural and political contexts. Fallon (2003) discusses the assertion that current intervention programmes are not up to the challenge of real change and whether it is possible to break the cycle of disadvantage in one generation and contends that "dropping into' a child's life for a year is not the answer to the complex situation which many families experience" (Fallon, p 6, 2003). Fallon (2003) who was herself an Early Start practitioner contends that for many children one year of intervention is inadequate to meet their needs.

> Every year I met children who had need, for example, support for language development at eighteen months or so. By the time they come to Early Start, their difficulties were compounded. (Fallon, 2003, p6)

Similarly Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) point out that a single intervention into a child's life is of limited value particularly if the child is living in an area with a high level of socio-economic disadvantage. Also there is a need to consider the political and social significance of intervening into children's lives. The literature in the area also strongly indicates the value of parent involvement in early years' interventions and the importance of consulting parents in any research on this topic as demonstrated by the Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 2004) and the work of Evans and Fuller (1999).

Chapter 4

Research Design

4.1 Introduction

This study aims to add to the understanding of the nature and distribution of long-term benefits from early childhood intervention programmes. It involves an in-depth study of one Early Start project which was included in the original eight projects established by the Department of Education and Science in 1994. The study examines programme outcomes from a number of perspectives by collecting the views of the three main stakeholders involved in the education process, students, parents and teachers. To contribute to understanding the impact of the programme from a community perspective interviews were also conducted with local community educators and other local early years' services. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory has been drawn on as a theoretical framework for this study. This chapter outlines the methodological procedures which were employed in this study to measure the long-term cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of participation in the Early Start preschool programme. The study employed a variety of methods of data collection and produced both quantitative and qualitative data. However initially it is necessary to explore why the methods chosen were considered to be the most appropriate methods for investigation of the research questions outlined in Chapter One, thereby achieving the objective of providing a research work which contributes to the body of research on early years' compensatory education.

4.2 Traditional research methods

Traditional social research methods have their origins in the work of French social philosopher, August Comte. In 1848 Comte introduced the *positivist method* of social research which dominated the field for over a century and began the search for answers to social questions by looking at the society itself and the structure of social relations. These new methods of social research were to be 'scientific' as Comte was averse to metaphysics and speculation in general (Sarantakos, 1998). This new approach had a profound effect on social research and new positivist methodology was introduced similar to that of the natural sciences.

> ...until the 1960s social sciences in general and sociology in particular were

> largely positivistic in theory as well as methodology, with the typical sociological research including mainly survey methods and experiments and being directed towards quantification and the use of statistics and computers. (Ibid, p4)

Cohen and Manion (1994, p13-14) outline what they describe as the four basic tenets of natural and physical science research.

1. Determinism- the ultimate aim of science is to formulate laws to account for happenings in the world.
2. Empiricism- findings should be verifiable by observation and evidence should yield strong proof of a theory or hypothesis.
3. Parsimony- phenomena should be explained in the most economical way possible.
4. Generality-findings are generalisable to the world at large.

The scientific nature of positivist inquiry and its reliance on a reductionist view of nature, which excluded notions of freedom and moral responsibility, were the precise reasons for an attack on positivism and the development of an anti-positivist movement.

4.3 Alternatives to Positivistic research methods

The dominance of positivism was challenged by a number of schools of thought, the most influential of which was symbolic interactionism. Other influential critiques of positivism came in the 1960s from Marxists, the interpretive school, the action-research group and the feminist critique of positivism. Positivism was criticised for its perception of reality, the methods employed, moral prescriptions that it made and it's reliance on mathematical formula to explain the reality. According to Cohen and Manion (1994) positivism was critiqued for its failure to take into account the human beings unique ability to interpret their own experiences and to represent themselves and in the process theorise and hypothesise social reality for themselves. Secondly, the findings of positivist social science research were accused of being so banal and trivial that they have little relevance or meaning for the lived experience of those they are intended to serve such as teachers and health care professionals. This criticism resulted in the development of two broad schools of thought concerning social research

methods. These competing methodologies have been classified by a number of authors using different terminology, three of which are outlined below.

a. Normative and interpretive paradigms

Cohen and Manion (1994) use two opposing terms to describe the positivist and anti-positivist view points. The positivist tradition is represented by the *normative paradigm* and is based on two basic concepts, firstly, that human behaviour is essentiality rule governed and that secondly, it should be investigated by the research methods of the natural sciences. The anti-positivist tradition is represented by the *interpretive paradigm* and is characterised by concern for the individual and the need to understand the subjective experience of the human being. The interpretive paradigm resists imposed external form and structure on the person and instead tries to understand the reality of their lived experience by trying to understand the person from within. While normative approaches are macro and structuralist and conducts research on society as a whole the interpretive approaches are concerned with the micro-processes and individual actor's interpretation and understanding of the world around them.

b. 'Enlightenment model' and 'engineering model'

Hammersly (2002) refers to two types of social research, firstly the 'enlightenment model' based on knowledge and ideas and secondly the 'engineering model' research which provides technical solutions to problems in a manner similar to natural science or engineering research. These models correspond closely with Cohen and Manion (1994) interpretive and normative paradigms. Hammersly (2002) refers to Habermas's (1974) theory on the engineering model as representing an ideology of technique which has been over extended from the natural sciences into the social world and has come to dominate contemporary life in modern society. Habermas sees this as a negative development which should be resisted. Hammersly (2002)claims that the 'enlightenment model' is most appropriate to the social science because it relates more closely to the nature of the knowledge that these disciplines produce which he argues hardly ever consists of scientific law which is deemed necessary for engineering research.

> Commitment to the goal of discovering laws is now widely regarded as an error deriving from a discredited positivist philosophy. What research provides instead, it is suggested, is a deeper understanding of the contexts in which action takes place, and of the action itself, or, at the very least, some specific concepts or items of information than illuminate important features of those contexts and actions. (Ibid, p38)

Problems which these practical activities face can not be solved technically with the application of scientific theory or by the deduction of rules or procedures from research findings. Hammersly (2002) suggests that education, along with social work, medicine, public policy making etc. are judgement based and reflective activities, so the adaptation of a technical approach to these subjects would be detrimental.

c. Quantitative and qualitative

The most commonly used classification of the two paradigms of social research is quantitative and qualitative research. Punch (1998) offers a simplistic distinction between the methods, quantitative research is empirical with data taking the form of numbers and qualitative is empirical research where data is not in the form of numbers. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) describe quantitative research as generally deriving from the logical-positivist philosophy which asserts that "a single objective reality exists that can be discerned through scientific research" (p19). Quantitative research attempts to be value-free and deductive and through numerical and statistical form deduce relationships between variables. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) describe qualitative research as deriving from a phenomenological philosophy "that contends that multiple realities exist and must be recognised by giving attention to group and individual constructions and perceptions of reality" (p19). Qualitative research seeks to understand social reality through induction and in doing so emphasises the process, values, contexts and interpretation in the construction of meaning and concepts. Quantitative research uses deductive methods which are predetermined and specific with numeric and deductive data, while qualitative research methods are inductive, emergent and unspecific, particularly at the beginning of the research process resulting in data which is inductive and often narrative in nature. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998)

argue that that the method and paradigm are secondary to the research question and researchers should be committed to using whatever research methods are available to answer the research question regardless of paradigm limitations.

4.4 Combining quantitative and qualitative methods

This current study combines qualitative and quantitative research method and therefore it is important to acknowledge and address the fact that each of the two research paradigms has a distinct philosophical base and any study which combines both can be open to criticism for 'diluting' either form. However, Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) claim that the combination of both methods can allow a study to use their strengths in a complementary way and generate balanced, in-depth understandings and outcomes. They also claim that a researcher who uses multi-methods is in a better position to generate credible and high-quality research. Blaxter et al. (2001) contend that quantitative and qualitative research are not in fact as distinct as their stereotypes would suggest. Quantitative methods may be mostly used for testing theory but they can also be used for exploring a new area or generating hypothesis or theory. In a similar vein, qualitative theory can be used to test a hypothesis or theory and quantitative approaches (e.g. large surveys) can be used to collect qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions. This appears to substantiate Goodwin and Goodwin's (1996) assertion that both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used effectively in the same study to produce both substantiated and illuminating data. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) argue that there has been an evolution in social science methodological approaches which has been marked by the move from mono-methods to mixed or multi-method studies. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) define a mixed method study as one which combines "quantitative and qualitative approaches into the research methodology of a single study" (p17). Smith (2006) discusses the notion of the researcher mixing research methods when there is more than one research question for which multiple research methods might suit. This approach would enhance our understanding of social reality and he claims that multiple-methods constitute a "more adequate science" (Smith, 2006, p473). In this study, the use of multiple methods attempts to enhance our understanding of the impact of the Early Start programme and

the use of survey methods for the students and in-depth questionnaires for the parents, teachers and community participants will provide different types of data on the same phenomena and will aim to compliment each other in the data collection process.

The methodology consists of data triangulation, which refers to different sources of data collection on the same phenomenon as a method of challenging and corroborating different claims. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods allows for different types of sources of data in the study design and facilitates a multiple perspective to enrich the understanding of the phenomena being studied. According to Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) combining qualitative and quantitative sources of data via triangulation allows the researcher to note convergences that can add credibility to the findings and divergences which emerge can highlight unexpected outcomes or additional areas for exploration. This approach will be used in an attempt to explore the macro world of the school and education policy and the micro world of the individual experiences within the school system. There will be an attempt to locate the micro within the macro and subjective interpretations within the wider structural frameworks. Multi-method data collection recognises that a single social reality does not exist and contributes to data corroboration, which according to Denscombe (1998) can enhance validity of results. The data collected will be predominately qualitative data but there will also be quantitative data collected in the form of Junior Certificate results and data relating to absenteeism.

4.5 Education Evaluations

While this study does not attempt to be an evaluation of the Early Start programme or curriculum it does look at the long-term consequences of a programme for participants and therefore it is necessary to discuss some aspects of evaluation as a research methodology and its relevance to the study. Worthen et al. (1987) describe the two main purposes of any type of education evaluation as a formative (.i.e. helping to improve a curriculum) or a summative purpose (i.e. deciding whether or not a curriculum should be continued). Worthen et al. (1987) further describe the six major purposes of evaluations which are applied to formal programmes as;

- A contribution to decisions about the programme installation
- A contribution to decisions about the programme continuation, expansion or accreditation
- A contribution to decisions about modifications to the programme
- Obtain evidence in support of the programme
- Obtain evidence in opposition to the programme
- A contribution to the understanding of basic psychological, social and other processes.

This study will contribute to the sixth purpose of evaluation as outlined above and contribute to the understanding of the long-term social and cognitive processes for those children involved in the programme. Worthen et al. (1987) claim that evaluations are necessary to test popular theories about the effects of education and children's development but there needs to be realism about the impact that evaluations can have and the extent of information that can be garnered from evaluations and it is counterproductive to propose them as a final solution. Instead, evaluations serve to identify strengths and weaknesses and highlight the good and bad. The authors also point out that evaluation is not just a technical procedure but can be a political activity due to the fact that information is power and those who have access to this information have an advantage. A negative impact of this interplay between politics and evaluation can be attempts to influence the effects of evaluations or avoid evaluation altogether.

4.6 Theoretical Perspective

Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) in their follow-up evaluation of the Rutland Street Project affirm that there needs to be "new more ecologically valid criteria" to provide for the measurement of outcomes of early years' intervention programmes. Similarly Sigel (2004) calls for an ecological approach to the evaluation of Head Start to acknowledge that educational intervention takes place in a developmental context which links preschool to later education. Evaluating programme outcomes from a systems theory perspective is important in building up a holistic picture of the child's social and educational development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory informs this study because it allows us to consider the long-term impact of a

preschool programme through contextualising the child's environment and community and the changes that have taken place in the ten years since their participation in the Early Start. Greene (1994) suggests this theory offers a contemporary framework which describes the child's relationships within a multi-layered social context.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) claims that the ecological environment is represented by a set of nested structures each inside the next and uses the analogy of a set of Russian dolls to illustrate his theory. The typology Bronfenbrenner uses to describe his ecological theory is the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem. The microsystems are contexts or settings where the individual is involved in face-to-face interaction with others and the environment. A critical element of the microsystem is that it is experienced. Examples include child's face-to-face interactions with important people in his/her life including parents and teachers. The mesosystem encompasses links between different elements in the microsystems where the developing person actively participates such as home and school and linkages between the microsystem and the exosystem. Greene (1994) claims that the nature of relationships between important persons in the child's life have important implications for the child. It is within this context that we can consider the need to examine the parent and staff relationship and the implications for the development of the child.

The exosystem is the setting in which the child is not directly participating but which can be influenced indirectly by for example the parent's workplace. An important aspect of these systems is whether or not they "support the parent of the child or other key people in the child's immediate world" (Greene, 1994, p362). She includes in this the low level of support given by the Irish government to the provision of childcare. This point is particularly significant to this study as Greene was writing at the same time as the Early Start project which is the focus of this study was established and she was referring to the political and official attitude to childcare during that period. The macrosystem refers to the ring consisting of "cultural specific ideologies, attitudes and beliefs that shape the cultural practices in relation to the child' (ibid, p363). In this study the context of the community is examined and influence of the community on the

child's and families social and educational outcomes is considered. Garbarino et al. (2005) contend that community influences "are important in providing open, supportive educational climates" and "the informal nature of the community and the neighbourhood are an important source of resilience for children" (p311). Contexts outside of the family can support child development and in some cases even compensate for what some parents are not be able to provide as children may benefit from "social support provided by the larger community" (ibid, p310).

Finally, the chronosystem involves "the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course and sociohistorical circumstances" (Santrock, 1994, p51). The chronosystem refers to the influence of time on development and the sociohistorical and political events that affect the lives of families and children such as legislative change and how childcare is viewed in society.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) have recently presented changes to the ecological systems theory. These changes, they claim, do not represent a paradigm shift but rather a shift in the centre of gravity within the model to make it more dynamic and complex and a move towards a bioecological model of child development which recognises the influence of the child's own biology. Gallagher (2002) states that the bioecological model is referred to as a Process–Person–Context–Time model (PPCT) and provides a theoretical basis for understanding "how particular processes, in combination with child characteristics, might differentially influence development" (p626). The bioecological model rests on the assumptions that "biological factors and evolutionary processes not only set limits on human development but also impose imperatives regarding the environmental conditions and experiences required for the realization(sic) of human potentials...to the extent that the necessary conditions and experiences are not provided, such potentials will remain unactualized (sic)" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998, p997)

> The core of the bioecological model is proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), activities in which the child interacts with persons, objects or symbols on a regular basis, such as participating in mealtime, listening to

> storybooks, and visiting relatives. The influence of proximal processes on developmental outcomes is expected to vary with characteristics of the Person (child or other), characteristics of the Context (the broader environment), and elements of Time (duration and historical setting). Gallagher (2002, p627)

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development allows for the conceptualisation of relationships among individuals across numerous forms of social organisations (e.g. families and childcare institutions) and through multiple structural influences (e.g. socio-economic factors and social policy). As the child is moving across these contexts it is necessary to examine the relationships that exist between each context e.g. the family and the childcare setting. Smith (1980) claims that Bronfenbrenner views parental participation as both "a catalyst and a 'fixative' for intervention; and the target of intervention is neither parent nor child on their own but the "parent-child system" (p31).

4.7 Ethical considerations and personal bias

This study complies with the research ethical guidelines of the Sociological Association of Ireland (2002). The guidelines state that the researcher should safeguard the interests of the research participants and recognise any conflicting concerns, which may arise. It is the responsibility of the researcher to explain to the participants in terms meaningful to the participant all aspects of the research project. Research participants should have their anonymity and privacy respected and personal information should be kept confidential. Any guarantee of anonymity or confidentiality should be strictly adhered to. In certain cases, as is the situation in the project, access to a research setting is gained through a 'gatekeeper'. In this study the school principals were the 'gatekeepers'. According to Greig et al. (1999) gatekeepers can be extremely helpful and good communication with them is a prerequisite for a successful study. An important aspect of this study was gaining the trust of participants and guaranteeing confidentiality. The anonymity of the Early Start School and the families and teachers involved in the preschool is one of the core ethical considerations in this thesis. This was a condition for participation in the project and some of the research participants mentioned that they were reluctant to participate in research which would contribute

further to the negative image of their community. In order to protect the anonymity of the Early Start project and the families and community involved none of the local reports or publications will be named in the project and the area will be given a peuesdoynm, Sunbury. The aims and objectives of the study and the purpose for which the resultant data was to be used was clarified for the research participants at the outset of the study.

An important consideration in any research is the researcher's personal bias and how this impacts on the validility of the research design and findings.

> Two important threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions are the selection of data that fit the researchers existing theory and preconceptions and the selection of the data that will 'stand out' to the researcher....Qualitative research is not primarily concerned with eliminating variance between researchers in the values and expectations that they bring to the study, but with understanding how a particular researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences. (Maxwell, J., 2005, p108)

Therefore it is important to acknowledge that my own personal and professional biography may have an influence on the focus of this thesis. My professional experience as a School Completion Programme (SCP) Co-ordinator for almost two years was one of the main motivations in pursuing this research. My role as an SCP Co-ordinator brought me in contact with primary and secondary schools, parents, students and community organisations in the urban area in which I worked. Each year I was responsible for developing an area wide integrated plan to help prevent early school leaving in the community and I feel that this role gave me an insight into the various educational institutions which operate in Irish society and the importance of developing integrated responses to educational disadvantage. This work also was helpful for gaining access to and developing a rapport with the research participants in this study because I was familiar with the organisation and structures of both primary and secondary schools and the schools and community participants within the study were familiar with and respected the work of their own local SCP. The SCP experience also emphasised for me the importance of involving community participants in the

study because I felt that the community has a very important effect on the educational outcomes of young people in the area and community participants were therefore included in the research design of the study.

4.8 Methods of data collection

4.8.1 Introduction

The methodology employed in the study is a multi-method data collection design. It involves an in-depth study of one Early Start project which was included in the original eight projects established by the Department of Education and Science in 1994. The Early Start project was located in an urban area which experiences high levels of socio-economic disadvantage (see section 5.1 for further discussion). The study examines programme outcomes from a number of perspectives by collecting the views of the three main stakeholders involved in the education process, students, parents and teachers. To contribute to understanding the impact of the programme from a community perspective interviews were also conducted with local community educators and other local early years' services.

4.8.2 Sampling Framework

The sampling technique used for this study is purposive sampling to illuminate the research questions. This study uses a multiple-group design involving one group of students who have attended the Early Start programme, Group A, while the other group who had not attended Early Start, Group B. Group A constitutes 20 children and their parents who attended Early Start in 1994-5, the first year of the programme. Group B constitutes 15 students and their parents, who enrolled in Junior Infants in 1994-5, and did not have the opportunity to enrol in Early Start. According to Anderson et al. (2003) a comparison group is necessary to attribute effects and outcomes to an intervention programme and the use of a comparison group minimises internal and external threats to validity in the research design. The key internal validity issue in this multi-group design is the degree to which groups were comparable before participation in Early Start. If they were comparable, and the only difference between them is

participation in Early Start, differences may be attributed to the programme but if they are not comparable it is difficult to assess the actual impact of the programme.

The comparison group matched the study group in terms of gender, ethnicity, same class teachers and socio-economic status of the family and would initially have met the selection criteria for participation in the Early Start programme. Due to the fact that Group A enrolled in Early Start in the same year that Group B enrolled in Junior Infants, students in Group A are approximately one year younger than students in Group B. The median age in Group A at the time of interviews (December-February in Third Year of school) was 14. The Median age for Group B at the time of interviewing (December-February in the year after completing their Junior Certificate) was 15. The Early Start programme did not start until September 1994 and students in Group A were the first participants in the programme. Group B participants would have been eligible for participation in Early Start if the programme had started a year earlier and because they were matched Group A in meeting the criteria for the Early Start programme eligibility and they experienced the same primary and secondary school education and same access to additional supports excluding Early Start they were chosen as the comparison group. Ryan et al. (1998) in their evaluation of the first eight Early Start projects also selected a comparison group who attended Junior Infants in the same year as the first Early Start participants attended Early Start and compared scholastic achievement for both groups.

> The (research) design assumes the equivalence of children who were in Junior Infants in the year in which Early Start commenced and of the Junior Infant children in subsequent years, except for the fact that the latter had experiences of Early Start. Thus, any differences in performance between the two sets of children should be attributable to Early Start experience. (Ibid, p45)

The research design for this current study is based on similar assumptions and the methods of data collection were identical for both groups.

The first step in contacting the sample in this current study was a meeting with the Primary school Principal of the school where the Early Start project was located. The

Principal agreed to facilitate contact with the former students, and participants for the study were initially contacted through the primary school with a letter sent by the Primary School Principal asking for research participants. This resulted in twelve participants agreeing to take part out of a possible 120 students who had enrolled in either Early Start or Junior Infants in that particular school in 1994-95 (see Appendix 2 for the Letter of Introduction to Parents).

The second step undertaken to contact the research sample was to meet with the local second level school Principal where the majority of students from Early Start were now attending. Again the second level school agreed to send correspondence to the parents of children who would have been enrolled in either Early Start or Junior Infants in that particular school in 1994-95. Finally three local youth and education projects in the area were contacted and asked to contact any of their participants who may have been in Early Start or Junior Infants in 1994-5. The contacts with the second level school and the youth projects proved to be a more successful strategy resulting in an additional twenty-three participants and in addition the socio-economic status of the participants became more reflective of the socio-economic status of the general population in the area in terms of employment status, housing tenure, educational attainment and family background. It also helped to address some of the literacy difficulties for parents as the youth services discussed the research verbally with parents. Many parents in the community have a more trusting relationship with the local youth services and the community groups than with the schools which is discussed further in Chapter Seven. When the parents gave their consent to participate in the research the students were asked for their own individual consent before being interviewed. The aims of the research were explained to the students in language which was appropriate to their age and understanding and they were given some time for reflection before they consented. Once permission was granted from the parents and the students, contacts were made with the students' school to interview school personnel.

4.8.3 Sample

Students and Parents (N=35)

The main sample for this study entails two groups of students and parents, Group A and Group B. Students in **Group A** participated in an Early Start Project in 1994/5 and students in **Group B** enrolled in Junior Infants in the same school in the same year. Group A consists of 20 students and Group B consists of 15 students. The mothers of all students in both Groups A and B were interviewed. Even though both parents were asked to take part in the research only one father from Group A took part in the study and he was interviewed with his wife.

Student Profiles

The overall gender ratio of the student participants in this study is roughly equal with 18 female students participating and 17 male students. In **Group A**, 12 of the 20 participants are female and in **Group B,** 6 of the 15 participants are female.

The majority (25) of the research participants attend the local secondary school which is a co-educational Community College. One student attended a mixed Gael Scoil, 8 attended single-sex schools in neighbouring areas and one participant from Group B was attending a project for Early School Leavers in the local area.

School Personnel (N=9)

Teachers from the Primary (4) and Secondary schools (4) including both the Home School Liaison Teachers were interviewed. Also the Childcare Worker from the Early Start project who worked with students in Group A while they attended Early Start in 1994/5 was interviewed.

Community Participants (N=5)

Five professionals working in educational disadvantage in the local community were interviewed to assess the contribution of Early Start to building up social and cultural capital in the local Community. Open-ended interviews were conducted with the manager of the local community crèche, the local youth services, a School Completion

Co-ordinator and two community workers involved in educational projects and youth projects in the area.

4.8.4 Data Collection

A number of previous longitudinal evaluations of early years' intervention programmes influenced the data collection methods for this study. The Rutland Street evaluation study measured cognitive achievement of participants using the results of public examinations taken by pupils in second level. This was seen as an appropriate method of measuring achievement because they are nationally recognised qualifications and student's future educational and vocational careers depend on acquisition of these qualifications (Kellaghan and Greaney 1993). Similarly the Junior Certificate results were used in this study as a standardised academic measure as the Junior Certificate is a standardised State Examination.

The Schweinhart et al. (1997) longitudinal study of the High/Scope Head Start preschool programme looked at number of themes for data collection. The first of these areas was schooling variables. The variables included highest year of schooling planned, total number of subjects failed, years of special education, intention to go to college, days absent per school year and repeating a year. They also examined variables relating to positive community activities and misconduct. The variables included volunteer work, times suspended from school, getting into a serious fight at school, used a weapon to get something from someone, took car from someone outside of your family, smoked marijuana, and used other drugs. These variables influenced the types of variables which were examined the data collection in this study.

In this study, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (see Appendix 3) is used as a measure of self-esteem for the students. The RSE is one of the most commonly used measures of self-esteem in research worldwide. Rosenberg's scale (Rosenberg 1965) was originally developed to measure adolescents' global feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is an attempt to achieve a uni-dimensional measure of global self-esteem. The original sample for the scale was of

over 5,000 students from ten randomly selected high schools in New York State. According to Rosenberg et al. (1989) self-esteem measured in the RSE is a measure of global self-esteem and is "essentially content free; that is, it excludes items dealing with specific attributes. Self-esteem, as reflected by this measure, does not imply feelings of superiority or perfection, but feelings of self-acceptance, self-respect, and generally positive self-evaluation" (p1008). The RSE includes ten self-worth statements which are scored using a four-point response ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. To score the RSE you sum the ratings assigned to all the items after reverse scoring the positively worded items. Scores range from ten to forty, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. Five of the items are worded positively and five are worded negatively. According to Rosenberg there is a link between positive global self-esteem scores and higher academic grades and also there is an inverse relationship between global self-esteem scores and juvenile delinquency. Rosenberg's wife, Dr F. Rosenberg, has given permission for the scale to be used for educational and professional research at no charge to the researcher (see Appendix 3 for the full RSE).

Rusticus et al (2004) examined the cross-national generalisabilty of RSE using samples of students from America (543 students), Canada (1443 students) and New Zealand (300 students). The study found that the results of the RSE were essentially un-dimensional and the authors conclude that RSE functioned equivalently across the three English speaking countries. While there is no specific research on the applicability of the RSE to an Irish context there is evidence that the test is suitable for measuring similar constructs across English speaking countries.

4.8.5 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with a student and a parent in an alternative school in the local area to ensure that all methods of data collection are feasible and was used to inform final questionnaire design. A pilot interview was also conducted with a teacher and a community participant in an alternative school. The pilot study found that the questionnaires were suitable for use with the wider sample and some limited changes were made to the data collection instruments. These changes mainly focused on

changing grammar in the parent and student questionnaires which contributed to the ease of their administration. Also there were some changes made to the student questionnaire in terms of font and layout which made it more assessable and readable for the students.

4.8.6 Data collection stage1: In-depth Interviews with Parents (n=35)

According to Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) interviews are especially useful for understanding the research participants' thoughts, perceptions and feelings. The interview method used in this study was the semi-structured or standardised open-ended interview. According to May (2001) open-ended questions give respondents more freedom to answer questions in a way that suits their interpretations and may offer information in areas, which have not been predicted by the researcher. The interviewer had preset questions but the responses were not categorised as they would be in a structured interview such as a structured interview using a Likart scale. The data collected was qualitative allowing research participants to describe their perceptions of Early Start in their own language. The variables measured included background family information, education variables, parents' participation in their child's education, parents' perception of the benefits of Early Start and parents' aspirations for their children. All of the parents agreed to have their interviews recorded on a Dictaphone. Evans and Fuller (1999, p159) discuss the concept of "creating an informal, non-threatening environment" when interviewing parents to facilitate parents express themselves freely and to encourage 'catalytic validility' in their responses. In acknowledgement of this each parent interview took place in a venue chosen by the parent, normally their home and lasted for between 30 minutes and 45 minutes (see appendix 4 for the Parent Questionnaire). The parent interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and later transcribed by the researcher.

4.8.7 Data collection Stage 2: Structured student interviews (n=35)

Stage two of data collection was a standardised structured interview including the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale for the Early Start participants and the comparison group. According to Punch (1998) in a structured interview the participant is "asked a series of

pre-established questions, with pre-set response categories...the interviewer attempts to play a neutral role" (p170). A small number of open-ended questions were also included in the student interview schedule. Due to the high internal validity and the ease of administration the Rosenberg's scale was used in the student questionnaire in this study. Other variables examined during the structured interview included social outcomes, social risk behaviour and life-style values, attitudes and behaviours. Interviews took place in either the school, the child's home or a local community centre according to the child's wishes. The student was given a copy of the questionnaire prior to the interview so they could reflect on their answers. The researcher conducted the interviews face-to-face with the student and recorded the data in a written format during the interview. The students were given time to review their answers at the end of the interview to reflect on the information they had shared with the researcher and to make any changes to the information. The Junior Certificate results for each student were also collected (see Appendix 5 for the Student Questionnaire). The Structured Student Interviews gathered both qualitative and quantitive types of data.

4.8.8 Data collection Stage 3: Interviews with school personnel (n=9)

Stage three of data collection was a semi-structured interview with teachers in both the primary and secondary schools where the Early Start participants and control group had attended. All interviews took place in the respective schools (see appendix 6 for the Teacher Questionnaires). The teacher interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and later transcribed by the researcher.

4.8.9 Data collection Stage 4; Interviews with community educators and local early years' services (n=5)

Five professionals working in educational disadvantage in the local community were interviewed to assess the contribution of Early Start to building up social and cultural capital in the local community. Open-ended interviews were conducted with the manager of the local Community Crèche, the local youth services, a School Completion Co-ordinator and two community workers involved in educational projects and youth projects in the area (see appendix 7 for the Community Participant Questionnaire). The

community interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and later transcribed by the researcher.

4.9 Analysis of data

4.9.1 Introduction

The information collected contains both qualitative and quantitative data. In qualitative analysis data undergoes three steps before analysis (Sarantakos, 1998). The first step is data reduction, which entails identifying the key themes in the research while summarising, coding and categorising the data. The key themes in this research are influenced by the themes identified in previous early intervention longitudinal evaluations as discussed in Chapter Three. The second stage is data organisation where data is assembled around certain themes and information is categorised in more specific terms and the results are more clearly presented. The third stage is interpretation, which involves making decisions, identifying patterns and drawing conclusions concerning the data. The analysis of the quantitative data was completed on a computer using statistical analysis software called SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

4.9.2 Type of data

Quantitative analysis of data requires that data be categorised according to scale of measurement. There are three main types of measurements of scales, which are applicable to the data collected in this project nominal, ordinal and interval. The distinction between the three different scales determines which types of statistical tests can be used for each scale.

1. Nominal- this is the simplest lowest form of data and is qualitative in nature. In order for data to be nominal categories must be mutually exclusive, distinct and uni-dimensional such as gender or occupation.
2. Ordinal- the data is categorised into groups and ranked in a continuum ranging according to magnitude. i.e. lowest to highest such as a position in a race. This is essentially a quantitative measurement and numbers have a mathematical meaning.

3. Interval scales are scales in which the number represents the magnitude of the difference. Foster (1998) uses the example of Celsius temperature to illustrate the interval scale where the difference between 10 and 20 is the same as the difference between 20 and 30. The Likart Scale is a common interval scale used in research. The final scale of measurement is the ratio scale, which is not being used in this project.

The type of scale determines the type of statistical test, which is appropriate for the data. Parametric statistical tests can be used for interval or ratio scales of measurement. For ordinal data non-parametric tests should be used. All of tests used for the data analysis in this thesis were non-parametric tests and are outlined in Appendix 8.

4.10 Methodological limitations of current research.

There are a number of limitations with the methods used in this study. The sampling method has a number of disadvantages. The sample in the study represents approximately twenty-eight per cent of the students who had enrolled in Early Start or Junior Infants in that school in 1994/5 and may not represent the full outcomes of the programme. The study also focuses on just one school and one limited geographical area which may affect the generalisabilty of the results. The sample is non-randomised because the participants chose whether or not to participate in the study. Also the sample is taken from the first year of Early Start and it is possible that as the programme has progressed over the years the curriculum and practices within the programme have evolved which might also affect the generalisabilty of the results. An additional factor related to the sample being from the first year of the Early Start programme is that the parents who chose to send their children to the programme may have been very educationally motivated because they sought a place for their children in the first year of the programme when it was new to the community. A possible limitation of RSE scale is the susceptibility of research participants to answer the questionnaire in a way they deem socially desirable. Related to this there was is also a more general issue of the reliability of students self-reporting in the study. Another possible limitation is the fact that Group A students are one year young than Group B students but as discussed in section 4.8.7 this was necessary to ensure that the

comparison group and the study group matched each other in-terms of selection criteria for Early Start. It is hoped that surveying all of the stakeholders involved will help to overcome some of these limitations, as it will allow data comparison and clarification.

4.11 Conclusion

In order to answer the research questions presented in Chapter One existing research methods were reviewed and considered. An eclectic approach was employed using both quantitative data such as Junior certificate results and qualitative methods such as attitudinal values to illuminate the research questions. The use of multi-group methods in the study adds to the validity and the accuracy of the finding and allows long-term outcomes to be attributed to participation in the Early Start programme. The next chapter presents the quantitative results of the data and particularly the findings from the student interviews.

Chapter 5

Student Interviews and Background Data

5.1 Introduction

The anonymity of the Early Start School and the families and teachers involved in the preschool is one of the core ethical considerations of this thesis. In order to protect the anonymity of the Early Start project and the families and community involved, none of the local reports or publications will be named in the project and the area will be given a pseudonym, Sunbury. This leads to a complex situation when trying to establish the socio-economic context of the school. The socio-economic profile of the community is crucial to understanding the barriers that the families face in the educational system and the general conditions of the area in which they live their daily lives. To establish a socio-economic profile for the area the most recent RAPID plan has been utilised for the community where the schools are located. RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) was launched in 2001 and is a focused government initiative to target the forty-five most disadvantaged urban areas and provincial towns in Ireland. The RAPID Plan (2002) describes the socio-economic context of the area and allows for anonymity because individual RAPID plans have been developed for all of the designated RAPID areas throughout the country.

5.2 Socio-economic profile and family background information

5.2.1 Socio-economic profile of the community and the deprivation index

According to the RAPID plan (2002) the local catchment area of the school has been overlooked by the economic boom of the late 1990s due to the systematic inadequacies present in the community and the lack of support structures to allow the community take advantage of the recent upturn in the Irish economy. The RAPID plan for the area uses the Haase Index of Relative Affluence and Deprivation, to provide a single measurement of overall deprivation for the area. The data is based on the 1996 Census of Population and the index takes into account the social class composition, the level of education, the level of unemployment and long-term unemployment, the proportion of lone parents and the age dependency rate in the area. An index score of one indicates that an area is among the most affluent ten per cent of areas, while a score of ten indicates that an area is among the most disadvantaged ten per cent (RAPID Plan, 2002,

p13). The Sunbury area where the Early Start Project is located scores a ten on the deprivation index indicating the highest level of deprivation. The 1996 Census recorded that only 0.4 per cent of people living in the Sunbury area belong to the higher professional socio-economic class compared to 37.5 per cent belonging to the semi and unskilled manual socio-economic class.

Of particular significance for this study, and influential on the deprivation index score, is the high proportion of young people under fifteen in the area leading to a high rate of age dependency. The RAPID plan indicates that thirty-four per cent of the local population are under-fifteen years of age compared to the national average of twenty-three per cent. Less than forty per cent of the local population are over thirty years of age compared to over half of the national population. This young population profile presents specific challenges in the area of childcare infrastructure and services for young people, and according to the RAPID report indicates that many families are "experiencing the greatest expenditure associated with providing for children, housing and essential costs, at a time in their lives when they can least afford it" (RAPID, 2002, p13). There are very few elderly people in the area with less than one per cent of residents being over sixty-five years compared to 11.4 per cent nationally. According to the RAPID report a picture of the area emerges with a large number of young parents with young children. Substance misuse is considered an important issue for people in the Sunbury area. The RAPID report (2002) highlights recent research from the area which found that forty-five per cent of respondents saw drug misuse as the most significant problem, while twenty-three per cent put it second. This was reiterated by almost all the adult research participants interviewed in this study.

Table 5.1; Socio-economic profile of research participants compared to local catchment area (RAPID plan 2002)

Indicators	Local School Catchment Area	Research Participants
Population	4523	35 families
Average Household size	4	5
% Households with 6 or more people	19%	12 families (34%)
% Lone Parents Households	23%	12 (34%)
% Private Housing	41%	12 families own (34%) 1 family renting (3%)
% Tenant Purchase	2%	7 families (20%)
Renting from Local Authority	58%	15 families (42%)
Unemployment	587 (13%)	10 families (29%)

5.2.2 Employment patterns in the community

Unemployment has fallen in Sunbury since the 1991 census which showed twenty-seven per cent of men and a lower proportion, seventeen per cent, of women unemployed. By 1996, 20.7 per cent of men and 15.2 per cent of women were unemployed. However, this still reflects an average unemployment rate in 1996 of 18.5 per cent in the Sunbury area, as opposed to a national figure of 14.8 per cent, a significant difference. While there has been a continuous fall in unemployment, evidence from the Local Employment Service would suggest that many of those who are long-term unemployed require very intensive support to move from unemployment to employment. More recent Department of Social and Family Affairs figures suggest an actual increase in unemployment from 437 in September 2001 to 587 in January 2003 for this particular area. There is also evidence to suggest that the gains in employment have been made in unskilled and part-time work. This is evident among the mothers in this study with the majority of them working in low-paid and unskilled work, mainly cleaning and catering jobs. This type of employment leaves them vulnerable to future fluctuations in the labour market. In this study ten (twenty-nine per

cent) of the thirty-five families interviewed are dependent on unemployment assistance which is above both the local and national average.

5.2.3 Family composition and one parent households

According to RAPID figures twenty-three per cent of the households in the area are headed by a lone parent, which is almost twice the national average and according to the RAPID plan this acts as an important indicator of deprivation. The RAPID plan presents information on the age of those who collect the Lone Parent Social Welfare Payment from the local post office in the catchment area and found that of the 579 parents collecting the allowance almost half of them are under thirty years and forty-one claimants were under age twenty. In this study, twelve (34.3per cent) of the thirty-five families are headed by a lone parent which is above the average for the area.

The median number of siblings in the participant families is three. Table 5.2 illustrates the participants place within their family. The most frequent place within the family for the study participants is oldest child and the least frequent is only child. Eivers et al. (2000) found that early school leavers tended to have a slightly higher number of siblings than non-early school leavers and those with five or more sibling were at a greater risk of early school leaving. Thirteen of the study participants have four or more siblings.

Table 5.2 Place in the family

		place in the family				Total
		oldest	middle	youngest	only child	
Participant in Early Start	yes	7	5	6	2	20
	no	8	1	5	1	15
Total		15	6	11	3	35

5.2.4 Housing

The majority of the study respondents are from the local authority housing estates which were built in Sunbury between 1977 and 1986. There has been a significant take-up of the tenant purchase/sales scheme, with almost half of the houses in the older

estates built in 1977 currently in the process of being bought. There are currently 4,000 people on the waiting list for local authority housing in the area and the RAPID plan acknowledges that as the current population is expanding there will be increasing pressure on housing supply. In this study the most frequent type of housing tenure was renting from the local authority, followed by home ownership in a private housing development, then tenant purchase and finally one family were renting privately (see table 5.1). As seen in table 5.1 the number of those renting from the local authority is below the local average and the number living in tenant purchase accommodation is well above the local average. One explanation for this is that many of the families in the study have only recently become involved in the tenant purchase scheme and this may reflect broader trends in the area towards tenant purchase.

5.2.5 Education attainment

The RAPID plan identified literacy as the single biggest education issue in their consultation process with the community and it has been identified as a priority issue for the area. Literacy issues were mentioned both in relation to children and adults. The RAPID plan claims that for some second-level schools in Sunbury, the problem is so large they would identify up to ninety per cent of their first year intake as experiencing some literacy difficulties. The issue of literacy difficulties in the area was also highlighted by almost all of the teachers interviewed in this study.

The RAPID plan points out that in 1996 in the Sunbury area, only three per cent of the population aged over fifteen and out of formal education had attained any type of third level education. The educational attainment of mothers only was collected in this study as just one father agreed to take part in the research and this information was not available for most of the fathers in the study. In relation to the importance of mothers educational attainment a recent study by Chevalier et al (2005) cited in the Irish Government's report, 'State of the Nation's Children' (2006) found that maternal educational attainment had a stronger effect than paternal educational attainment on the child's educational achievements, particularly for boys. As illustrated in Table 5.3 only three of the mothers in the study had any type of post Leaving Certificate qualification

or third level education. The number of mothers in the study who had no formal educational qualifications was much higher than both the local and national average for females.

Table 5.3 Mothers educational attainment in study

Qualifications	**Mothers' educational attainment Frequency (%)**	Females in the Sunbury 1996 Census	Females in National Census 1996
no former qualifications or primary only	24(68%)	48%	29%
Junior cert/lower secondary	5(14%)	30%	20%
Leaving cert/upper secondary	3(9%)	19%	31%
Post Leaving Certificate	2(6%)	NA	NA
Third Level	1(3%)	3%	20%
Total	**35(100%)**	100%	100%

5.2.6 Educational attainment of siblings

Sixteen of the study participants had older siblings who had left secondary school education. As can be seen from the Results in Table 5.4, three of the participants had siblings who left with no formal qualifications. The most frequent type of educational attainment for the siblings of the research participants was a Leaving Certificate.

Table 5.4 Siblings' educational attainment in Study

Qualifications	**Siblings educational attainment Frequency N=16**	National Census 1996
No former qualifications or primary only	3 (19%)	29%
Junior cert/lower secondary	1(6%)	21%
Leaving cert/upper secondary	6(38%)	30%
Post Leaving Certificate	3(19%)	NA
Third level	2(13%)	20%
Apprenticeship	1(6%)	100

5.2.7 Young people and work

The RAPID plan (2002) contends that the current economic situation and the availability of a large number of jobs is tempting young people out of the educational system and into work. This issue was also mentioned by one of the school principals interviewed in this research. The RAPID plan maintains that as students start working part-time in transition year, they are encouraged by employers to take on extra hours to the point where they are effectively doing a full time job and eventually drop-out of school. This issue was also mentioned by one of the primary school principals interviewed in this study (see section 7.2.8). At the time of data collection for this research most of the transition year students were starting to look for part-time work and work experience for transition year so it is difficult to test this hypothesis. At the time of collecting the data only five of the thirty-five students were working and only one student was working more than ten hours a week. However, as many are only starting to look for employment it is difficult to assess the long-term impact of working part-time. Lynch and Lodge (2002) found in their study of second level students in twelve schools in Ireland that forty-one per cent were working part-time throughout the year with thirty per cent of these working over ten hours a week. In their study the Leaving Certificate classes were most likely to be working. The authors also found that the responsibilities and autonomy students experienced during part-time work led to greater calls from the students for democratic engagement in the running of the schools and a strong desire for their voice to be heard within the school.

5.2.8 Childcare infrastructure in Sunbury

> Where families, such as many of those in (Sunbury), experience high rates of poverty, social welfare dependence, substance misuse, relationship breakdown, physical and mental ill-health, poor living conditions and social isolation, the chances for children starting off in life are quite predictable. As one of the main elements that will offer enhanced social, cognitive, motor and communications skills to children in their early years, good quality childcare can prepare them for school and indeed maintain progress in the face of other adverse factors. (RAPID Report, 2002, p22)

There is currently only one full-time community childcare centre in the Sunbury area which provides fifty full day / afterschool places for children. The manager of this centre was interviewed for this study and this is further discussed in section 7.4. In addition, the Health Service Executive supports a day nursery in a neighbouring area which provides part-day care for targeted families. Some sessional care is provided by a small number of other community organisations, mainly women's groups. The RAPID plan contends that there is an urgent need for additional childcare places in Sunbury and this has implications for both the needs of parents and children. The lack of childcare provision has implications for lone parents and parents of young children who wish to participate in further education or employment opportunities. Another important dimension of the lack of childcare infrastructure is the need for children to avail of good quality childcare and facilitate entry to "school without disadvantage and on an equal footing to peers" to help break the cycle of disadvantage (RAPID, 2002, p22). The RAPID plan views the provision of childcare in Sunbury as a priority for parents to undertake current opportunities for further training and employment and the absence of childcare infrastructure will undermine any future regeneration process which might take place in the area.

While the concern of this study is not with the childcare needs of working parents it is important to consider how Early Start fits into the childcare provision within the community and the links it has with local childcare providers. The Early Start project according to the school Principal has no official links with other childcare providers and no one from the Early Start project or the school has contact with the County Childcare Committee for the area. In the interview with the Manager of Community Childcare Centre in the Sunbury area it emerged that a number of children attending the centre full-time were also attending Early Start and were dropped off and collected by the childcare staff. However there were no formal links with the Early Start programme or with the primary school itself in terms of communication, consultation or transition programmes. While Group A (N=20) in this study attended Early Start the majority of Group B (N=15) also attended some type of preschool. The majority of Group B (nine) attended a local community preschool on a sessional basis and three attended a local voluntary playgroup and finally three attended no preschool.

5.3 Participation in organised activities and past-times

5.3.1 Youth Projects in Sunbury

Youth-focused projects (aimed at those aged between five and twenty years of age) in the Sunbury area include diversion projects, drugs projects, information and advice, multi-agency work with young people, outreach initiatives, training and programme development advice. It is estimated that the current facilities in the wider catchment area (including Sunbury) provide activities for up to 300 young people in thirty clubs from ages four to seventeen years out of a total of 4,300 young people in the catchment area. While there is one main purpose built youth centre in the area, most of the services are offered in premises which were not purpose built. The RAPID plan (2002) highlights the need for more purpose built facilities for young people and in particular the development of sports facilities in the area. Only nine of the students in this study were taking part in a weekly youth club (twenty-six per cent) and of these four were involved in a crime diversion youth club. There was not a strong correlation between participation in Early Start and participation in a weekly youth club.

Few of the participants were taking part in organised weekly activities. Six girls were taking part in dance classes (four from Group A and two from Group B) and one girl from Group A was taking part in drama classes. Only nine students (four from Group A and five from Group) were taking part in weekly youth clubs. Students in Group A and Group B reported that they were involved in youth clubs at primary school level but were not engaged with the local youth services at second level. Jim for example was involved in a youth club in primary school but his mother says he was never asked to join a club at second level so this is why he isn't involved. Several parents and students in the study expressed the concern that there was little to do for young people in the area and young people were neglected unless they were involved in anti-social behaviour in the community. Most parents felt there was very little for teenagers to do except 'hang-around'.

5.3.2 Sports participation

Less than half of the students in the study participated in organised sport. In total nine students were involved in soccer, three were involved in Gaelic games and two in boxing. There was no significant statistical relationship found between playing sport and participation in Early Start (the statistical score on the Mann-Whitney test was 0.254 which shows no significant relationship. In the chi-square if the significance value is equal to or less than 0.05 this indicates that there is a significant association between the two variables (Foster, 1998)). However there was a significant correlation between participation in sport and gender with boys being far more likely to be involved in sport than girls. Of the fourteen students who played sports only two of the students were female and the statistical correlation between gender and sport had a Mann-Whitney Test score of 0.002 which shows a very significant relationship. An important consideration when looking at sport participation is the lack of sporting facilities in the area. There was no Gaelic Athletic Association in the area, there was no local swimming pool and very limited access to all-weather pitches which all impinge on access to organised sports. Another interesting factor which emerged is that amongst the students who are participating in sport it can be a very serious commitment with several of the boys attending soccer trails for local clubs. Three of the boys mentioned they were considering a career in soccer and one of these boys considered it as his main career option. This point will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.6 which examines future aspirations.

5.3.3 Hobbies and past-times

Students were asked to identify their favourite past-time and the most popular past time identified was football as illustrated in table 5.5. 'Hanging-out' with friends and either playing or listening to music were also identified by the participants as favourite past-times. Lalor and Baird (2006) identify the importance of music in adolescents' lives in a recent survey of young peoples' views and needs in Co. Kildare. They identify a large number of adolescents from their research who were "actively engaged with music, drama or singing each week and listening or playing music is a very common way of coping with "feeling down" (Lalor and Baird, 2006, p8). Only two students,

both from Group A were attending music classes and two girls in Group A were also attending Speech and Drama classes on a weekly basis. One of these was attending music through school and she appeared to be the only student doing this and it was through a Gael Scoil. It was not clear if other local schools were offering these extra-curricular activities to students but none of the participants indicated that they were. As reported by Lynch (1999) involvement in extra-curricular activities in school can contribute to positive student-teacher relations and assist students' sense of belonging in the school which may help prevent early school leaving. Six children were taking part in no organised activities at all. Gender of the participants was very influential in the type of past-times they identified as being their favourite and girls were far less likely to pick a sport or computer games. In Group B, again football was the most common activity among the students in the group with five students citing it as their main past-time and two female students were involved in Irish Dancing. There was limited participation in after-school youth clubs. One girl in Group B had been targeted for an after-school activity because she was very shy in primary school. Aside from football and Irish Dancing few of the students in either group were involved in organised activities and, in general, their free time appeared to be unstructured with the males in the study being more involved organised activities.

Table 5.5 Hobbies and past-time by gender

		favourite pastime							Total
		football	hanging out with friends	computer	music	reading	dance	boxing	
Student gender	female	1	4	0	6	4	3	0	18
	male	10	3	2	1	0	0	1	17
Total		11	7	2	7	4	3	1	35

Students were asked how much time they spent socialising with their friends and it emerged that Group B spent more time with their peer group on a daily basis compared to Group A. Most students had daily contact with their peer group, eleven (seventy-three per cent) of Group B students were spending between two and four hours daily with them compared to seven (thirty-five per cent) Group A students. Group A students (twenty-five per cent) were slightly more likely than Group B (twenty per cent) to only spend time with their friends at the weekend.

Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) in their study did find significant differences in terms of leisure activities between the groups (see section 3.5.1) and in particular their Experimental group were more likely to have a hobby than the Control group. This study found that Group A were only slightly more likely to be involved in an organised activity with gender rather than participation in Early Start being the greatest influencing factor on whether or not students had a hobby.

5.3.4 TV and Computers

Students were asked about the amount of time they spent watching television and playing computer games. Only one student from each group stated that they did not watch any television while the majority (thirteen students from Group A (sixty-five per cent) and ten from Group B (sixty-seven per cent)) stated that they watched between one and two hours per day. Overall, there was very little difference between Groups A and Groups B in the amount of time they spent watching television. The percentage of students who spent three to four hours a day watching television was again very similar with six students (thirty per cent) from Group A and four students (twenty-six per cent) from Group B watching for this length of time daily. There was no significant statistical relationship between gender and length of time spent watching television (using the non-parametric Pearsons Correlation the sig. 2-tailed was 0.53).

The majority of students (ten from Group A and ten from Group B) did not play computer games on weekly basis. Those who did play computer games usually played for between two and three hours a week. Using the non-parametric Pearsons Correlation no significant relationship emerged between length of time playing computer games and participation in Early Start (Sig. 2-tailed was 0.440). A significant relationship did emerge between playing computer games and gender with boys far more likely to play a computer game than the female students (sig. 2-tailed was 0.001).

5.3.5 Students reading habits

Students were asked about their reading habits and, excluding school books, what types of material were they were reading. Most students were engaged in some form of regular reading which is illustrated in Table 5.6. The most common reading materials cited were newspapers. Five of the students were reading weekly magazines and one student was reading comics. Only three students claimed they were not engaged in any form of reading and two of these were from Group B.

Nine students were reading books at the time of the study and a slightly higher percentage from Group A were reading books when compared to Group B indicating some differences in cultural activities. Students were also asked if they had read a non-school book in the last three months prior to the study and nineteen of the thirty-five students had done so with again a slightly higher percentage from Group A (sixty per cent) reading a book than Group B (forty-seven per cent). Kellaghan and Greaney (1993) found no significant differences in terms of leisure reading patterns between the groups in the Rutland Street study but they did find that the experimental group were more likely to have read a book in the previous three months which concurs with this research. The type of books read by participants in this research were different for both groups with the majority of Group A (ten of the twelve students) identifying adolescent fiction books (mainly Harry Potter) and in Group B all of the seven students who had read a book had read adult fiction (mainly Celia Ahearn) or a true story. Three of the students in Group B had read the same true story which was a recent book about a gangland figure from the Sunbury area, who had been killed in a gangland shooting. The students could relate to places and people within the book and the students were very interested in discussing the book with the interviewer.

Students were asked how much time they spent reading on a weekly basis and the majority (seventy-five per cent of Group A and seventy-three per cent of Group B) spent between zero and one hour per week reading. Only three students (one from Group A and two students from Group B) read on a nightly basis. There was a significant statistical relationship between the time spent reading and gender with girls

engaged in reading on a more frequent basis (using the non-parametric Pearsons Correlation the sig. 2-tailed was 0.013 which is statistically significant). There were inconsistent reading habits for most students in the study and reading was not a regular activity for many of the students.

Table 5.6 Types of Reading Materials

participant in early start * type of reading material Crosstabulation

Count

		type of reading material						
		comic	newspaper-general	newspaper sports/tv section	none	books	weekly magazine	Total
participant in early start	yes	1	3	3	1	6	4	18
	no	0	4	4	2	3	1	14
Total		1	7	7	3	9	5	32

5.3.6 Summary of involvement in organised activities

Students were asked to identify their favourite past-time and the most popular past-time identified was football, followed by hanging out with friends and either playing or listening to music. Only two students, both from Group A, were attending music classes and two girls in Group A were also attending Speech and Drama classes on a weekly basis. One of these was attending music through school and she appeared to be the only student doing this and it was through a Gael Scoil. It was not clear if other schools were offering this to students. Six children were taking part in no organised activities at all. As reported by Lynch (1999) involvement in extra-curricular activities in school can contribute to positive student-teacher relations and assist students' sense of belonging in the school which may help prevent early school leaving. Only nine of the students in this study were taking part in a weekly youth club (twenty-six percent) and four of these were involved in a crime diversion youth club. There was not a strong statistical correlation between participation in Early Start and participation in a weekly youth club. Also there were inconsistent reading patterns among both groups in the study and gender appeared to have a more significant impact than participation in

Early Start on reading activity. However, three students, all from Group B were not engaged in any type of regular reading activity.

5.4 Educational profile of participants

5.4.1 Special needs provision

In Group A, four students in the Early Start group were identified as having specific learning needs and in Group B, three students were identified as having specific learning needs (see sections 6.4 and 6.10 for further discussion). Campbell and Ramey (1994) in their evaluation of the Carolina Abecedarian Project found that children who had received preschool treatment were less likely to be placed in special education. However, this study did not find a significant statistical relationship between participation in Early Start and placement in special education or learning support. This is similar to Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) who also found that placement in special education was not significantly different for the study or comparison groups. However participation in Early Start was identified by teachers and parents in the study as contributing to earlier identification of speech and language difficulties (see section 6.2).

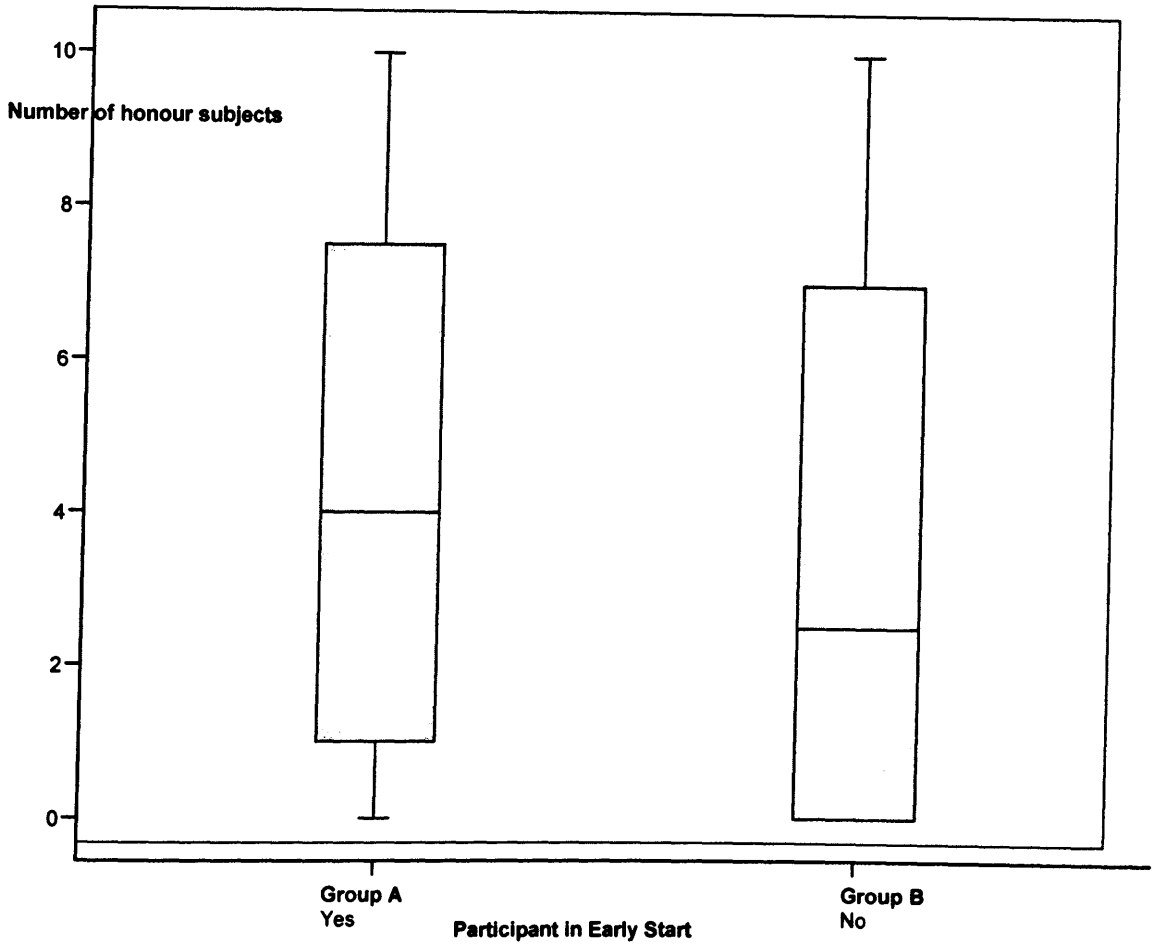
5.4.2 Junior Certificate Type

In addition to the traditional Junior Certificate Programme, offered by all schools, a more recent applied version called the Junior Certificate for Schools Programme (JCSP) has been established. The JCSP is designed for students deemed at-risk of early school leaving who would benefit from special support to help them complete their Junior Certificate. Students taking the Junior Certificate School Examination study the normal Junior Certificate syllabus and also receive an individualised record of their achievement in addition to the Junior Certificate. In Group A, the majority of students were participating in the traditional Junior Certificate (seventeen students) while in Group B, there was a much smaller majority participating in the traditional Junior Certificate (eight students participating in the Junior Certificate Programme, six in the JCSP and one student was attending an out of school project).

5.4.3 Number of honours subjects taken for Junior Certificate

Students studied up to ten subjects for their Junior Certificate including the core subjects, Irish, Maths and English. A number of students were exempt from Irish because they had special needs including dyslexia. The mean number of honours subjects for Group B is 3.5 and the median is 2.5. The mean number of honours subjects for Group A is 4.5 and the median is four. The box-plot below (Table 5.7) illustrates the distribution of honours subject in each group. In the box-plot, above the line in the box represents the median number of honours subjects for each group. The un-shaded line demonstrates the lowest and the highest values in each group. The values for Group B are bunched at the lower end of box plot indicating fewer honours subjects. Group B students were more likely to not take any honours subjects in their Junior Certificate exams (five students in Group B did no honours subjects compared to two in Group A). Using Spearman Rho to examine the relationship between participation in Early Start and the number of honours subjects taken at Junior Certificate level there was no overall statistical significance (Sig. (2-tailed) was 0.28). However there are significant statistical differences in particular subjects such as Maths which is discussed in section 5.4.4.

Table 5.7 Distribution of honours Subjects
Box plot – Inter-quartile range of Honours Subjects in the Junior Certificate



5.4.4 Junior Certificate Results

In Group A (N=20) all students completed their Junior Certificate Exams and in Group B (N=15) fourteen of the students completed their Junior Certificate Exams. The results for the seven main subjects taken, including Maths and English which are compulsory subjects, are given in Table 5.8. Using the Junior Certificate Results of Group A and Group B, a number of cross-tabulations were carried out to test the nature of the relationship between participation in Early Start and academic outcomes (refer to Appendix nine, Table three for results). Using a non-parametric test from SPSS, Spearman's Rho, a positive correlation emerges between participation in Early Start and higher exam marks in the Junior Certificate Maths exam (P value was 0.043). A positive correlation also emerges between participation in Early Start and higher

achievements in Science in the Junior Certificate exams (P value was 0.020). A higher percentage of Group A students (twenty-five per cent) did honours level Maths for their Junior Certificate compared to Group B (seven per cent). Additionally, a higher percentage of Group B (forty per cent) sat the foundation level Maths paper for their Junior Certificate exam compared to Group A (twenty per cent).

Mullan and Travers (2007) maintain that the majority children at-risk of failure in maths are from areas of high socio-economic disadvantage and that there is a need for early intervention in mathematics as research suggests that there can be a "three-year gap in achievement levels in early numeracy by the time a child enters formal education" (p229). They contend that in Designated Disadvantaged Schools in Ireland there is limited learning support in mathematics available as the focus of the majority of learning support is on improving literacy skills and there is an inequality in access to learning support in Maths. A possible explanation for the positive correlation between participation in Early Start and improved results in Maths may be that the Early Start environment provided an early introduction to mathematical concepts or 'number sense' which was beneficial to the participants when they started formal education. Dunphy (2007) contends that developing 'number sense' for young children is an important factor in later mathematical attainment. She states that while young children "could not yet be said to be numerate in the conventional sense, they are, nevertheless, in the process of developing an understanding of some of the ways in which numbers can be used in every day activity" (ibid, p7). Dunphy is particularly influenced by the work of Grenno (1991) who asserts that 'number sense' in young children is bound up in the child's everyday experiences and it is "through participation in numerical experiences that young children come to appreciate a range of possibilities for the use of numbers"(p9). Therefore the development of 'number sense' during participation in Early Start may have given Group A an advantage over Group B when they entered formal school particularly if we consider Mullan's and Traver's assertion that there is little availability of learning support in Maths in Designated Disadvantaged Schools. This finding might indicate that the curriculum of the Early Start programme may have influenced the development of 'number sense' for the students in the programme,

particularly as the curricular guidelines emphasises the active involvement of the child in their learning and the role of adults in structuring childrens learning contexts. This development of 'number sense' may also have been beneficial to Group A in their Junior Certificate attainment in Science since some aspects of the Maths and Sciences curriculum are closely related. The 'State of the Nation's Children' (2006) report cites a recent OECD-PISA study which found that there was a correlation between social class in Ireland and reading and mathematics literacy, with children from the lowest social class category achieving a lower mean score of 470.8 in mathematical literacy, while the mean score achieved by children from the highest social class category was 542.5.

Table 5.8 Junior Certificate Results

Subject	Level / Grade	H A	H B	H C	H D	Total hons	O A	O B	O C	O D	O F	Total Ord	F A	F B	F C	F F	Total Found
Maths	Group A (N=20)	0	2	1	2	5	2	4	2	2	1	11	1	2	1	0	4
	Group B (N=14*)	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	3	2	0	7	0	3	3	0	6
Science	Group A	1	5	3	0	8	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
	Group B	0	1	2	3	6	0	3	2	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0
English	Group A	1	1	6	1	9	1	2	4	2	0	9	0	1	1	0	2
	Group B	1	1	1	2	5	0	3	2	1	0	6	1	1	1	0	2
French	Group A	0	3	1	5	9	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Group B	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Irish	Group A	1	1	1	1	4	1	3	2	2	1	9	0	1	3	0	4
	Group B	0	0	1	2	3	0	0	0	5	0	5	2	2	0	1	5
History	Group A	1	1	3	6	11	0	4	2	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
	Group B	0	1	4	1	6	0	2	3	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
Geog-ropy	Group A	0	2	7	2	11	1	3	2	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
	Group B	0	0	5	2	9	0	1	2	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	0

H=higher level O=Ordinary level F=Foundation Level

No significant relationship emerges between participation in Early Start and the participants' exam results in other Junior Certificate subjects such as English and Irish. While there was no positive correlation between higher results in Junior Certificate French and participation in Early Start, there was a higher percentage of students from Group A (fifty per cent) compared to Group B (thirty-three per cent) studying French which is the only second language any of the participants were studying. The National University of Ireland requires English, Irish (with some exemptions for specific circumstances and learning needs) and another language as part of their entry requirements with special provisions for students with dyslexia. The fact that less than half of all the study participants have a third language would indicate that direct entry to university is not a viable option or choice for them in the future and this may restrict their choices after they complete school.

5.4.5 Attitude to school

According to Kellaghan (2001) social is located in the family and the child's local community and refers to issues such as conduct (including moral development), identity (including self-concept), social behaviour, attitudes and motivation. This definition of social capital then requires that a study looking at the contribution of Early Start to developing social and cultural capital would investigate the attitudes of students to their current school experiences. Participants in this study were asked to indicate using a Likart Scale how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements relating to their experiences at school. The statements and the results are given in table 5.9 below. There were no significant statistical differences between respondents from Group A and Group B in how they answered these questions and participation in Early Start did not seem to affect the respondents' attitude as measured in this section of the questionnaire. Further analysis of the data revealed statistically significant relationships between specific issues raised in the questionnaire (See Appendix 9, Table 1 for non-parametric bivarate correlation analysis using Spearman's rho). All students viewed education as an important asset for teenagers in the area to 'get ahead' in life. Unsurprisingly, students who felt that "most classes and subjects in school are boring" were more likely to think that "homework is a waste of time" and students who felt that "most teachers

care about students as individuals" were more likely to think that "students have a say in how the school is run". Students who felt that they generally liked school were more likely to agree with the statements "most teachers think I am a good student" and view parental involvement as positive. Students who felt more positive towards aspects of school such as parent involvement and student participation were more likely to feel more positive in general towards school. The influence of gender differences in attitude to school was also analysed using Spearman's rho and no significant statistical relationships were found. In relation to student voice within the school, ten students from Group A and six students from Group B felt that students have no "say in how this school is run" and there appears to be a desire for greater student participation in school decisions. Lynch and Lodge (2002) found in their research that fifty per cent of second level students wanted more student consultation in the running of the school and increased democratic involvement in decisions which affect them. Downes et al. (2007) contend that lack of student autonomy within schools is recognised as damaging to students' motivation.

Table 5.9 Measuring Attitudes to Schooling Factors

Attitude to School	Participant in early Start	strongly agree	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
A. Most of the classes and subjects in your school boring	Group A (n=20)	2	6	6	3	6
	Group B (n=14*)	1	5	1	6	1
B. Most teachers care about students as individuals	Group A (n=20)	0	11	3	4	2
	Group B (n=14)	1	9	3	0	1
C. There is good discipline at my school	Group A (n=20)	3	14	2	1	0
	Group B (n=14)	1	12	0	1	0
D. Most teachers think I am a good student	Group A (n=20)	5	14	1	0	0
	Group B (n=14)	2	8	2	1	1
E. In general I like school a lot	Group A (n=20)	2	6	6	5	1
	Group B (n=14)	1	5	6	1	1
F. It is good for students and teachers if parents get involved in school	Group A (n=20)	1	8	6	3	2
	Group B (n=14)	4	6	2	2	0
G. I get embarrassed if my parents get involved	Group A (n=20)	3	4	6	5	2
	Group B (n=14)	2	4	3	3	2
H. I like to discuss homework problems with my parents	Group A (n=20)	2	7	6	2	3
	Group B (n=14)	3	3	4	3	1
I. Homework is a waste of time	Group A (n=20	1	1	3	9	6
	Group B (n=14)	1	3	1	6	3
J. I have so much work to do at home that i don't have time to do my homework	Group A (n=20)	0	1	2	13	4
	Group B (n=14)	0	1	1	11	1
K I learn more useful things from friends and relations than i do in school	Group A (n=20)	1	3	3	9	4
	Group B (n=14)	0	2	2	10	0
L. Getting a good education is the best way to get ahead for teenagers in area	Group A (n=20)	9	11	0	0	0
	Group B (n=14)	7	7	0	0	0
M. I get on with most people in my class	Group A (n=20)	11	8	0	1	0
	Group B (n=14)	7	6	1	0	0
N. I think the JC is important for my future	Group A (n=20)	10	8	0	2	0
	Group B (n=14)	9	2	2	0	1
O. Students have a say in how this school is run	Group A (n=20)	1	7	2	4	6
	Group B (n=14)	0	4	4	6	0

The student in Group B who was not attending mainstream education did not answer these questions.

5.4.6 Students' self perception of intelligence and ability

Participants were asked questions relating to their perception of their own intelligence and ability and to rate themselves in the activities listed in table 5.10. Using the Mann U Whitney test, Group A perceived themselves as being better at Maths than Group B (Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) was 0.039) and as discussed in section 5.4.4 in a cross tabulation of their Junior Certificate Maths Results, Group A emerge with higher results in Maths. Table 5.8 illustrates the distribution of Maths results for both groups. This was the only subject or area where there was a significant difference for Groups A and Group B in the students' self-perception of their intelligence or abilities. A second analysis was carried out using gender as the grouping variable and this analysis found that girls perceived themselves to be better at drama and music and boys were likely to perceive themselves as 'very good' at sports (see Appendix 9, Table 2 for analysis). This is not surprising given than more boys than girls were participating in sports as discussed in Section 5.3.2.

Table 5.10 Self-perception of intelligence and ability

	Participant in early Start	Not Good	Moderate	Very Good	Not applicable
Maths	Group A (N=20)	2	10	8	0
	Group B (N=14*)	5	7	2	0
Science	Group A	2	4	10	4
	Group B	3	4	6	1
English	Group A	2	5	13	0
	Group B	1	6	7	0
Sport	Group A	3	7	10	0
	Group B	0	7	7	0
Drama	Group A	5	7	5	3
	Group B	5	3	2	4
Music	Group A	5	5	5	5
	Group B	6	1	4	3
Making Friends	Group A	0	3	17	0
	Group B	0	3	11	0

* The student in Group B who was not attending mainstream education did not answer these questions.

5.4.7 Study Skills

Participants were asked how much time they spent doing their homework while studying for their Junior Certificate and the results are give in Table 5.11. There were no significant statistical differences found between Group A and Group B in terms of how long they spent doing their homework (using Spearman's rho Sig. (2-tailed) was 0.152).

Table 5.11 Length of time doing homework during Junior Certificate Year

		How much time do you spend doing home work?				
		none	less than 1 hour per day	2-3 hours per day	over 3 hours a day	Total
participant in Early Start	yes	2	6	11	1	20
	no	1	9	5	0	15
Total		3	15	16	1	35

Few of the students from either group participated in the supervised study programmes for Junior Certificate pupils offered by their schools. In Group A, only three students participated and in Group B only four participated so students from Group B were slightly more likely to participate in supervised study but there was no significant statistical correlation for either group. Homework clubs and supervised study were not always perceived as helpful by all of the students. One student for example had recently left supervised study because he could not concentrate in the study room because he found the behaviour of other students distracting.

5.4.8 Absenteeism

Students were asked about their rate of absenteeism from school and the results are presented in Table 5.14. While sixteen of the study participants were infrequently absent from school over half of the participants were absent on at least a monthly basis. Most significantly, there were six students in the study who were absent at least once a week and of these five were from Group B. However, all of these five students were also in Transition Year and there may be less of an onus on them to attend school on a daily basis because of the more relaxed nature of Transition Year compared to third year. Frequent absenteeism is viewed as a risk factor associated with early school leaving. All the students in the study claimed their parents were aware of their absences from school. One of the mothers in the study had made a court appearance

while her child was in sixth class in Primary school because of his absenteeism (see Section 6.11.3). This child has since left the school system and is now attending an Early School Leavers project. Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) found no difference in absenteeism at age eight years between the groups in their study but there was considerable variation found within each group and this study finds that programme participation appears to have had a limited impact on absenteeism.

Table 5.12 Rate of absenteeism

		How often are you absent from school?					
		more than twice a week	once a week	monthly	5-6 times per year	rarely or never	Total
participant in Early Start	yes	0	1	9	4	6	20
	no	1	4	4	2	4	15
Total		1	5	13	6	10	35

5.4.9 School Discipline

Students were asked about their behaviour in school and how frequently they found themselves in trouble with their teachers. In Group A (N=20) fourteen students rarely found themselves in trouble and nine students in Group B reported that they were rarely in trouble with their teachers. Two students from each group felt they were in trouble sometimes and four students from Group A and four students from Group B felt they were in trouble very often. The most common reasons students identified for getting into trouble were talking in class followed by messing or fighting in school. Also not doing their homework was cited as a common reason and one student from each group felt that the reason they were in trouble was because teachers did not like them. Students were also asked if they were suspended from school and thirteen students (seven from Group A and six from Group B) had been suspended. There was no significant statistical relationship between participation in Early Start and suspension from school but there was a correlation between suspension and a higher rate of absenteeism (using a non-parametric test Spearman's Rho the P value was 0.012 see Appendix 9, Table 8).

5.4.10 Teachers' rating of students' performance (non-special needs students)

Second level teachers were asked to rate the students from groups A and B in terms of social skills and approaches to learning and other related categories. In Group A, results from second level teachers were returned for seventeen of the twenty students and in Group B teachers comments were returned for thirteen of the fifteen students. The results of these are in Tables 5.13 and 5.14. The students with the most serious learning difficulties are not included as teachers' comments relating to these students are discussed separately along with the student profiles in sections 6. 4 and 6.10. In all cases, the teachers who returned comments were the students Year Heads and had a good overview of the students' academic performance in the school and a personal knowledge of the student. All of these teachers had also taught the students during their time in the second level school. In relation to approaches to learning, there were very few differences between the groups. In relation to social skills, the students in Group A were rated slightly higher by the teachers and none of the teachers rated the students from Group A as having poor social skills. In comparison, two students from Group B were rated as having poor social skills. In relation to goal setting a higher percentage of Group A were rated as having 'good' goal setting ability. A slightly higher percentage of the Group B were rated by teachers as having 'poor' levels of home support. Also in relation to active parent involvement Group A were rated by the teachers as being more actively involved. However, for both groups the level of 'good' active involvement was not very high. In relation to school attendance, Group A were rated as slightly better by teachers but since this is an exam year and many of the students in Group B were in Transition Year this might have an impact on attendance and absenteeism. There were high levels of punctuality reported for both groups but two students from Group A were rated as 'poor' for punctuality. Classroom behaviour was also rated similarly for both groups. This is similar to the findings of Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) who found only slight differences in classroom behaviour among research participants in their evaluation of the Rutland Street Project. In this current study, the two main areas where differences emerged between the groups were Group A being rated more positively by their teachers in terms of social skills with more of

them being rated as 'good' and also a larger percentage of Group A were rated as 'good' at setting goals.

Table 5.13 Group A: Early Start group (N=15 students)

Teachers rating of students;	poor	average	good
Approach to learning	20%	27%	53%
Social Skills	0	53%	47%
Problem Solving	13%	47%	40%
Goal setting	33%	27%	40%
Home support	7%	40%	53%
Attendance	7%	20%	73%
Punctuality	13%	7%	80%
Classroom Behaviour	13%	7%	80%
Active Parental involvement	0	66%	33%

Table 5.14 Group B: Non Early Start group (N=12 students)

Teachers rating of students;	poor	average	good
Approach to learning	17%	33%	50%
Social Skills	17%	50%	33%
Problem Solving	8%	59%	33%
Goal setting	25%	59%	17%
Home support	17%	33%	50%
Attendance	0	33%	66%
Punctuality	0	8%	92%
Classroom Behaviour	8%	25%	66%
Active Parental involvement	41%	33%	25%

5.5 Attitude and self-esteem

5.5.1 Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem (RSE) scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to measure the students' self-esteem in this study. According to Downes et al. (2007) Rosenberg "describes self-esteem as feeling that you are 'good enough'" and self-esteem is associated with school achievement (p410). Rosenberg's Self-Esteem (RSE) scale is a ten-item self-report measure of global self-esteem (see section 4.9.4). Items are rated from strongly disagree (one) to strongly agree (four) (see Table 5.15 for results). Scores range from ten to forty, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem. Five of the items are worded positively and five are worded negatively. All the students were given an individual score based on their responses to the scale. The mean score was thirty-two, the minimum score was twenty-five and the maximum was thirty-nine. An analysis of the data was carried out using Spearman's rho, a non-parametric test, which found no correlation between the RSE score and participation in Early Start (Value of P was 0.099) (See Appendix 9, Table 4). Further analysis found no correlation between the RSE score and gender (Value of P was 0.096). Using Spearman's rho there was a correlation between the RSE score and whether or not the students felt that "most teachers think I am a good student" and students with a higher score on the RSE scale tended to believe that "most teachers think I am a good student" (value of P was 0.017). There was no significant correlation between RSE score and being in trouble with the Gardai (value of P was 0.578) and there was no correlation between RSE score and taking illegal drugs (value of P was 0.72). While Rosenberg et al. (1989) contend that there is some evidence of a link between juvenile delinquency and a lower RSE score it is not evident in this study.

Table 5.15 Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

Attitude to School	Participant in Early Start	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
I feel I am as good as anyone else	Group A (N=20)	9	11	0	0
	Group B (N=14*)	2	11	1	0
I feel I have a number of good qualities	Group A	7	13	0	0
	Group B	3	11	0	0
I am inclined to feel I am a failure	Group A	1	1	7	11
	Group B	0	1	10	3
I am able to do things as well as most other people	Group A	9	10	0	1
	Group B	2	10	2	0
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	Group A	1	4	9	6
	Group B	0	0	12	2
I take a positive attitude towards myself	Group A	10	10	0	0
	Group B	4	10	0	0
On the whole I am satisfied with myself	Group A	8	11	1	0
	Group B	4	8	2	0
I wish I had more Respect for myself	Group A	0	6	8	6
	Group B	3	4	6	1
I certainly feel useless at times	Group A	0	4	10	6
	Group B	0	7	6	1
At times i think i am no good at all	Group A	0	5	8	7
	Group B	1	3	4	6

Findings from parents interviews in this study, which are further discussed in the next chapter, indicate that mothers perceive their children as more confident if they are involved in extra-curricular activities and have a number of close friends. Girls seem to be perceived by their mothers as having slightly higher self-esteem then boys and mothers in the study seem to equate self-esteem with good communication between parent and children, also girls are seen as more communicative than boys.

5.5.2 Students' self-perception of their problem solving ability

Students were asked questions relating to their self-perception of their problem solving abilities and the results are illustrated in table 5.16. Most of the students from both

groups felt that they could figure out problems and were positive about their ability to bounce back from a bad experience. There was no significant statistical relationship between the students' self-perception of their problem solving ability and participation in Early Start (see results in Appendix 9, Table 5).

Table 5.16 Self perception problem solving ability

	Participant in Early Start	Almost never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Almost Always
1. How good are you at figuring out your problems and plan how to solve them	Yes (N=20)	0	1	8	7	4
	No (N=14)	0	2	6	4	2
2. How good are you at bouncing back quickly from bad experiences	Yes	0	2	4	8	6
	No	0	0	3	7	4
3. How good are you at leaning from your mistakes	Yes	0	1	2	9	8
	No	2	0	2	5	5
4. How often do you wish you were different	Yes	8	6	4	2	0
	No	4	5	4	1	0
5. Do you have a hard time getting things done	Yes	3	6	8	2	1
	No	2	3	7	0	2

5.6 Future aspirations

5.6.1 Students' future educational aspirations

Students were asked to identify their future educational aspirations which are detailed below in table 5.17. Overall, ten students identified third level college degree courses they would like to attend. Three students felt the Junior Certificate was their ultimate educational aspiration and nine felt they would end their formal education after completing their Leaving Certificate. In a follow-up with the students since completing their Junior Certificate exams, two of these students (one from Group A and one from Group B) have indeed left the education system and one has remained in school.

There was no significant statistical correlation between participation in Early Start and future educational aspirations (using a non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test the P value

was 0.191) but, as discussed in the next section, a higher percentage of Group A aspired to professions which required third level qualifications. There was a significant statistical relationship between gender and educational aspirations with a greater number of girls (eight) intending to pursue third level education compared to boys (two) (using a non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test the P value was 0.034). Also, both students who identified pursuing post-graduate qualifications were female, while all the students who identified their Junior Certificate as their only educational aspiration were male.

Table 5.17 Future educational aspirations
Participant in Early Start * educational aspirations Crosstabulation

Count

		educational aspirations							Total
		Junior cert	leaving cert	1 year PLC	Apprentic e-ship	degree course	master level	don't know	
participant in Early Start	yes	2	4	3	1	5	2	3	20
	no	1	5	2	4	3	0	0	15
Total		3	9	5	5	8	2	3	35

5.6.2 Future Professional aspirations

Students identified a number of careers they intended pursuing after they finished formal education (see table 5.18). A slightly higher percentage of Group A (thirty-five per cent) identified careers which involved a third level qualification compared to Group B (twenty-five per cent) and as discussed in the previous paragraph these students were predominantly female. A greater number of Group B students identified a trade (i.e. carpenter, mechanic etc.) as their future career aspiration and this was the most common career identified by this group. Overall, eight students had not decided what career they wanted to pursue. This may not be overly significant considering the students were aged between fourteen and sixteen years at the time of the interviews. There was no significant statistical correlation between participation in Early Start and future professional aspirations (using a non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test the P value was 0.121).

Table 5.18 Future Professional Aspirations

Participant in Early Start * what would you like to do after school Crosstabulation

Count

		What would you like to do after school?													
		Trade- i.e. mechanic	nurse	Teach-er	Hair or beauty	engineer	pilot	arts/ music	chef	Professional sports	Accountant	vet	computers	child care	don't know
participant in Early Start	Yes N= 20	2	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	5
	No N= 15	6	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Total		8	1	3	4	0	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	7

5.6.3 Life as an adult

Students were asked questions relating to their views on their future life as an adult. In particular they were asked about a range of issues and to evaluate how important they felt these issues would be to them when they became adults (see Table 5.19). The issue which the majority of students from both Group A and Group B identified as being very important to them was getting a well-paid job. Looking after their parents was also identified as something which was very important to them and paying taxes and buying a house were also scored very highly. Going to mass and voting in elections were the issues that were identified as least important by many of the students. There were no significant statistical relationships between responses to these questions and participation in Early Start (see Appendix 9, Table 7). However there were some correlations between responses to individual questions, such as students who identified having children as very important were also more likely to identify getting married and volunteering in their community as very important to them. Also, those who identified volunteering as important were more likely to identify other civic duties such as voting in elections and paying taxes as being very important to them.

Table 5.19 Life as an adult
How important do think the following things will be for you in the future when you are an adult?

	Participant in Early Start	Very important To me	Important	Not important to me at all
Getting Married	Yes(N=20)	7	11	2
	No (N=14)	4	4	6
Going to mass	Yes(N=20)	2	12	6
	No (N=14)	0	7	7
Having children	Yes(N=20)	7	10	3
	No (N=14)	3	9	2
Looking after my parents	Yes(N=20)	11	8	1
	No (N=14)	12	2	0
Buying a house	Yes(N=20)	10	8	2
	No (N=14)	6	8	0
Paying tax	Yes(N=20)	10	6	4
	No (N=14)	6	6	2
Voting in the elections	Yes(N=20)	8	5	7
	No (N=14)	4	5	5
Getting a well-paid job	Yes(N=20)	15	5	0
	No (N=14)	13	1	0
Helping others in your community/ volunteer	Yes(N=20)	4	11	5
	No (N=14)	1	11	2

Students were asked to identify what the best thing about being an adult in the future would be and the majority (nine from Group A and four from Group B) identified having freedom followed by having a job (seven from Group A and three from Group B). Other issues identified by a small number of students included owning a car, being in a relationship and having children. There was no significant statistical difference between the responses of Group A and Group B to this question. Students were also asked to identify issues which they felt would be difficult for them when they are adults. The most frequent response to this question was the responsibilities associated with adulthood (six from Group A and ten from Group B). Also having your own job and having children were identified by seven students from Group A and three from Group B as something which would be difficult and again this is related to the perceived responsibilities of being an adult. A small number of students could not identify any particular issues which they felt would be challenging for them as adults

and again there were no significant statistical differences in the responses to this question between Group A and Group B.

5.6.4 Students' perception of their parents' aspirations for them.

Students were asked questions relating to their perception of their parents' aspirations for them and their parents' attitudes to aspects of the students' lives. The majority of students felt that their parents wanted them to do well in school exams and to do their Leaving Certificate (see Table 5.20). The main differences emerging between Group A and Group B were in terms of the students' perception of their parents' attitude to college. Students from Group A were far more likely to perceive college attendance as something which was very important to their parents. There was a significant statistical relationship between participation in Early Start and students' perception of their parents' future aspirations of college attendance for them (using a non-parametric Spearman's Rho the P value was 0.018, see Appendix 9, Table 6). Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) found that the students who had been in the Rutland Street preschool programme reported that significantly more of them received encouragement to go the second level from their homes. Similarly, this study found that the programme participants received more encouragement to go to third level than Group B, which might indicate that these parents have higher aspirations for their children in terms of educational attainment.

Table 5.20 Students' perception of their parents' aspirations for them.

How important is it to your parents that you...	Participant in Early Start	My parents do not want me to do this	My parents do not think it is important	A little important	Fairly important	Very important
Play sport	Yes (N=20)	0	4	7	7	2
	No (N=14)	0	5	4	3	2
Take music or dance lessons	Yes	3	8	3	5	1
	No	1	11	2	0	0
Take on a leadership role	Yes	1	5	8	5	1
	No	0	3	8	2	1
Help at home	Yes	0	2	3	9	6
	No	0	1	1	3	9
Get a p-t job during the school year	Yes	7	8	3	1	1
	No	4	4	3	0	3
Do my leaving certificate	Yes	0	1	0	1	18
	No	0	0	0	2	12
Go to college	Yes	0	1	1	5	13
	No	0	5	0	5	4
Do after-school activities	Yes	0	3	7	6	4
	No	0	8	1	4	1
Get a good job when I finish school	Yes	0	0	0	2	18
	No	0	0	0	1	13
Do my homework	Yes	0	1	0	3	16
	No	0	1	0	3	10
Do well in school exams	Yes	0	0	1	1	18
	No	0	0	0	4	10
Have a boyfriend or girlfriend	Yes	0	8	9	1	2
	No	0	11	3	0	0

5.7 Social outcomes

5.7.1 Crime and Bullying

In relation to involvement in criminal activities, seven of the thirty-five students (four from Group A and three from Group B), all male, have been in trouble with the Gardai. Mainly these students have had contact with the Gardai over minor incidents but one student from Group A has appeared before a Juvenile Court recently and two other students (one from each group), have regular contacts with a Juvenile Liaison Officer. There was no significant correlation between participation in Early Start and involvement in criminal activities.

Students were asked if they experienced being picked on or bullied by other students. Most students felt that they 'almost never' or 'rarely' got picked on (thirteen students from Group A and thirteen from Group B). A small number of students felt they were bullied 'sometimes' (two) and three students felt they were picked on 'very often'. All of the students who experienced this type of bullying were from Group A. Students from Group B are older so they may be less likely to still be experiencing this type of bullying. Additionally, in the interviews with parents, some parents from Group B mentioned incidents of bullying which had affected their children when they were younger. It also appears that three of the students in the study are involved in bullying other pupils, all in Group A. Parents in the study expressed concern about the bullying in the area and in particular the level of violent bullying which was taking place (see sections 6.7.2 and 7.4.5). Students were also asked if they had in the past brought a weapon into their school and five students, all from Group B, had done so. This is a serious issue for the school and a second level teacher reported in this study that the school collects a significant number of weapons from students every year. Farrelly (2007) claims that bullying behaviour in Irish schools, was slightly more common in schools with higher numbers of children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. He also highlights recent research by Downes (2004) conducted in Ballyfermot which found that "principals tended to underestimate the level of bullying and that bullying was a key concern of pupils across schools and influenced the non-attendance of a

notable minority" (ibid, p430). Non-attendance at school due to bullying was also mentioned by a teacher in this study (see section 7.3.5).

Students were asked if they were involved with peers whom their parents did not approve of and sixteen students (nine from Group A and seven from Group B) felt they were involved with peers their parents did not like. There was no significant statistical difference between Group A and Group B in their responses to this particular question (using a non-parametric Spearman's Rho the P value was 0.663). Parents in the study discussed their concerns about the negative influence of some of their children's peers (see section 6.7.1).

5.7.2 Drugs and Alcohol Consumption

Students were asked if they had taken illegal drugs and six students had done so. Students from Group B were slightly more likely to take drugs, three of them had smoked hash and one student had taken heroin. In Group A, two students admitted that they had tried hash. While more students had taken drugs in Group B, these students are also a year older and are more likely to have had increased exposure to these substances.

Students were asked whether or not they drank alcohol on a regular basis and if so how frequently they consumed alcohol. The majority of students from Group B (twelve) and half of the students from Group A (ten) did drink alcohol and most students drank on an occasional basis such as school holidays or Halloween (see Table 5.21). Students from Group B were more likely to drink on a weekly basis than Group A. There was a significant statistical relationship between Group B and regular consumption of alcohol (using a non-parametric Spearman's Rho the P value was 0.032) but age of the participants may also be a significant consideration. Students were asked if their parents were aware of their alcohol consumption and five students from Group A and eight from Group B said their parents were aware that they consumed alcohol. The issues of drugs and alcohol consumption will be further discussed in chapters six and seven.

Table 5.21 Frequency of alcohol consumption

		How often do you drink alcohol?				
		never	weekly	monthly	occasions such as Halloween	Total
participant in Early Start	yes	10	0	3	7	20
	no	2	3	1	9	15
Total		12	3	4	16	35

5.7.3 Leadership

Students were asked if they had taken on any leadership responsibilities such as captain of a sports team or leader in a youth club. In total, twenty students had not taken on any type of leadership role and nine from Group A and six from Group B had taken on such a role. The main roles identified were captain of a sports team (eight students) and a leadership role within school. Only one of the students identified any types of leadership roles which might be available to them in their community or in local youth clubs. There was no significant statistical relationship between participation in Early Start and taking on a leadership role (using a non-parametric test Spearman's Rho the P value was 0.58 which is not significant). Three students in Group B were involved in a mentoring programme for younger students in the school. There appears to be more opportunities available to Group B to become involved in such activities such as mentoring because these activities are only available to students who are in forth and fifth year in school.

5.7.4 Sexual Activity

Students were asked if they had engaged in sexual activity before the age of 16 years. In Group A, three students stated that they had had sex and in Group B, six students claimed they had had sex. While the numbers of students involved in sexual activity in Group B were significantly higher again the students were a year older and this might be one reason the difference. Males in both groups were far more likely to say they were engaged in sexual activity than females and only two females compared to seven males in the study claimed to be sexually active. Also, among the study participants there were no teenage pregnancies reported and seven of the students who were not

sexually active identified fear of teenage pregnancy as a reason for abstaining from sexual activity.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the educational and family background information of the participants in the study and sought to highlight any differences in educational attainment between Group A and Group B. The main areas where differences emerged were in exam results in the Junior Certificate in Maths and Science. Participation in Early Start appears to have supported the students' academic attainment in Maths and Science and this finding demonstrates the importance early years intervention in supporting the acquisition of numeracy. The Early Start participants were also more likely to do honours levels subjects for their Junior Certificate and to do a third language. The next chapter focuses on the results of the in-depth interviews with parents in the study.

Chapter 6

Parents' Perspectives on Early Start and their Childs Educational Journey

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data collected during qualitative interviews with parents. The first section of the chapter focuses on the parents in Group A (N=20) and the second section discusses the data from Group B participants (N=15).

Part 1: Group A-The Early Start Parents

6.2 Parents' educational background (Group A)

Many of the mothers in Group A had negative experiences of the education system and left school without formal qualifications, many going to work in local factories particularly sowing factories. Only two parents in this group had a post-leaving certificate qualification and twelve of the mothers did not have any educational qualifications.

> I left school at 14 years of age. I left school on Friday and started work on Monday. It was normal in those days. Penny
>
> I always found school hard and a struggle, I was one of those kids who was looking over saying 'how are those kids able to do it', I struggled the whole way and I definitely don't want to see my kids struggle. Mandy
>
> I think I probably underachieved in the sense that I didn't study hard enough and things like that. I was never really pushed, like my mother wouldn't check homework or things like that the way it is checked nowadays and she wouldn't be aware of the way things are done in school as I would be, parents had less knowledge of school life then. Laura

Most of the mothers regretted not gaining educational qualifications but tended to renegotiate their own negative experiences of education through providing positive encouragement for their children. For instance, one mother stated that even though she herself did not gain any educational qualifications she has provided her daughter with 'everything so I don't see any reason for her to fail'. Many mothers who had left school early returned for further educational in tandem with their childrens school progress.

6.3 Parents' perceptions of Early Start

6.3.1 Parent involvement during Early Start

Parents were very positive about their experiences of parent involvement during Early Start and most felt they were actively involved in their child's education during Early Start. Parent participation in their child's education operates at a number of different levels and the various types of participation cited by parents will now be discussed. In the context of Epstein's (2002) model of parent involvement parents were actively involved in the first three types of parent involvement, parenting, communicating and volunteering and parents were less involved in the last three learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. The first three types of involvement cited are more passive forms of involvement and are directed by the teachers rather than parent-led. The role of the Home-School-Community-Liaison (HSCL) teacher in encouraging parent involvement was mentioned by six parents in this group.

Parents were asked about the types of parent involvement they engaged in during the child's participation in Early Start. Parenting courses were the most common type of involvement with thirteen parents mentioning parenting or educational course such as an Irish Preschool Playgroup Association course and Play with Purpose. Classroom volunteering and trips with children was mentioned by eleven parents as something they were actively involved in and most of this group participated in this on a fortnightly basis. The third most common activity mentioned was informal contacts with other parents which was mentioned by eight parents. This was cited as especially beneficial for young mothers who were new to the area. One mother who had been recently widowed stated that the programme allowed her interact with other mothers from the community. Modelling was mentioned by one parent as something she found beneficial. As a continuation of active involvement after Early Start three parents became involved in the primary school Board of Management. None of the parents interviewed were involved in curriculum design or planning for Early Start. This is similar to the findings of the previous Educational Research Centre (1998) evaluation of Early Start which indicated limited parent involvement in these activities.

Parents cited the positive atmosphere in the school as something which contributed to parent involvement.

> The school has an open door for parents over there. By getting parents involved at that early age they don't feel so isolated. Once you start welcoming them into the school it will continue on, that is a key asset you have got to get the parents involved. Karla

One area where there was particularly active parent involvement was parent education courses available through Early Start. Thirteen parents attended courses and spoke about the ease of access to the courses because of the availability of childcare. Also the fact that they knew other parents in the programme contributed to their confidence while participating in these courses.

> I did courses and I had free time when Ron was in Early Start. It was good, you are meeting all different people and getting involved. I did some courses for a year or two after Early Start. Caroline

> I did a few courses, a few parenting courses and it does get you more involved in the school and when they went on trips you go and help out. Casey

It is clear from the parents' quotes that the parenting education courses played an important role in getting parents involved in the school. While none of the parents mentioned the courses as having a direct impact on their future employment or education two parents mentioned that it might have indirectly influenced their return to education because it was the first time they had attended adult education courses. Both of these mothers are currently working as Special Needs Assistants in primary schools.

6.3.2 Formal and informal supports

Two parents mentioned receiving formal support for their child through their involvement with Early Start. In both cases Early Start teachers had recommended that the children would attend Speech Therapy and the children attended the local Health Board service. Both of these parents then became involved in a local language support

programme for parents and children. There was no other mention of contact with other formal supports through Early Start.

Building social networks with other parents was the most frequent informal support mentioned by parents. Parents identified getting to know other parents as a significant benefit of participation in Early Start.

> There were fifteen other girls the same age saying "we are all there with you". I wasn't getting as frustrated then wondering why my child was carrying on like this; it is not just her it is everybody. Martha

> Because of sitting in the parent-room every morning with the teachers and bringing them down to your level you didn't feel as conscious going forward, you would jump in head first because it was all the women from the coffee morning. We (the parents) all went out every couple of weeks. I am still in contact with two girls the same age as me from the Early Start. Nora

> I used to sit in the parent room before I collected him. All the parents used to be in there and that's how I got to know all the parents in the area and it got me out of the house. I thought it was brilliant for the parents. Joan

> I was just mingling with people in the area, what would you say, meeting friends, moving out into the area. So it was a good way to meet people. We sort of mingled with the HSCL. Mandy

It operated as an informal support group for parents and allowed them access to informal support from other parents in the area. Rowen and Gosine (2006) describe social capital as a sense of connectedness to the larger community based on networks and social trusts. In this way Early Start played a role in increasing parents' informal contacts and networking opportunities and therefore contributing to social capital for parents. The results are also similar to Ghate and Hazels (2002) study which found preschools offer parents an opportunity to increase their social support network. Early Start then would seem to offer opportunities for both formal and informal forms of family support to parents in the study and was cited as being especially important for parents new to the area. Crawford and Walker (2007) discuss the potential of protective environments to protect children from adversities and highlight the role of community support networks "particularly those that offer emotional support and

practical help and advice" as being beneficial for parents and children (p48). In Lewis and Archer's (2006) study of the role of HSCL's in Early Start they found that parent-to-parent contact was facilitated by only five of the thirty-three HSCLs in their study. Parent-to-parent contact was highlighted by parents in this current study as very important and this indicated that such contact should be central to any parent involvement strategies for Early Start.

6.3.3 The role of Early Start in breaking boundaries

Parents frequently cited the role of Early Start in allowing them to become more familiar with the school setting and the school personnel including the teachers and other school staff.

> The year they are in Early Start they familiarise themselves with the school, they know who the principal is. The year they leave Early Start they are confident, they familiarise themselves with the school and teachers, they are not uncomfortable going in because they know it. They feel safe. Biddy

> It was the first time I could do any courses or anything in the school and they provided childcare with the courses, there was an educational socialising because you were talking to parents about the school and what was going on. Early start was a big contributor to me being involved in the school. Jane

Early Start played a role for parents in overcoming the perceived boundaries between parents and teachers and increasing communication. Two-way communication between parents and staff is a crucial element of a positive working relationship and is also important for the child's relationship with peers and adults (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Powell, 1989; Hughes and MacNaughton, 2000).

> I was a student in that school so even when I brought my child in it was still my school, the HSCL taught me(when I was at school) and it was really like she is the Teacher and I am still her past student but when they(teachers) came in drinking tea with you and having donuts and yapping on telling you their business it brought them all down to your level because they were able to speak to you the way they speak to anyone else, broke all the boundaries kind-of. Mairead

Early Start gave parents the opportunity to develop a more informal relationship with the school and contributed to breaking down boundaries between parents and teachers. The relationships between schools and families in disadvantaged areas can be rife with cultural or economic conflict that cannot be solved by simply enhancing communication (Lareau, 2000). In this study parents were very conscious of the teachers' role as professional educator. While attending Early Start many of the parents developed personal relationship with the HSCL teacher which greatly contributed to the parents' sense of ease within the primary school. Lewis and Archer's (2006) research with HSCL teachers also found that parental involvement during Early Start contributed to breaking down barriers between parents and teachers and contributed to "genuine partnership between parents and teacher" (p21). However, teachers in that study also expressed doubts about the long-term impact of these benefits. They also expressed some concern about the ability of Early Start to engage with the most marginalised parents. This was expressed by community participants in this current study (see Section 7.4).

The process of starting school was identified as being less stressful and more enjoyable because of participation in Early Start. One mother felt it was a positive beginning for the child and contributed to the child's overall school experience in a positive way. Three parents mentioned that their children still had the same friends that they made in Early Start and that this has helped them on their journey through school.

> It was very easy, she had no fear, that fear of constantly being with your mammy and the suddenly the isolation (of being in school). Shelly

Interestingly while most of the parents mentioned the importance of getting to know the school for the parent and the child none of them mentioned the role of teachers in getting to know the parent and the child. The focus of responsibility was always on the parents and children becoming familiar with how school operates rather then school becoming familiar with the families.

6.3.4 Parents lack confidence in their role as primary educator

Some parents felt that the child should attend Early Start because they lacked confidence in their own role as a primary educator.

> I put her into Early Start because I couldn't occupy her and I didn't want to teach her how to do anything in-case I taught her wrong and different people have different ways of teaching and I didn't want to teach her the alphabet and how to count in case I knocked her for six. Lucky I did cause the preschool taught her phonics and I would never have been able to do that. Anne

According to Lareau (2000) some parents from working-class backgrounds are intimidated by the professional authority of teachers and these parents fear teaching their children the wrong things or instructing them in the wrong way and "they see home and school as separate spheres" (p8). This leads to a strong reliance on information from teachers when asked about their child's performance in school or behaviour. Lareau (2000) also found in her research that many working-class parents felt they should leave academic matters to the teachers. This was also apparent in this study with parents relying strongly on information from the teachers for reassurance on their child's school performance. Parents were asked about their child's academic performance and behaviour in school. All of the parents relied almost completely on information they had received from the school when answering this question. This is also evident when examining some parents' views on teachers' approval of their child's transition to primary school. Some parents spoke about the importance of the child settling into school from the teachers' perspective. School-readiness was described as something which was laid down by the teachers and achievement of school-readiness was necessary to gain the teachers' approval.

> Early Start prepared her really well, they know their words and pencils, you know yourself getting their hands ready to hold pencils and things. It is a great help to teachers so they can give attention to the ones that don't have that. Pauline

Interestingly, Pauline does not seek individual attention for her child from the teacher but is more concerned about the teacher's availability to other children. Parents

identified aspects of school readiness when discussing Early Start and this was a reoccurring theme and central to the discussion on transitions to primary school.

6.3.5 School-readiness

The language of school-readiness offered by the parents in the study seemed to focus very often on discipline.

> He was learning how to behave properly. He knew what time was sports time and what time was eating and what time was sitting with other children or quietness time. He knew what rules, it was control really and what to say and when to say it. Maud

> When she started in junior infants you could tell the children who were in Early Start and those who weren't. When they were told to get in line and everything, get into your desk they done it straight away. There is no point in arguing, they just fit right in. It was brilliant. For parents there was no anxiety. Maura

> I found it very good discipline and learning because they are in a routine and they weren't shy starting off. I found it great because it wasn't just play, it was play in a disciplined way. Ally

Piotrkowski (2004) describes school readiness in terms of resources such as political, social, organisational, educational, financial and individual which prepare the child for school and describes it as a non-static concept which incorporates the multi-dimensional nature of the child's development. Piotrkowski (2000) proposes that in a low-income community parents elevated readiness beliefs "regarding the resources children need for kindergarten may be a function not of developmentally inappropriate expectations but are due to realistic concerns that their child may not succeed in resource-poor local schools" (p554). Piotrkowski refers to this as the resource model of school-readiness. Parents tend to de-emphasise interests and curiosity and instead emphasise concrete skills to help students adjust quickly and successfully to the classroom. Similarly in this study parents tended to focus on the importance of discipline for their child and the role of Early Start in helping their child fit into the school routine and seeking the teachers approval for their child.

6.3.6 Perceived benefits of Early Start

Parents were asked about their perceptions of the programmes benefits. Parents were very enthusiastic about the socialising aspect of the programme and this was the most frequently cited benefit by parents.

> It helped him to socialise with the kids even though he was a bit of a lonely child. It helped him with his colours and his numbers as well, and that is how I got involved in the school. Jane

> Yeah, she was very good, I don't know if it was her age, she was just that little bit older but it was great for her. She was very shy and it brought her out of her shell and gave her confidence. Anita

Parents expressed a sense of contentment that their child enjoyed the programme. They were more likely to articulate any programme benefits as based on their child's experience rather than their own experiences of participation in Early Start. The idea of transition was important to parents and was also mentioned in relation to transfer to second level.

The importance of socialisation for an only child, or the oldest, was also mentioned as a benefit of Early Start.

> She is an only child and she didn't really have any kids around her so that is a good thing as well. The fact that it was in the school, they weren't terrified then in junior infants, because you could see the difference between the kids who had been in Early Start after starting school, the crying was a big difference. Lena

> She was the only child and I was widowed at the time and I was new in the area. She had no one to play with so the girl next door brought in the leaflet so we said we would go over because she needs to mix, even though I used to sit her on my knee and read to her and so when she went in there I thought it was just the nursery but I was delighted it wasn't, it was educational. Molly

As well as allowing the child to socialise with other children the role of Early Start in fostering the child's independence was also mentioned by two mothers. This also contributes to parents' sense of ease when the child starts school.

> I think it broke her dependence on me, she was so clingy you would nearly need a crow-bar to get her off, it took 6-8 weeks for her to settle and I had to stay in the coffee room and peep out and tell her I was still there. She was an only child and the first grandchild on both sides so she had to start mixing with other children. For parents there was no anxiety. Michelle

One woman had placed her grandchildren in Early Start based on her positive experiences with her own younger children who had attended the programme.

Parents mentioned the role of Early Start in providing opportunities for the child to learn and in particular all parents mentioned the positive learning opportunities offered by Early Start (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.1). Parents were also contented with the fact that there was structured play in Early Start which they felt increased their child's learning opportunities.

> I feel she got the best. They went to so many different areas while in there. I haven't seen it in any other play school I have been in since. They got a wide variety, the teacher didn't just stick to the nursery rhymes. Molly

One mother felt that Early Start did not encourage learning as her daughter had already had the opportunity to learn at home but that Early Start did play an important role in the child's socialisation. She emphasised the socialising aspect of Early Start as more important than learning. This mother was very confident in her own educational knowledge and later went on to join the Primary and Secondary school Boards of Management. She purchased educational materials and was concerned with providing an educational environment in her home for her children and her daughter subsequently achieved the third highest Junior Certificate results in this study. This mother could be perceived as pursuing the types of 'cultural investment strategies' for her child's educational success which Bourdieu conceived as central to the creation of cultural capital (Field, 2003, p.16).

6.3.7 Comparisons to siblings who did not participate in Early Start

A small number of parents had experience of one child participating in Early Start and another child who did not and two of these parents spoke about their perception of the impact of Early Start on their child in the context of this experience.

> I am a great advocate of Early Start I think it is brilliant for them; it gives a gradual build-up to being in school. Being in the school is not so scary for them. Sam didn't do Early Start and he was literally just whipped into the uniform and whipped away and it made it worse that he started two weeks after everyone else when we moved here, he felt isolated. John did Early Start and settled in and the rest of them the same. Maura

> She was well prepared for junior infants. She went in there ok and she knew all her little things, her stories, whereas when the other fella went in he didn't really know nothing, he didn't do Early Start, no he was in my mothers, I couldn't keep coming back for the two hours, I notice the difference between him or her. Yeah, we would have preferred of he had done Early Start. Millie

The quotes from these mothers indicate that the mothers themselves perceived differences in their children's transition to primary school and they attribute these differences to participation in Early Start. The quote from Millie indicates that her employment was a barrier to her son's participation in Early Start even though she felt he would have benefited from Early Start.

6.3.8 Parental involvement after Early Start

Most parents mentioned the positive relationship they had developed with the primary school principals and the frequency of positive communication between the home and the primary school. More than half of the parents also mentioned being actively involved in the primary school such as involvement in the Parent Committee or volunteering in the classroom. Parental participation at second level was much more limited and there appears to be a different culture of parent involvement operating at primary school compared to second level. Communication with the secondary school was the most frequently mentioned topic in relation to parent-school partnership. The types of parent involvement that parents experienced in primary school may not be relevant in secondary as the school curriculum is more sophisticated so this affects

parents' ability to help with homework. This next section will focus on parents' current experience of parent involvement and will begin with examining the experience of parents whose children have diverse learning needs.

6.4 Parent participation in their child's education I (Special needs children)

6.4.1 Children with diverse learning needs:

Four students in the Early Start group were identified as having specific learning needs. The data from these parents will be analysed separately because of the different nature of their relationship with the second level schools. Parents of children with special needs tended to have a different relationship with their child's school which was characterised by greater communication and parent-teacher contact compared to the parents of children who did not have any identified learning difficulties. Therefore these case-studies will be discussed separately and their relationships between parents and teachers will be explored individually (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.2).

6.4.2 John

John is aged 14 and is the oldest of three children. John has ADHD and has had a full-time Special Needs Assistant (SNA) since primary school. John's mother, Noreen, currently works as a SNA in a local primary school. Noreen feels that John was too young starting school and that this has compounded his learning difficulties. She would have liked John to repeat Early Start but this was not possible. Noreen noted that John has a very low attention span and this view was supported by his teachers who were interviewed in the study. Another mother whose child also participated in Early Start but does not have special needs also felt her son started school too young and fears this will have a negative impact on his further studies and might negatively influence future college attendance.

Noreen maintains a high level of contact with the secondary school. She meets with the

school on a weekly basis to monitor John's progress, this weekly meeting was established by the school because of the child's learning difficulties. Noreen is active in seeking specialised support for her child but is still very dependent on the school and professionals for support and advice on the supports available. She recently tried to change schools but was unsuccessful. The new school was unwilling to take John on because of the extent of his learning needs. The responsibility seems to be with the mother to seek support for her child and the recent attempt to change schools highlights the difficultly Noreen experiences negotiating her way around the school system. In relation to future aspirations for John, Noreen feels he will not complete his Leaving Certificate but he would like to be a mechanic. John's teachers felt he was having serious difficulties coping in mainstream education.

> John is possibly the most difficult and in my opinion our biggest failure in third year and I don't mean that in that the child has failed but that the system has failed the child...He has quite profound learning difficulties, he is barely reading and writing and he is in third year. 5th Year Head

Comments from John's teachers highlight the serious difficulties he is having in school and also the lack of suitable facilities to meet his specific learning needs. Given the lack of suitable facilities to meet his learning needs it is almost inevitable that John will fail in school. There also appears to be a communication gap between the parent and the school and the needs of the student have not always been central. The notion of the second level system failing to meet the needs of a minority of students and characterising them as failures was mentioned as a serious issue by both teachers and community participants in this study.

6.4.3 Adam

Adam was only recently diagnosed as having ADHD. Adam is the youngest of three children and there is a history of early school leaving among his siblings. Adam's father died when Adam was an infant and his mother is currently unemployed. His mother was completely dependent on the school for a diagnosis of his ADHD and she was not active in seeking support herself for her son's learning needs.

> He was only diagnosed (with ADHD) in third year and put on medication. He missed a lot of school because he never slept, he would be up till four or five in the morning and then he would be tired and get into loads of trouble in school, some days I wouldn't let him into school at all..... now it is totally different, his reports from school are brilliant like, there is a big difference. Lola

The mother tends to blame the primary school for not alerting her to his condition. She sees her son as a passive recipient of education and is completely dependent on the school for advice. Since the diagnosis and medication the child is participating in class and receiving positive reports from the school and Lola felt he would now complete his Leaving Certificate.

In relation to communication with the secondary school, Lola felt that the school would get in touch with her if there is a problem or if there were upcoming parent-teacher meetings. Contact with the school was very much a one-way process initiated by the school. The Year Head was her main contact with the school and she has little contact with the HSCL. Lola was unclear about her son's school schedule or the subjects he was studying for his Junior Certificate. Adam still had difficulty settling into organised activities such as Youth Clubs or sport and tended to stay in them for very short periods of time. Lola felt that the school journal was central to communication between the mother and the school. Lola was not clear on what her future aspirations were for Adam.

Adam's teachers also commented on the recent positive changes in his behaviour because of his diagnosis. According to Adam's teachers, medication has had a positive impact on his educational attainment but Adam is still experiencing problems regarding long-term goal settings. Both Adam's and John's families were dependent on the school for diagnosis of their ADHD and in both cases their current teachers feel that their parents failed to acknowledge the extent of their child's learning and behavioural difficulties. Neither of these families have sought educational supports outside of the school or seemed aware of such supports.

6.4.4 Aoife

Aoife is an only child and has mild learning difficulties. Aoife's mother is a single parent and is currently unemployed. Aoife was in all ordinary level and foundation level subjects and was receiving special educational support for Maths and Irish. Aoife's mother , Mindy, was particularly concerned with the role of Early Start in breaking down boundaries between the teacher and parent and she uses similar language in her contacts with second level teachers, describing them as 'down to earth'. This mother appears to be very conscious of the perceived class differences between herself and the teachers but is comfortable approaching the school if there is a problem. Mindy did not pursue homework clubs or other educational supports for her child because she felt these were for working parents. This was mentioned by another parent in the study who was also currently unemployed. Some parents in the study are not clear on the function of some of the educational supports available in the area.

Mindy thinks that Aoife will finish her formal education after her Leaving Certificate and then "she might go off the beauty school". Aoife's teachers also felt she had a short attention span and similar to John and Adam, Aoife's mother is dependent on the school for all educational support and has not sought educational interventions outside of the school.

6.4.5 Sandra

Sandra has been diagnosed with dyslexia and has on older brother who also has dyslexia and is currently studying at Third level. Sandra's mother works in administration in a local primary school is and has very actively sought support for her children's dyslexia and appears to have utilised her contacts within the school system. Sandra's mother was not satisfied with her child's academic performance.

> She has no confidence in herself and a lot of it stems from having dyslexia even though she sees her brother with dyslexia achieving what he has achieved she can't see herself being as capable as him. Claire

Claire actively pursues an individual educational experience for Sandra. Last year she

changed schools because she felt the school was unresponsive to both the needs of the parent and the child. The school appears to have held back information until Claire went to the school for a meeting and she felt very disempowered by this. She felt that the new school are more open to suggestions from the parents. In relation to future aspirations Claire felt that Sandra will pursue further study after her Leaving Certificate.

> Third level because that is just the way life is in our family. I kind of make her feel it is normal going on to third level, it is just expected of her so she knows she is staying there I hope she does third level. It certainly won't be traditional Trinity or UCD, it might not even be an IT but I am hoping to direct her to maybe even a PLC course. Claire

Claire's position within the school has allowed her access to educational information which she has utilised for her own children and has increased her access to social capital by increasing her opportunities for social networking. Also Claire sought to normalise the idea of going to third level for her children by constructing it as a given rather than a choice. Only one other parent in the study discussed third level in this way, a mother in the Group B who had a third level qualification herself and whose partner lectured in a Third Level Institute.

6.5 Parent participation in their child's education (Non-Special needs children)

6.5.1 Parent participation in their child's education

In the Early Start group sixteen students were identified as not having special educational needs and these students will now be discussed as a group. Most parents were satisfied with their child's performance in school. Four parents felt their children were not pushing themselves enough. One parent in particular felt her daughter was being negatively influenced by her out-of-school friends and this was impacting on her school performance. Another mother was not satisfied with her son's academic performance and felt that he was totally responsible for improving his school results. Parent participation in their child's education operates at a number of different levels

and the various types of participation cited by parents in this study will now be discussed.

Parents were asked about their attitude to education. All the parents indicated that they valued education as being very important in their child's life.

> Very, very important, like her education comes before anything else she does and like her hobbies or anything her education comes first and anything she needs help with all she need do is ask. Molly

Parents were generally very positive about education and about their children acquiring educational qualifications and as discussed in Section 6.2, parents tended to renegotiate their own negative experience of their education through positive encouragement for their children.

Parents were asked about their children's study habits and while the majority of parents did not directly help their children with the homework at second level most were involved in either supervising or checking their child's homework. One mother was critical of supervised study offered by the school and felt that the family are better equipped at home to support the child with her homework.

Communication with the school was the most frequently mentioned topic in relation to parent-school partnership (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.3). Communication with the school was particularly important to help the child make the transition to second level. One parent mentioned the role of school activities in developing positive parent-teacher relations and this would indicate that the child's engagement with extra-curricular activities in the school can have a positive impact on parent-teacher relations. Some parents were looking for increased communications from the school and lack of consultation with teachers was one of the main issues highlighted by parents.

> The (parent-teacher) relationship is non-existent basically. Part of me thinks I

> know the child, I know her so I could help the teacher along. Maud

A number of mothers felt that the school would only have to make contact if there is a problem as opposed to contacting them for a positive reason. This was also associated with a strong reliance on the teachers for educational decisions and approval from the teachers. Most parents had very limited contact with the secondary school and some viewed this as a positive thing because they associated contact with the school as something problematic.

Two mothers were actively involved in activities in the secondary school.

> Yeah I feel that I am being involved in everything now stuff like tours they involve me now. John feels I am more involved now, more involved than with Sam, I feel now I am on an even keel with them. Martha

The second of the more actively involved parents was involved in a broad range of activities linking the school with the community including a parent visitation programme aimed at supporting transfer to second level but she felt that the level of parent participation in the community has recently decreased. Even parents who are more actively involved in the secondary school still appear to have a limited relationship with the school.

> The parents association has kind of fallen, we meet once a year to see what the school wants. All the older parents are all working now. I wouldn't know the teachers as such, I would know the HSCL from parent visitation programme but that is only once a year. Ella

Even though this mother is on the secondary school Parents' Association her involvement is still very limited and very much teacher-led which is very different to her experience of participation in her child's education during Early Start.

6.5.2 Transitions to second level

The transition from primary to secondary school presented some problems for two parents.

> I went to the Primary School Principal and explained my fears. The school did a lot of workshops and talked about bullying and settling in and all the big issues for them. Martha

Another mother experienced a problem with the placement of her child in a special education class.

> When he started in the school first they got him mixed up with another student and they said he needed to go to a special needs class and I said 'I think it is the wrong person you are talking about' and I went over to the Primary School Principal and he got on to them and they (secondary school) rang back apologising. Connie

The secondary school would not take the mothers word for the fact her son was not in need of special educational support and the Primary School Principal had to intervene on her behalf and act as an advocate. The school appears to value the entrance test results more than consultation with the parents about their child's learning capability and needs. In relation to targeted educational supports three boys in Group A had attended an educational club targeted at twelve to thirteen year olds to help with the transition to second level.

6.5.3 Parents' evaluation of child's behaviour in school

Parents were asked about their child's academic performance and behaviour in school. All of the parents relied almost completely on information they had received from the school when answering this question.

> She seems to get on well in school. I have never had any trouble with her, she keeps her head down. Judging by her parent teacher meetings she does. Phil

> I don't actually get notes for him but I noticed he is getting livelier, so that's not to say this year or next year I won't be getting notes. Ella

> According to teachers he is very well behaved and very quiet, both kids are, a bit too shy actually. When he was small a couple of teachers at meetings would say 'I don't even know he is here he is so quiet I don't even know his name' Anna

Anna like other parents in the study was very reliant on information from the school

and she mentioned waiting for her son's next exam results to assess his academic performance and did not seem concerned that some of her son's teachers admitting not knowing her son's name. Again her information about her son's education was very much dependent on the school. Another mother referred to the school as having 'no complaints' about her daughter's behaviour and academic performance.

6.5.4 .Seeking an individualised education for the child

One of the least common types of parent participation in the study was actively seeking an individualised education for their child with only five parents in this group mentioning specific examples. None of the students in this group were attending grinds at the time of the study even though this was an exam year for this student group and parents were very dependent on supports within the school and on teachers providing their child with educational supports. Few parents actively sought educational supports for their children. This is similar to a recent study in Tallaght of 187 children, which found that childrens involvement in out of school activities was low with only thirteen per cent involved in Homework clubs (Childhood Development Initiative, 2004). Lynch (1999) contends that accessing the private education market through purchasing grinds and summer colleges was "one of the principal mechanisms through which middle-class families maintained their relative educational advantage" and boosted their academic attainment (p112).

Another example of seeking an individualised education for their child include Claire, who, as discussed (see Section 6.4.5), had previously sourced private educational support for her daughter's dyslexia. Three mothers mentioned choosing particular schools outside the local catchment area for their children because of their academic reputation including one mother who had sent her daughter to a Gael Scoil. One parent actively sought educational and social support for her son and helped secure him a place in a local community after-school group to support him with the transition to second level.

> I think if your face is known and they know you care and they think well she does genuinely give a shit about her kids then you can get them into these things (afterschool club) but if you sit back and be a door mat then it is harder. Molly

Overall the parents in the study did not seek an individualised education for their children and were reliant on educational information from their children's teachers and had limited access to other sources of information

A similar theme which emerges from the study data is the sense of separation between home and school for some parents. In relation to homework one parent stated her daughter was "grand, she just goes upstairs and does it herself" (Mandy). In relation to the value parents place on education one parent mentioned that grades were not important to her but respect was more important.

> As much as I like looking at grades I am more interested in the comments the teacher has to say about the child, like so far they can relate to people, there is no disruptions, they are respecting people, to me that is important. To get an A but for the teacher to turn around to say she is an insolent pup, I would die. But the teachers say she is a pleasure to teach. Sharon

Lareau (2000) argues that in working-class communities there is a separation between family and school compared to middle-class communities where there was more inter-connectedness between home and school as parents spent more time preparing their child academically, particularly their verbal skills. Middle-class parents monitored their child's homework more, provided extra tutoring and specialists during the summer. These things were less likely to occur in working-class homes. Middle-class parents sought a more individualised education for their children and were not dependent on their child's teachers to provide them with equitable access to the education system. Working-class parents interviewed by Lareau felt that they should leave the academic matters to the teachers and "they seldom try to influence the core of the education system" (p.viii). Working-class parents in her study trusted teachers to educate their children and viewed education as something which happened in the school rather than at home. Similarly in this study parents are more likely to rely on the school for educational information. Lynch (1999) also found that working-class

students relied heavily on schools for educational advice and information in a way that middle-class families did not and therefore the school played a stronger mediating role in the educational careers of working-class students compared to middle-class students.

Henry (1996) highlights the role of teachers in projecting the idea that they know best and "parents who are intimidated by schools may buy into the idea of specialisation and fragmentation by upholding the belief it's the school's job to educate" (p95). Parents may then relinquish their children to the school because they believe new opportunities will be open to them through education and the practices within schools make school appear like a formal organisation rather than a responsive organisation. This contributes to distancing parents from the school.

6.5.5 Educational decision making

Parents were asked a number of questions relating to making education decisions such as subject choices for their child. In several cases the child makes educational decisions rather than the parents when they get to second level.

> I wouldn't get consulted on subject changes, they would just ask Matt and he would make up his mind. I would like to know more, like when I go to a parent teacher meeting one teacher talks about all the teachers, gives a report from them all. Yeah I suppose I get a general idea of how he is getting on and I look at his work and see how he is getting on but I suppose it would be nice to be consulted. Sue

Mandy makes decisions by consulting her daughter only and does not go to the school for advice. Several other parents made decisions with the child and wrote letters to the school regarding dropping to pass level subjects and had no discussion with the school. A small number of parents were more actively involved in subject choice for their children.

> Me and her dad did, because she had subject options with home-economics and music. We sat down and had a talk to her, we said at the end of the day you can always learn home-economics at home and through reading while the other subject you need professional people to bring you through so it is kind of a

calculated choice. Rita

> They do contact you if there is a problem, she was in higher level Maths and it wasn't her best and I went up to the teacher and she got put back. She feels more relaxed now. Rena

Some parents in this study were not clear on the difference between the Applied Leaving Certificate and the 'traditional' academic Leaving Certificate. The type of Leaving Certificate a student picks will have a significant impact on their choices after they finish school as most third level institutions do not accept the Applied Leaving Certificate for entry to courses. This issue is further discussed in section 7.4.5.

Many of the parents were disengaging with involvement with the schools at the same stage as they themselves had left the formal education system, usually just after primary school. Vincent (1996) carried out research on five second level schools and found that parental participation was affected by feeling disassociated from the school and these feeling were exasperated at second level. It was particularly difficult for working-class parents to have their views heard by teachers. Working-class parents also felt that they were rarely consulted about their children's needs and felt distanced from the academic dimension of the school as the curriculum becomes more complicated.

A frequent issue for parents from the Group A and the Group B was the decision about participation in Transition Year in the local feeder school which the majority of the students in this study attended. Many parents were concerned about the lack of choice they had in choosing Transition Year for their children. The school only offered the traditional academic Leaving Certificate to those who completed Transition Year and students who were attending the Applied Leaving Certificate went straight into fifth year. Some parents did not seem to mind the school making the decisions but others were concerned.

> I think if there was a choice it would give parents the opportunity to sit down with their daughter and with the teacher and ask what will be in Transition Year and will it be a good thing. With no choice it becomes imposed and it is a different mindset because 'I have to do it'. It's trying to get her to look at it in a

more positive way. Rita

This mother also felt that Transition Year was the reason that her older daughter had not gone onto college. She feels that it is more difficult to keep a young person in school after they reach eighteen years of age because of the increased socialising opportunities and exposure to alcohol that accompanies adulthood. This also reflects earlier comments from parents who felt that starting school too young has a negative impact on their children pursuing further education.

A small number of parents cited their work-place contacts as influential in decision making regarding their child education. For example, Tracey worked in a high-tech facility and sought the advice of co-workers who had completed third level when seeking information on Transition Year for her daughter. Three other parents who worked as SNAs in primary schools sought the advice of the teachers they worked with or mentioned how their job facilitated them becoming more familiar with the education system. This is another example of parents using their social network to support their educational decisions but overall most parents were reliant on the school for support with educational decisions. The findings concur with Lynch (1999), who found that working-class students and parents in her research were "more exclusively reliant on the public education services than middle-class students" and were almost completely dependent on schools for educational information and felt excluded from decision making (p122). Middle-class families sought alternative educational supports through the private education market and family networks.

6.5.6 Parent as advocate for the child

A recurring theme for parents, who were having a conflict with the school, was the parents' role as advocate for their child when they visited the school. Recent literature and policy, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, stresses the importance of listening to the voice of the child. Katz (1995) asserts that, for many parents, a fundamental part of their parenting role is to be their child's strongest advocate with both the teachers and the school. This is particularly important

in services where young people may not have the ability to fully articulate their desires and concerns and it is the responsibility of the parent, as the primary carer, to interpret their child's needs and act as a voice for their child. One mother describes in detail a recent conflict she has had with the school (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.4).

> They don't listen to the kids until the parents go up. The kids have no say in that school. I think it is very hard to win even if your child is right. At the end of the day he is missing out. I feel that he is getting bullied, not by students, but by the teachers. Connie

This mother felt disempowered by the school and sees herself as acting on behalf of her son. This particular mother found the transition from primary to secondary school difficult in terms of her relationship with her son's teachers. The second level teachers accuse this pupil of bullying other pupils and of being involved in disruptive behaviour. There appears to be considerable conflict between the parents and the school in this particular case. In a similar situation another mother mentioned her role as advocate for her son.

> I am constantly in contact with school, I like to know what is going on. If he is been in trouble I like to ring up and see what's goes on, like I had a run in with a teacher because she upset him in Maths. Martha

One of the teachers commented on this mother's recent involvement with the school.

> Her son is in in-house detention every week for a variety of reason. She comes up when he is suspended but she doesn't really take an active interest in between. You would never see her unless they were suspended. The older son has dropped out of school. 5th Year Head

In the study of parental involvement by Hanafin and Lodge (2002), parents reported that they felt excluded from school decisions, particularly decisions they disagreed with and felt powerless.

6.5.7 Parental disengagement in second level

There appears to be a different culture of parent involvement operating at primary school when compared to second level. Some of the parents who were actively involved in primary school did not feel confident in their role as partners with the second level school.

> Initially, I found it difficult, I felt intimidated by the teachers in the secondary school, I felt I was been spoken down to. It's impersonal. I never felt I could just go up and approach the teacher. They are very hands off whereas it is completely different from the Primary School with its' open door policy and it is hard, not just for the parents, but for the kids as well. Martha

> I don't have much contact at the moment cause I work across town. It was different when she was in primary I was on the Board of Management and I had a lot of contact but since I moved across town (for work) I don't have the time. Karena

This mother had been very actively involved in primary and was not as involved at second level but did feel confident in contacting the school if there was a problem. This may indicate that the breaking of boundaries between parents and teachers established in Early Start and primary school may have continued benefits for parent-teacher relations at second level. The expertise that the parent developed through her involvement at primary was not being fully utilised by the second level school.

Many parents mentioned the positive relationship they had developed with the Primary School Principals and the frequency of positive communication between the home and school.

> Over in the Primary you actually see the teachers, over in secondary school you don't, in Primary you meet them when you drop them off but in secondary you rarely see a teacher except the Year Head. Ella

There are different cultures in primary and secondary schools regarding parent involvement and teachers appear to operate more of a hand-holding pedagogy for parents in primary school.

Parents identified a number of barriers preventing their involvement at second level. In particular the culture of parent involvement has changed as employment in the area has increased. The lack of engagement at second level corresponds with the economic improvements and increased job opportunities in the community.

> With both of us working full-time we have no time to be involved anyway, because I do shift work and my wife works full time. Tim

Hanafin and Lodge found that parents in their study had positive experiences of individual contact with teachers and negative experiences of exclusion from decision making at a policy level in school. They assert that this leads to 'competing and conflicting experiences of school may only add to feelings of alienation' (Hanafin and Lodge, 2002, p40). Their study also found that parents sometimes categorised their contacts with teachers as 'inadequate, difficult, off-putting, excluding and frightening' (p41). Parents in the study felt that their role in formal education structures were limited and that they had no opportunity to influence school policy. The parents in this current study reported similar issues regarding contacts with their child's second level school.

6.5.8 Push factors for academic success

Parents discussed various influences which motivated their children to succeed within school such as the influence of their child's peers (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.5).

> The girls wanted to go to the local school but we made the right choice sending them to an all girls school. Rena

This parent felt that her daughter was motivated by the success of the peers in her school and as discussed previously she actively sought a place for her child in this school because of the high academic results. The next mother felt she was the main push factor for her child.

> I was always strict maybe because of the way I was brought up. I just don't like them being bold in school and I always get good reports from the school. Helen

Sue motivated her son by getting him a place in after-school club and she also encourages him to read more. Martha is using her older son's negative experience of dropping-out after his Junior Certificate as a push factor for her younger son to stay in school. As well as positive influences from peers, a number of mothers mentioned the negative influence of peers. Mandy is worried that her daughter is being influenced by a friend who has recently dropped out of school and Mandy has noticed her daughter was now less interested in her school work.

Some parents were afraid to apply too much academic pressure on their child because of existing pressure from the school and from peers.

> He worries a lot if he doesn't pass, he would be disappointed if he didn't do well. He sets himself up for it, he worries too much and I would worry that he might make himself sick for the Junior Cert. I would worry he would go too far. Ella

Some parents felt their children put themselves under too much pressure to succeed in school and this may be negative. This concern was also expressed by a teacher for two students in this Group. Differences emerged in parents' expectations relating to the gender of their child with parents expecting girls to be more academically self-motivated than boys. Some parents felt that their sons would do less school work and be less interested in academic achievement.

6.6 Parents' future educational aspirations

In the Early Start Group (Group A) ten (fifty per cent) parents wanted their children to go to third level (seven female students and three male students). In Group B seven (forty-six per cent) parents wanted their children to go to third level (five female students and two male students). A slightly higher number of Early Start parents (thirty-three per cent) wanted their sons to go to college compared to the non-Early Start parents (twenty-two per cent). In both groups, mothers of girls had higher

aspirations for third level that the mothers of boys in the study. This is reflective of a national trend towards higher third level participation rates for girls and also links to the previous paragraph on parents pushing their children to succeed academically. In the most recent report on school leavers in Ireland, McCoy et al. (2007) report that female students "continue to dominate entry to the Post Leaving Certificate sector, while a higher proportion of young males participate in apprenticeship programmes. Within schools, males continue to be over-represented among early school leavers" (pix). Lynch (1999) found in interviews with community activists, in working-class areas, that they believed "the male peer groups in their communities had the more negative attitude towards education" (p113) and this finding concurs with attitudes among participants in this study. The future aspirations of the Early Start group will now be discussed.

Three parents in Group A (two female students and one male student) had higher future aspirations for their children who had completed Early Start compared to their older children who had not attended Early Start. This may indicate higher future aspirations associated with participation in Early Start or may be reflective of the fact that as parents have increased experience of and contacts with the education system, their educational expectations for their younger children grow. While many of the parents of the female participants were clear on third level aspirations for their daughters this was less common for the male participants. There appears to be a general lack of information in this community regarding third level.

There were some comments from teachers in the study which indicated concern over low future expectations among high achieving students in this Group B.

> She is well able to set sort-term goals, don't know about long-term. She is a very good student who is quite a high achiever but has low expectations, she wants to be a hairdresser. 4th Year Head

Only one mother in the Group B viewed third level education as a 'definite' for her child and perceived the Leaving Certificate as only a stepping stone to third level. In

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Group A, three parents viewed third level as a 'definite' and sought to normalise third level participation for their children. These finding concur with O'Flaherty's (1995) assertion that research on parent's attitude revealed that parents of the Head Start children wanted more managerial and skilled jobs for their children (O'Flaherty, 1995). This might suggest that participation in Early Start has contributed to some attitudinal changes and increased the achievement orientation of the students and parents.

6.7 Anti-social activities

6.7.1 Protecting children from risks

Recently the term 'at-risk' was defined by the OCED broadly under the three headings family, community and social factors.

> Educational, social and vocational failure are predicted by a range of factors including; poverty, ethnic status, family circumstances, language, school type, geography and community. Thus the term 'at-risk' refers in a general sense to children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Day et al., 1997, p.17 cited in Cox, 2000, p2)

Parents were asked about what types of worries they had for their children in relation to anti-social behaviours such as drugs, alcohol consumption and juvenile delinquency. Most parents mentioned factors which they felt protected their child from involvement in any of these issues. Some parents viewed their relationship with their children as the most important way of protecting them (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.5).

Garbarino, Bradshaw, and Kostelny (2005) report that a close relationship between parents and teenagers can act as a protective factor as 'youth disclosure' to parents has been found to have a positive impact on problem behaviour. Youths who are more securely attached to their parents are more likely to disclose information to them, and "this association illustrates the importance and profound effects of a secure parent-infant bond, one which is characterized (sic) by high levels of warmth, consistency and responsiveness" (ibid, p305). The impact of living in the area and the exposure to risk

was a recurring theme for all parents in the study. Garbarino et al. (2005) refer to the 'socially toxic forces' which operate in disadvantaged communities such as poverty and violence and these forces can have negative physical and psychological impacts on children and parents. The availability of drugs in the Sunbury area was a common theme for many of the parents and in particular the visibility of the drug culture in the locality was viewed as one such 'toxic force'. For Adam, the student with ADHD discussed in section 6.4.3, his doctors have pointed out that he is particularly vulnerable regarding drugs. Adam's mother was also concerned that the area where they have been offered new accommodation, by the Social Housing Unit, would increase Adam's chances of being exposed to the gang culture in the locality as she was aware of a number of gangs operating in the estate that they have been offered a house. She was also conscious of the fact that the family did not know anyone in this estate and they would have few social supports if they moved there. However one parent did mention that the visibility of drugs might also act as a deterrent to drug use because their children can see the reality of drug abuse from a very young age. Parents of both girls and boys in the study are very concerned about their children's personal safety in the locality and the girls in particular were under very strict supervision.

> She is not allowed up to the shops on her own, she goes out and plays with them when I am up here. Both my sisters live up here so she is never far from sight. Michelle

This mother also mentioned the importance of social supports in protecting the child from risk, in this case it was having family living nearby to monitor her daughter. In their study of the influences of the community on parenting, Garbarino et al. (2005) claim that monitoring can act as a protective factor, as young people who are well-monitored "are at decreased risk for smoking, using drugs and alcohol, engaging in risky sexual behaviour, becoming anti-social or delinquent, and socializing with deviant peers" (p305).

In addition to an open and honest relationship with parents and monitoring, another factors which parents cited as important in protecting their child from risk was the

influence of peers.

> She pals with a nice bunch and it is definitely the friends they have. It is very important, it doesn't matter where they live it is there friends. Rena

While the child's peers are seen by some parents as a positive aspect some parents are worried about the negative influence of their childrens friends.

> The guards have brought him home once because literally he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I worry when they all go out together and there is a big gang of them and they all meet up that worries me because that is why he was brought home....I worry about peer pressure and smoking drugs and stuff, we have had two incidences where he has came in drunk. Martha

> The likes of this Halloween he wants a few bottles of beer and here I am 'oh god' but he is going to do it behind your back anyway. I don't know whether I am wrong or right but I would rather know that he is drinking 6 bottles of Budweiser. I give him the money €10-15 and say go out and play, I don't know how. Connie

There is an expectation among some parents that their children will drink alcohol and the last mother does not question where they source the alcohol. Mandy was also worried about the negative influence of her daughter's friend who has recently dropped out of school. Mandy's daughter wanted to change schools and go to New College, a co-educational Community College in a local parish.

> I have found that she has had a drink with this girl as well. I will have to send her to the Convent School. But she said 'I am not going down there they are all snobs' and at one time like she held her head up high. Mandy

Mandy highlighted the association between different schools in the area and sense of identity. The Convent School mentioned by Mandy which was perceived by her daughter as being 'snobby' has a reputation for having very high academic results. Another mother in the study whose daughter attends this school felt her daughter was motivated to go to third level because of the peer group in the school and the expectation in the school that most students will transfer to third level. The perception

of social-class associated with different schools is interesting as it highlights how some of the students have constructed a sense of identity through the school they attend and how that school is perceived in the community. Also Lynch and Lodge (2002) highlight evidence that only half of all Irish students attend their local secondary school and they found in their research that "social class-specific economic inequality manifested itself first in terms of one's ability to choose a school that was deemed to be most educationally advantageous" (p40). In this current study the neighbouring secondary schools were perceived as being more desirable for their children than the local community college by a small number of parents. This may relate to Lynch and Lodges (2002) findings that "secondary schools are still much more middle-class in their intake than community colleges" (p40).

6.7.2 Disengagement with the area

Some of the students in the study were not involved in local activities and were not mixing with peers in their area outside of school hours. For example, the girls attending Irish dancing were doing so outside of the local community and none of these were involved in local recreational activities. For the ones who were attending school outside of the locality this meant they had little contact with other local teenagers. Many of these students were achieving high academic results and their disengagement from local activities may contribute to the lack of local positive role models for other students in the area.

> They need something for the teenagers to keep them occupied and keep them off the corners and from taking drugs. Stacey doesn't like the rough element up there (in local centre). Helen

Particularly for the boys who were disengaged from the area, a major factor in this disengagement was the perceived prevalence of violence in the locality.

> You would be worried because they don't seem to go around any more in ones and twos there is actually gangs around. Now he wouldn't be in a gang as such because he is in football at the weekend and then he would go down to someone's house from the football...and I would be afraid that someone else

would pick on him because he doesn't hang around in a gang around here. Ella

He doesn't like anything in the local Youth Service because for the simple reason he doesn't like the young fellas who are over there. Some of them bullied him when he was younger. Sue

The role of sport was mentioned by parents as a positive factor in protecting their children from risk factors.

With the football and the GAA there is, I wouldn't say rules but there is right and wrong and he knows how to take being told what to do and he would listen to you and he knows what's right and wrong. Carla

Sport is also an important part of the male students' sense of identity and operates as a link to their peers.

Analysis of Parent Data: Group B

6.8 Parents' educational background

Many of the mothers in this group had negative experiences of the education system and left school without formal qualifications. Mothers tended to renegotiate their own negative experiences of education through her children.

Well I encourage the kids a lot with homework and school cause I never done it but I push them to do well. I think teachers are a lot easier now where as years ago you couldn't even talk to the teachers, there was tension, whereas now the kids can talk to the teachers, even in the secondary school. Tara C

This mother sees school as a much more pleasant place to be now rather than when she was attending school. She also appears to have low expectations of how teachers relate to parents and students and does not expect them to be friendly and approachable. Joanne also regrets not finishing her own education.

I do say to them (her children) 'I left and then came back years later, so I could have done a lot more when I was younger' so you can't get on in life without a good education. Joanne

She is also renegotiating her school failure by pushing her children to do well and is attending a six week course for parents who want their children to attend third level. Several of the parents who left school early returned for further educational in tandem with their children's school progress.

6.9 Primary school experience

Most parents characterise their relationship with the primary school personnel as very personable, particularly the primary school principals. Similar to Group A parents, Group B parents were involved in a more active forms of parent involvement in the primary school. The HSCL was crucial to parent involvement in the primary school and created a culture of involvement. Involvement also seemed to have definite outcomes such as fundraising and a parents' room. The parents' room was mentioned by two parents in this group as beneficial to their participation in primary school. This contrasts to the second level school where there is no parents' room and no identifiable physical space for parents. The parents in Group A more frequently cited the parents' room in the Primary School as an important part of their relationship with the school. Early Start appears to have played a key role in familiarising parents with the room and allowing them feel comfortable in the school as it presented them with more frequent opportunities to use this designated space.

6.10 Parent participation in their child's education I (Special needs students)

6.10.1 Children with special needs

While a number of children in this group were identified as having diverse learning needs, two in particular has more serious learning difficulties and these will be discussed separately (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.6). Similar to the case studies of children with diverse learning needs in Group A with these students will be discussed separately from the students you did not have identified

special needs because of the different type of relationship that they and their parents experience with the school.

6.10.2 Tom

Tom was fifteen at the time of the interview and was in a Leaving Certificate Applied class. Tom has one older brother who is in transition year and Tom's mother is unemployed. Tom received learning support for most of his school subjects. Tom's mother has a complex relationship with the school and has been involved in a number of conflicts with the school relating to Tom's behaviour. In general she labels her contacts with the school as negative because of her son's behavioural difficulties.

> Tom is just a torment, he would wreck your head. I have been in the school so many times over Tom. But with Tom it is not always his fault either. Darina

Darina was having a lot of difficulties with Tom and it is unclear what type of support she was getting. Her contacts with the school are predominately negative and the level of parent partnership with the school was very low. She hates going to the school and admits to losing her temper in the school. She felt that her son was provoked in school and that most of the problems stem from conflict with female classmates as he has problems interacting with girls. Darina's future aspirations for Tom are low.

> I think he was lucky to even get through the Junior Cert. He is mad to be a mechanic as well but he doesn't think you need school, he thinks you just need to use your head....they are trying to make him stay so I have to make sure now he copes with this. Darina

Tom had a difficult relationship with the school. He is also cited as a violent bully by the teachers in the secondary school and as ring leader in a gang. Tom is at very high risk of early school leaving and experiences very negative contacts with the school. He has had some school supports to keep him in education such as learning support and targeted after-school clubs in first year. Tom's mother felt that he did not need to take part in some of the activities that were offered to him even though he is at high risk of early school leaving.

At the time of the data collection he was facing a very serious threat of expulsion as his behaviour had brought him in front of the school's Board of Management for bullying other children. Farrelly (2007) reports that "in disadvantaged areas there is an increased likelihood that some children will resort to aggressive and impulsive means to solve interpersonal problems. This may be due to poor social supports within the family and community that adversely affects self-esteem, sense of security and feelings of mastery over situations" (p430). Tom's teachers perceive him as violent and he has been in contact recently with the Juvenile Court Services. He attends a young offenders' programme and according to himself drinks alcohol regularly and smokes hash. When Tom was interviewed he stated that he doesn't think his mum wants him to go to college. He said he gets embarrassed if his mother gets involved in school as she has been in a lot of conflict with the school. He hates homework and thinks school is a waste of time and he sometimes drinks in front of his mother. The school have no contact with the Juvenile Liaison officers for this student and there appears to be very limited integration happening with the support services and various agencies Tom is in contact with.

6.10.3 Gerard

Gerard is the youngest of four children and he left the mainstream education system at age twelve before starting secondary school. All his older siblings were also early school leavers and he is currently attending an Early School Leavers Project in the locality. This is the second such project he has attended since leaving school after sixth class. Gerard's mother was prosecuted under the School Attendance Act (1926) in 2000 for not sending her child to school in 6th class and appeared in court.

> All of a sudden we were getting letters from the Principal saying he missed 41 days or something and the Guards were bringing me to court....I was saying 'I know kids who have missed a lot more' and all of a sudden you are in court with social workers and this. Una

Una appears to be blaming other people for her son's attendance and she did not seem to perceive a forty day absence as serious and appeared surprised to see herself in court and involved with social services over school matters. She seems to have no sense of control over the situation and thinks it is normal to miss so many days of school. This may indicate that she does not view education as a priority for Gerard.

> The judge even said to me 'could you not take him by the hand and bring him over the school' and I said 'yeah you try and grab an eleven year old child and bring him to school with all his mates going to school', but the judge didn't see it that way. Una

There appears to be some confusion over the reason Gerard did not enrol in secondary school and his mother does not view herself as responsible. The initial placement in an Early School Leavers Project was in the centre of the city which is some distance from the family home. This resulted in Gerard travelling to the project by himself and after a few months he began a routine of leaving the project early everyday and spent the afternoon un-supervised in the city centre unknown to his mother. He was allowed to make his own decisions regarding school from a young age such as whether or not to attend and there appears to be little guidance from home regarding educational decisions. His mother is very dependent on educational and social work professionals to support her and her children. The family were receiving very intensive formal family support at the time Gerard left the formal education system because of the chaotic nature of their home life at that time. Una seems unconcerned about the results of the recent drug tests.

> Twice now his drug test came back positive, the first time they said it was heroin. So they sent me over to my doctor and he did it and it came back negative. The second time it came back positive.... He is drinking now, don't get me wrong and the odd Friday night I would say to his mates now go up stairs and get yourself a few bottles but make sure it is in the house. Una

Gerard has only recently made contact with the youth services and is in a group for adolescents at-risk of juvenile offending. He has had on-going contact with the local

Gardai and the Gardai were involved in getting him a place in the Early School Leaving Project. His mother was happy with his current progress.

6.11 Parent participation in their child's education II (Non-special needs children)

6.11.1 Non-Special needs students

In the non-Early Start group, thirteen students were identified as not having special educational needs and these students will now be discussed as a group. Most parents were satisfied with their children's academic performance in school. In relation to parent evaluation of their child's behaviour in school, parents were reliant on notes from school to hear about children's progress and behaviour and the school is perceived as the educational expert.

6.11.2 Secondary school parent involvement

Similar to Group A, a pattern of less parent involvement at second level compared to primary school emerges for Group B. Twelve parents indicated that contacts with the school were completely teacher-led. These parents were almost completely dependent on the school for educational information and six parents were not happy with the current contacts they had with the school. Four parents experienced feeling disempowered by the school during parent-teacher meetings in the school. Only one parent was involved in any type of parent organisation at second level. Seven parents let children make their own educational decisions. One parent also mentioned that their child did not want them involved at second level and this parent had been on Board of Management in primary school. The transition to second level was mentioned by three parents as problematic.

> Education is very important for her and for my older son too. I thought he was so intelligent leaving that school over there (Primary). Marian

The mother indicates that her confidence in her son's academic performance changed from primary to secondary school and her expectations of her son's academic attainment were lowered. This issue of children achieving in primary school and then failing when they get to second level is mentioned by both teachers and community participants interviewed in this study (see Section 7.2.8). There were a number of factors identified by parents which are perceived as barriers to parental involvement. One of these was the fact that children do not want their parents involved in secondary school because they are more self-conscious and embarrassed about their presence in the school. A number of students (9 from Group A and 6 from Group B) reported being embarrassed by their parents' involvement at second level (see table 5.9).

Three mothers mentioned returning to education to study foundation level Maths to support their children in primary school with their homework. This training was provided by the primary school for parents. Only one parent mentioned providing direct homework support to their children at second level. In this case both the mother and father of this child had third level qualifications and felt they were able to help their daughter with her Maths at second level but the majority of parents felt unable to assist their children with homework at this level.

Communication was the most commonly discussed issue relating to parents' involvement mentioned by parents in both groups. The majority of parents indicated that communication was teacher-led but some were satisfied with this.

> The school go out of their way to make phone calls, I have had messages and all left on the phone, they have asked me to get in involved in parents' nights now. Lisa

This mother is happy with school contacts and seems surprised that the school would leave phone messages for her. This may indicate that this mother has low expectations of the level of communication with her daughter's school. A number of parents felt they had limited contact with the school because their child was well behaved and similar to Group A, most parents in this group perceived communication with the school as being associated with something negative or problematic.

> I wouldn't have been great in school so in that respect if they were talking about French or Spanish I wouldn't really know but in regards to English and Irish I would like more contact but any other subject now I would be lost. The school would know more about how he would be able to cope with it. We never push them we would suggest something and get them to make up their mind. We went too by the school and what they recommended. Carol

This mother was anxious about contacts with the school due to her own perceived lack of knowledge about the school system and she constructed the teachers as the experts. She has no confidence in her own knowledge and was dependent on her son to make his own educational decisions. There also appears to be no consultation from the school on these decisions and the mother feels unsupported in helping her children with their educational decisions. She uses knowledge of older son's educational experience to influence education decisions but she has no input from the school. The only person she consulted was her older son, and has very limited access to social capital and does not seem to be able identify a particular person in the school who is responsible for these decisions. This indicates a separation between home and school.

The use of the school journal as a tool for communication in second level was mentioned by six parents. Parents cited the role of the journal in facilitating their surveillance of their child while attending school such as informing the parent if the child is absent from school. A small number of parents in both groups also felt there were communication difficulties regarding discipline. In general the journal was perceived as an important tool of communication between home and school but was mainly used for one-way communication between school and home.

Some parents expressed dissatisfaction with the type and level of communication between home and school particularly around discipline and subject choice.

> If kids are being punished the parents have to mind their own business and let the punishment go on, which I don't agree with a bit. I think if a child is misbehaving in school they should get onto parents straight away. Tara

This mother would like more communication and connection between home and school about discipline issues to allow continuity of care. Parents viewed the school as responsible for initiating the contact and parents were waiting to be invited to be more involved in the school (see also Section 7.4).

6.11.3 Relationships with individual teachers

A positive relationship with a particular teacher was identified by some parents as central to their communication with their child's school. The role of the HSCL was identified by parents as crucial to their involvement in primary school and even though the secondary school which the majority of students attended in this study had a HSCL only one parent mentioned the HSCL. Of particular importance to some parents at second level is the role of the Year Head. This role was also mentioned by parents in the Group A. A relationship with a specific teacher facilitates communication with the school for example one teacher, was mentioned by parents from both groups as being especially approachable and made them feel at ease in the school. This is similar to parents' relationship with the primary school where they are in regular contact with the Principal and have developed a personal relationship with this person. Some parents expressed delight when teachers showed an individual interest in their child. Also one mother whose son was regularly in trouble with class teachers has a very positive relationship with one particular teacher which she felt is very beneficial to her son staying in school. Sigurdardottir et al. (2004) cite research indicating the importance of students feeling socially supported and experiencing a one-to-one caring relationship in school can help prevent early school leaving and achieve positive educational outcomes. These types of personal relationships with teachers could be seen as forms of social capital. Darmody (2007) also reports that "the nature and quality of teacher-pupil interactions have a profound influence on the school climate, have strong implications for the future life chances of pupils and can contribute to a continued cycle of disadvantage" (p392).

Several parents felt the second level principals were unapproachable and found a cultural shift from their relationship with the primary school. The closeness of the

relationship between the primary school principals and the parents seems to have heightened parents expectations of the their level of contacts with the secondary school principal and the difference in this relationship has contributed to the difficulties in transition between primary and secondary school for parents and students. The issue of the role of the secondary school principal is further discussed in Section 7.3.

6.11.4 Bullying

There were a number of incidents of bullying reported by the parents from both groups in this study. Nora for example had a disagreement with another girl in the school which led to a violent incident (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.7).

> The girl pulled Nora to the ground and tore the school bag off her and Nora didn't want to fight her she just kept pushing and pushing....I was devastated, we never had any hassle....They (the teachers) wanted to put it on her file and blacken her name, she would have been in the book for fighting, and that would have destroyed her character and she had had a clean slate for four years. Suzanne

The mother perceives the school records as a source of official information about her child and was very concerned about her child's reputation as she was reliant on the school for references. The mother felt that power lay with the school because of their control over her child's school records. She was annoyed that the school had not contacted her about the incident and felt let down. Lack of communication between the school and the parents exasperated the situation and added to the distress of the incident for the family. This was a serious incident and an example of a child experiencing serious violence at the hands of other children in their community. These incidents were not uncommon and were having traumatic effects on students such as students being afraid to attend school or to go out into the community and in serious cases students sustained physical injuries. Concerns about bullying and violence were also expressed by teachers in the study (see Section 7.3.5). Several parents related episodes of bullying which their children had experienced in both primary and secondary school.

> He was bullied one time. We took him out of secondary school for a week because he had a gash on his eye and when we went to the Principal about it he treated his Dad like a child. He said he never felt as degraded as he did coming out of that office. Tara

In the last example the father felt completely disempowered by his contact with the school and had a very negative experience with the School Principal. The parent acted as advocate for his child with the school but the father's experience with the school indicated there was not an equal relationship between the Principal and the Parent. These parents felt that the school did not do enough to tackle the issue of bullying and felt the school needed to be more proactive. They were only aware of one parent-teacher meeting which dealt with bullying and did not mention any knowledge of school policy in relation to bullying. The parents' role as advocate for their children is further discussed in the next section. Many students in the study experienced bullying at some stage and it appears episodic in nature rather than constant. Communication with the school was cited as crucial to resolving the situation.

6.11.5 Parent as advocate for their child

Several parents mentioned incidents where they acted as advocates for their child in the school, particularly when there was a conflict. Mark wanted to do transition year and asked his mother to act on his behalf in the school.

> They wanted him not to do fourth year, to go straight to fifth year but he wasn't having it. He said I want to do fourth year and I said right and I went to the school and told them. Donna

His teachers wanted him to do Leaving Certificate Applied and skip transition year but the student himself decided not to. One mother who had been very involved in both the primary school and secondary school had recently experienced a conflict with the secondary school. She felt powerless because of the conflict with the school and was worried that the disagreement might push her child out of school. She stated that she felt threatened by the school and bullied by the teachers.

> I used to do parent visits and all but now there is no way. I heard bad things about the Principal but I wouldn't have believed it and I know a few troublesome kids and it is hard for the teacher but when you have a child who has never been in trouble (before). I am so annoyed, I am so frustrated and I know when I have the meeting with the Principal I will get no where. Fidelma

The mother and child felt disempowered by the school and meeting with the Principal and the mother feels powerless to support her son. She felt that if something negative happens in school you can never regain any respect from the teachers and her son's school career is irrevocably tarnished. She felt that some teachers were taking her child's side and other teachers were not and she considered the mixed signals from school staff confusing. The parent was acting as advocate for the child and she felt that she was actually fighting the school.

> I was actually asked to start a Parent's Forum for the secondary school and I said no a few months back. See I think what is after happening is that I am so involved up there that they think they are making a point or something. It is so frustrating because this is a disadvantaged area for school kids. This is such a big issue in our house. I feel as if he has been treated really badly, people can't even believe what is going on they are shocked. Fidelma

This mother felt hurt and let down by treatment from the school especially as she was involved with the school and actually feels her involvement in the school might have influenced her son's treatment. Her son was very upset about an incident in the school. He was accused of threatening a teacher in the yard, which he denied. He felt he was not listened to in school and was picked on by other teachers over the alleged incident. His teachers, in this study, reported that he is a good student but not good at setting goals for himself and regularly misses deadlines but did not comment on this incident which is causing conflict between the family and the school. This incident highlights the fact that parents and students have no facility to take grievances to a body outside of the school and have limited access to independent advice and educational information. It is interesting that this parent was actually asked to establish a Parent Education Forum by a local community group to confront this issue. Lynch and Lodge (2002) also found from their research with second level students that "the arbitrary or unfair use of authority by adults was the issue that received most comment" from students

(p153). Students also were concerned about the issue of labelling of students and considered such labels to be self-fulfilling prophecies and unjust. This is similar to the comment by this student who was being labelled a 'trouble maker' and was told by his class mates that his teachers disliked him. While his Year Head did not consider the incident serious it is having an impact on the student's experience of school and is described by his mother as frustrating. Lynch and Lodge (2001) also contend that recent research highlights the negative impact exercising power and control over students may be having and suggest that failing "to manage power relations between students and teachers in a respectful manner, may have quite negative educational consequences" (p19).

6.11.6 Decision making at second level

There is evidence that a number of parents in this group rely completely on teachers to make educational decisions for their children. Parents were often unsure of their own educational knowledge and allowed the school make the decisions. Parents were very trusting of the teachers' opinions, they view the teacher as the expert and appear to have no other access to educational information apart from their contacts with the teachers (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.8). Other parents also expressed satisfaction with their children's school performance based on positive comments from teachers rather than actual academic results. In general parents seemed unclear about Transition Year and the qualifications offered by Leaving Certificate Applied programme (also see Section 7.4.5).

There is evidence that most of the students in this group were expected to be very self-reliant in terms of educational decision making. Parents are very reliant on the teachers' opinions relating to educational decisions and their child's academic results and school behaviour. One student, for example, initiated a meeting with parents and teacher to ask about his options for the Leaving Certificate. His parents were unable to offer him any direction because they lacked information on the education system. The motivation to seek more information and make an informed decision clearly comes from the student. Students seemed to be allowed alot of autonomy for decision making

but this may be due to lack of information from the school for parents. Jim, for example was very motivated and sought employment without informing his mother and seemed to make his own educational choices, sometimes going against the advice of teachers. Jim was very independent and self-sufficient with very little educational support from his home. The issue of student-led decision making was mentioned by the second level HSCL in this study (see Section 7.3.2).

6.11.7 Examples of the influence of social capital for decision making

There were a number of examples of parents using their social networks to seek advice before making an educational decision. The mothers who worked as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in primary schools in both Group A and Group B were very likely to use their contacts in the school for educational advice and to seek information on educational decisions.

> He was recommended to do transition year and people were saying it's terrible cause they go off the rails and that but because I work in a primary school the teachers were saying to me it is great cause it makes them more mature for going to college. Joanne

Joanne was unclear about her son's educational choices and would like more information from the school. She felt the secondary school has not given her enough information to make an informed choice and relied on her own educational contacts for information. According to Field (2003) social capital represents a resource that involves "wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and shared values" (p20) and in Joanne's case she seeks and trusts the opinions of the primary school personnel she works with to help her made educational decisions for her son. Another example of a social network was a mother who was involved in educational disadvantage in the community and worked in a local community project. This provided her with access to social capital as it gives her inside knowledge of the education system. This mother was very happy with her contacts with school and her role as an insider in the school and opportunities to network with other parents.

> I was in a few parent groups. I would still know all the parents. We network so if someone is feeling down we say 'what is the problem?' so you can give them support. Sinead

The social networks established for parents appear to be long lasting and the connections from parent groups far extend the reach of the duration of the parent groups themselves. This is similar to a recent evaluation of the Springboard family support programme in Ireland which found that strengthening a family's support network improved the families capacity to cope financially, reduced stress and improve parent-child relationship and the social networks that are developed can far exceed the length of the programme and can provide long term positive supports for families (McKeown and Sweeny, 2001). This mother is the only person to mention such a network in Group B but several Early Start parents in Group A did mention networking opportunities provided by participation in Early Start. This may indicate that Group A had been offered more opportunities to participate in such networks because of Early Start.

6.11.8 Push factors for academic success

Several factors were identified by parents in the study which would push their child to succeed in education (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.9). Marian identified her older son's failure in school as motivation for her daughter to succeed in school. The older son currently works in a factory and wants to return to education but is finding the process difficult Another mother perceived work experience in transition year as a positive experience which pushed her daughter to succeed rather than de-motivating her. This girl was also highly motivated and organised and her parents appeared very encouraging.

Three parents in this group identified their return to adult education as a motivational factor for their child's educational success. One such mother returned to education and completed a third level degree after having her daughter at a young age and views herself as a role model and inspiration for her daughter. Returning to education as an

adult provided some mothers with the opportunity to renegotiate their previous negative experiences of education and provide inspiration to their children.

> Education is very important because I didn't do it myself and doing it now as an adult it is much harder, it is easier when you are young. I say to him I should have been doing it when I was your age and I wouldn't be doing it now. Ann

Adult education provides opportunities for self development and career prospects for parents and allows parents to act as role models for their children. This was also mentioned by the 4th Year Head Teacher interviewed in the study.

One mother who felt her daughter was not enthusiastic about staying in school was applying pressure on her daughter to do her Leaving Certificate. This mother did not seem to be communicating with the school regarding her fear that her child will leave school early, indicating a separation between home and school. Another mother felt her son was being pushed from the school system by some teachers.

> Now the teachers at the minute are asking him to leave school and get an apprenticeship, they are saying you should be out getting an apprenticeship, they should be enticing children to be staying in school...I think they are sick of him and don't want him in the class. Debby

Even though she felt that some of the teachers might be pushing her son out of the school system she still viewed them as the expert and seemed unwilling to challenge them. The school itself then is acting as a push factor. The NESF (2002) highlight the 'Push-out' model of Early School Leaving which perceives institutional factors as the root cause of early school leaving including school type, curriculum, pupil teacher interaction and disciplinary procedures.

Another mother felt that parental separation had a very negative effect on her children's educational attainment and led to her eldest son leaving the education system without any formal qualifications. Family breakdown also compounded the difficulties faced by parents trying to raise a family in the area where the Early Start project is located.

The negative influence of out of school peers was mentioned by two parents in this group.

> He is getting to the age that he wants the money, a few of his friends are out of school, a boy he was friendly with is in Youth Reach. I thought the friend out of school affected him over the summer because he was saying when he gets to sixteen he is leaving school to get an apprenticeship. I would like him to stay on. Ann

The decision to leave school seems to be very much up to the child with limited pressure from home even though his mother wants him to stay. She is concerned about the negative influence of an out-of-school peer, and seemed unable to challenge this and similar to other parents in the study, she did not communicate these fears to the school. There are no other educational supports obvious to the mother and the child has not been deemed at-risk of early school leaving by the school. The influence of peers is also discussed in relation to anti-social behaviour (see Section 6.7).

6.12 Anti-social activities

6.12.1 Protecting children from risk

Parents identified a number of factors which they believed protected their children from risks. Knowledge of the child's peers was identified as an important way for parents to protect their children. Five parents also felt that their close relationship with their children helped protect him from risk (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.10). Some parents expressed concern about the negative influences in the local area and in particular, the influence of local peers.

> You always have that worry with kids, there is a lot that he grew up with that have left school and gone to a local Early School Leaving Projects...He (her son) has a bit of cop on, he would come in and say 'such and such is after being out trying to rob a car' but he would come in so he is sensible enough. Joanne

This mother perceived both involvement in sport and an open relationship between the child and parents as a way of avoiding anti-social behaviour. Her son mentioned that

he was brought home by the Gardai on one occasion for being present when a friend of his was stealing from a local shop. There were no charges brought against him but his mother did not mention this during the interview. She may have thought it was not relevant or may only have wanted to portray her son in a positive light. While she did have some concerns about involvement in crime she did not feel that there was a danger that he would get involved in drugs because she felt that the negative experiences of drug addiction in their extended family would act as a warning for her son. Joanne also highlights the prevalence of drug abuse in the community and the fears of many of the parents that their children can be lured into using drugs. Parents from both groups in this study are very concerned about the high levels of anti-social behaviour in the community and several of them mentioned how difficult it is to parent in an environment where crime and drug use were prevalent. There were strong feelings expressed by parents on the dangers of living in the area and in particular the visible signs of drug abuse and the negative impact on the children. The dangers of drugs are very apparent to teenagers growing up in the area and some mothers felt that this is a way of protecting them from doing drugs (see full parent quotes relating to this section in Appendix 10.11).

The level of violence that some of these teenagers in this area were involved in was very serious and constituted criminal behaviour. One of the teachers interviewed in this study reported that at least two children were not attending school because they were victims of violent bullying and intimidation by other children in the area. The local shops are well known as a location for drug dealing in the city and this issue is further discussed in the next section. Communication with parents is again seen as a key issue to protect children from taking drugs.

> I am very open with him and I don't think he would get involved in crime, the only thing I would be worried about would be if he got caught up in drugs. Ann

Even though Ann does not seem aware of it, her son indicated during the interview for this study that he smokes hash and doesn't perceive it as a negative thing and he also drinks on a more regular basis than his mother is aware of.

Similar to Group A, alcohol consumption in Group B is mainly associated with occasions such as the Junior Certificate results and Halloween. Many of the parents in the study were not aware of how much their children were drinking and several of the students pointed out that there is immense peer pressure to drink alcohol on a regular basis.

> Tim wouldn't drink, I am not just saying that cause he is my child, I have often offered him a drink and he would say no. We don't encourage him but if he wants to have a bottle have one. Tara

Tim implied during his interview for this study that he was drinking and there was peer pressure to drink. Most of the parents did not seem to discourage their children from having a social drink in adult company. Another student drank at home regularly in front of his mother because he claimed he was bored and there was nothing else to do in the area. He also saw it as a way to keep young people at home and off the streets. He had also been bought home in a squad car by the local Gardai on a number of occasions. In Group B three male students had been brought home by the Gardai and one male student was attending a juvenile crime diversion programme.

Parents in the study operated stricter controls over girls than boys particularly with coming home times. Particularly, for girls parents encouraged much more limited alcohol consumption. Some of the girls in the study were very strictly supervised by their parents because they feared the public spaces in the Sunbury area.

6.12.3 Disengagement from the local area

Some of the parents in the study expressed fear of living in the area and socialising in the area, this was also expressed by some of the female students in the study (see Appendix 10.12 for full parent quotes relating to this).

> Living here at the moment worries her, she doesn't like living here, she doesn't like coming home on the bus. She hates the bus you know with the druggies. Jane

This family were living in a private estate in Sunbury and felt that foreigners were to blame for recent changes in the community and changes in the social fabric. The visibility of drug usage in the area impacts on the students feelings of security and place in the community. Some families are very uncomfortable about the negative image of the area and would prefer to live outside of the area. There appears to be very little pride in the area for some families and very often these students are engaged in social activities outside of the area and attending school outside of the area, experiencing limited contact with local peers. Similar to the experiences of some participants in Group A, this disengagement with local schools and activities could have a negative impact on the social capital in the area.

6.13 Discussion

All of the parents in the study emphasised the importance of education for their children and many parents were renegotiating their own negative experiences of education through their children's positive experiences. Parents from Group A were very satisfied with their experiences of Early Start and felt that it impacted positively on their on-going relationship with their child's primary school. The results are also similar to Ghate and Hazels (2002) study which found preschools offer parents an opportunity to increase their social support network. Early Start then would seem to offer opportunities for both formal and informal forms of family support to parents in the study and was cited as being especially important for parents new to the area. There is evidence of continued parent involvement in their child's education in primary school but the impact of parent involvement at second level appears limited. Fallon (2003) discusses the assertion that current intervention programmes are not up to the challenge of real change and contends that 'dropping into' a child's life for a year is not the answer to the complex situation which many families experience' (Fallon, p 6, 2003). However the positive impact of Early Start in developing parents social support networks and increasing parents' social capital can be seen as a positive long-term

outcome of participation in the programme. The supportive relationships which the Early Start parents have developed both with the school and in some cases with other parents could be viewed in the context of the concept of solidarity, care and love labour recently developed by Lynch (2007). Love, care and solidarity labour provide forms of *nurturing capital* and create 'emotionally resourced family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours or partners' (p554). This leads to a sense of belonging and a sense of being appreciated for the individuals involved and this is evident in the outcomes for some of the Early Start parents in Group A. This finding is particularly important given the high level of socio-economic deprivation in Sunbury because Lynch claims that love, care and solidarity labour are often absent in communities which are "broken by conflict or violence" (2007, p555). Therefore Early Start could be seen as playing a role in increasing love, care and solidarity labour for some of the parents within the study.

Both groups of parents in the study were concerned with transitions for their children and in particular the transition to second level and parents were also very conscious of the child's relationship with individual teachers. Many parents in this study were disengaging from school partnership at the age at which they themselves left formal education and leave educational decision making to the child. This might be interpreted as being passive but might have more to do with parents' own perception of having inadequate knowledge about education. Parents had limited knowledge of the second level school system and were reliant on teachers for educational decision-making because they had no other access to educational information. There was very limited contact with the HSCL teachers in second level particularly compared to the level of contacts with the primary school personnel. Group A parents were particularly conscious of the role of the HSCL in primary school and their initial contacts in Early Start allowed them to develop a more informal relationship with the HSCL which they utilised throughout their childs primary school education. While few of the parents in the study reported feeling uncomfortable contacting the second level school if there was a problem, partnership with the school was limited and almost non-existent for most parents. According to Cullen (2000) many working-class parents are inhibited from

meaningful partnerships because they lack the understanding of how important it is for them to engage with their child's school and this is further compounded by "conditions of poverty and exclusion (which) inhibit parental capacities to formulate deeper relationships with schools" (p37). Vincent (1996) found that working-class parents felt that they were rarely consulted about their childrens' needs and felt distanced from the academic dimension of the school as the curriculum becomes more complicated which is similar to the findings of this study.

In relation to future aspirations for their children, Group A parents, similar to Group A students, had slightly higher aspirations for third level education which might suggest that participation in Early Start has contributed to some attitudinal changes and increased the achievement orientation of students and parents. The next chapter explores the interviews with the school personnel and community participants.

Chapter 7

Teachers' and Community Participants' Perspectives on Early Start

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the interviews with the teaching personnel and community participants in this study. The themes of transition and integration are central to the data which emerged both from the parent interviews and from the perspectives of teachers and community participants.

7.2 Primary school teachers' perspectives on Early Start

7.2.1 Overview

In the primary school where the Early Start project is located five key school personnel were interviewed. The Early Start teacher and Childcare worker who worked on the Early Start project when Group A attended in 1994/5 were both interviewed. Neither of these were working in Early Start at the time of data collection but were both in other teaching positions in the school. The teacher is now Vice-Principal in the Junior Primary School. The Childcare Worker worked for 10 years in Early Start and now works as a Special Needs teacher. The current principal of the Junior Primary school was also interviewed. In 1994/5 when Group A were in Early Start this principal was employed as the HSCL at the school so she has intimate knowledge of the project and the parental involvement aspects of the programme. The current HSCL for the school was interviewed and the Senior Primary Principal was interviewed.

The Early Start project in question is not linked with other preschools in the community or with the County Childcare Committee. It does not have a parent advisory committee. The teachers felt that Early Start has had no noticeable impact on absenteeism in the school although it is not something that they have investigated, they do feel that for some children a pattern of school absenteeism begins in Early Start. There were no health screenings during Early Start as the national immunisation programme is linked to Junior Infants. There was, however, a visit by a dentist for the parents and children on the project to explain aspects of dental hygiene and in addition the programme adopted a healthy eating policy. There was identification of speech and

language needs in Early Start which was viewed as positive as it provided early identification of these issues. This was mentioned by two parents in the study, whose children were identified as having speech difficulties while in Early Start and were put in contact with formal support.

7.2.2 Overall aims and outcomes of Early Start

The consensus among the primary school teachers questioned was that the overall aim of Early Start is to prepare children for Junior Infants.

> It is a two pronged approach, to make sure the children were better prepared for school and also to make sure that preparation happens not only in the school but at home. We are trying to build links between the parents and the school in an effort to model that kind of behaviour to them which will help the child's education background. I think you do a good job of identifying the children who are going to have problems particularly from the age of 7 or 8 and the start of formal reading. Former Early Start Teacher

Early Start is also perceived as playing a key role in encouraging parental involvement and the early identification of a child with learning needs. The position of Early Start within the school grounds was perceived as very positive by all the primary school teachers.

> I think it helps it because it takes away a lot of the fears the parents have of approaching the school and it gets them involved at a very early level and then for the child as well it is not that big a fear starting school because they are used to the physical surroundings. Former Early Start Teacher

This is similar to the views of parents in the study who viewed Early Start as central to breaking boundaries between parents and the school. Teachers were asked about their perceptions of achievements of Early Start children in Junior Infants.

> Definitely their social development is improved they are used to working in small groups or with others and they will do things like share. They are also used to a more structured day so the structure of the school day then isn't such a shock to the system, there is definitely the cognitive development because Early Start is so structured they would be used to things such as jigsaws, playing

> together, so they definitely would make cognitive gains and the biggest improvement we would see would be language development because a lot of them in the area have very improvised vocabulary even if they don't have specific language problems, I think you are giving them the day to day vocab that a lot of them don't have. Former Early Start Teacher
>
> When children come into Junior Infants totally prepared, it's extraordinarily noticeable compared to the other children and the teachers say that prior to when the programme started you would spend the first month cajoling. They didn't know how to work in groups or sit down and now the learning takes place in September. Junior Primary School Principal

The development of language skills and the contribution of the programme to the child's confidence were seen as very positive outcomes by the primary school teachers. The Early Start Childcare worker felt that children benefited in terms of socialisation and children had fewer behavioural problems in Junior Infants as they had "learnt behaviour which was required in the school environment". She also felt that children developed problem solving skills and learned to take turns in Early Start. Teachers were asked if they felt a preschool intervention can foster a positive attitude in the child and all of them felt this did occur with the Early Start participants.

One of the school Principals explained why an early years' intervention programme was important for the local area.

> Some parents sent their kids to school as soon as they were four, barely out of nappies, with no social skills or training or ability to deal with other people and it was disastrous and an awful lot of junior infants children were very ill at ease for their first few months here but the Early Start had a different agenda. It wasn't about getting them straight into school work it was about getting them into socialising, learning to live with other people, sharing and so on, it has been a total success. In an area like this if you don't pay for it they won't do it. It's not that they don't want to do it, but there are so many restrictions and I know families here with four children living on €165 per week with one parent so there is no leeway for paying for anything, there is no leeway for paying for swimming, paying for art, paying for drama. These are all the things that the middle-class family can pay for with out much hardship whereas here it is a major struggle and the same thing applies to preschool. Senior Primary School Principal

This school Principal seems to be very aware of the economic constraints that parents are enduring and the negative consequences that this has for educational outcomes and he indicates an awareness of the structural issues which might impede educational gains for some the children in the area. This is in contrast to some of the comments from other school personnel which will be discussed further on in this chapter which indicate that parental attitude is the main influence on educational outcomes and the main cause of educational failure (see section 7.2.8 and section 7.3.4). While there appears to be a cultural deficit explanation adopted relating to educational disadvantage in the area by some of the school personnel there is also an acknowledgement of the negative impact of economic inequalities on educational attainment in the area.

Teachers were asked about the integration of Early Start into the school. In particular the physical presence of the programme in the school grounds was seen as very positive. School personnel were unclear if participation in Early Start contributed to increased academic attainment for students but they were more positive about the impact on social outcomes, particularly in relation to the child's confidence.

> There is one thing I have noticed about all the Early Start children, they have no fear of performing, the children in Early Start are kids who would volunteer to read in church, who would volunteer to come up and do something at assembly, that's something I would notice about some of these kids, maybe that extra year has given them that extra confidence or that get up and go about school. Senior Primary School Principal

The positive environment in Early Start is perceived as contributing to the child's positive attitude towards learning in school and the child's confidence. According to Kellaghan (2001) cultural capital refers to the primary conditions which foster cognitive and scholastic development and improve competencies related to school success. Primary school teachers in this study identified a number of components of cultural capital which they associated with participation in Early Start. These include; modelling (the use of language in organising time and space); stimulation to explore ideas and events; high value placed on academic expectations; guidance and motivation

for school related maters and finally ensuring that the child engages in activities which are developmentally appropriate.

7.2.3 Current targeting and integration of Early Start

The Junior School Principal explained how children are currently targeted for Early Start which may not relate directly to the sample in this study but provides an interesting perspective into how the programme is integrated into the school and how the programme was been developing over the last decade.

> We offer it to everyone in our parish, we send out letters through our existing families and we put notices up in the health centre and the resource centre and places like that. We normally get seventy and have about ten on the waiting list. Generally speaking we would try to get the most marginalised but then I would but also I tend to mix it, I don't believe in segregation. If you have everybody in Early Start marginalised then you end up with a marginalised Early Start so I don't think that works but having said that you are duty bound to have the most marginalised there first. Junior Primary School Principal

Preschools in the area are not targeted or contacted during the recruitment process for Early Start students which indicates that the programme is still viewed as isolated from other early years initiatives in the area. The HSCL does not play a role in targeting families for Early Start but is central to the parental involvement aspect of the programme. One of the Principals made the point that all families in the area should be targeted as this is one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country with one of the highest early school leaving rates. The current rate of Leaving Certificate completion in the local second level school is approximately seventy per cent compared to the national average of ninety-two percent (McCoy, et al. 2007).

School personnel were asked about the links between Early Start and other local intervention programmes which target children at-risk of early school leaving such as the School Completion Programme and local homework clubs. There were mixed responses relating to the links between Early Start and these other intervention programmes.

> I think it helps identify needs and because Early Start programmes are based in more disadvantaged areas the children are more likely to benefit from other things like home work clubs. Former Early Start Teacher

> It wouldn't be right to say that all children in Early Start would be targeted and would be offered a place on another programme. Junior Primary School Principal

Some of the school participants viewed Early Start as part of an integrative response to early school leaving while others viewed it as a stand alone programme. In terms of the current integrative response to educational disadvantage which the Irish government supports it is viewed as important for the success of these programmes that they are viewed as part of an integrated strategy to combat educational disadvantage (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003). It is therefore important that Early Start is not viewed as isolated from other such programmes operating in the school or local community such as the School Completion Programme. The Junior Primary School Principal spoke about the integration of other educational interventions in the area.

> Early Start is just the start of it, in order for it to succeed and break the cycle of disadvantage you are going to have to target the area and school based programmes by themselves won't do anything, children only spend ten per cent of their waking lives in school so it is of no value unless it is coupled with a whole integrated home support help and all that kind of stuff and that is just too mind-blowing as a way forward. Junior Primary School Principal

Teachers were asked about the links between Early Start and the local community and most felt there was a 'general awareness of it in the community'.

> When it came first it actually took away jobs, two preschools closed because of it so I wouldn't say it had a good profile but that was ten years ago so it might have changed.
> It is a different type of thing because it is education led, you see it is very teacher led...it doesn't allow for time out and time to be or become and create because it is Department of Education. Junior Primary School Principal

The structured nature of the programme and the perceived links to the Department of Education and Science seem to prohibit community involvement. However the Early

Start Childcare Worker identified a number of ways in which the project had linked with the wider community.

> It works closely with the Health Board Speech and Language Services. Also it works with the local Area Partnership who have provided some additional funding and employed local organisations to run parent courses. Professionals in the area would come and offer advice and courses to parents. Early Start Childcare Worker

Teachers were asked about the role of short-term intervention in preventing future school failure for young children. Short-term interventions were viewed as positive if they could be added to as the child progressed through school.

7.2.4 School readiness

School readiness was identified as the central aim of the programme by all the primary school respondents and was described as being a multi-faceted concept.

> Socially and emotionally ready for school, even though a lot them will be a young four years of age, they are actually more emotionally ready for school because they have had the experience of being with other children. It is to do with the language and the enjoyment of learning that the readiness is there, they are not daunted by school, they know they are going to enjoy it and unbeknownst to themselves, while they are playing, they are learning. Former Early Start Teacher

School readiness was identified as being; physically, socially and cognitively ready for school. The Early Start Childcare Worker felt that Early Start contributed to school readiness through language development such as teaching children shapes and rhymes, through teaching children what types of behaviours were required in school and it contributed to the development of social skills by teaching children how to play with each other. The Early Start Childcare Worker felt that participation in Early Start impacted positively on a child's class room behaviour because they have been encouraged in Early Start to conform to classroom rules concerning what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Teachers were asked if they felt that teachers' perceptions of school readiness were different to those of the parents.

> I think parents are more worried about them emotionally, about them separating and that and I don't think until the parents come into the Early Start room and realise how quickly their children can learn and how educational so-called play is and I don't think they realise their children are so ready for it. I think the more they participate with the Early Start programme the more amazed they are about what their children can do or what they can do with their children at home. Former Early Start Teacher

The Early Start teacher views Early Start as playing a role in creating awareness among parents of school readiness and increasing parents' expectations of their child's learning potential and abilities.

> Certainly you would have some parents who have very low expectations for their children, you would have parents who only want them to be happy and you would have parents also who want them to be writing the dictionary before they come out of it. Junior Primary School Principal

Parents in the study tended to focus on the importance of discipline for their child and the role of Early Start in helping their child fit into the school routine and sought the teachers' approval for their child when discussing school readiness. This is similar to the 'resource model of school readiness' as described by Piotrkowski (2000) and parents tended to de-emphasis interests and curiosity and instead emphasis concrete skills to help students adjust quickly and successfully to classroom. Parents' and teachers' views did concur on the practical preparation of children for school and the importance of routine but teachers tended to put more emphasis on children developing a positive attitude to learning and language development during Early Start.

The Junior School Principal was asked if she felt that the teacher's concept of school readiness would impact on whether or not a child received additional learning supports.

> I don't think so, it can confuse the issue at the beginning of course but you do an awful lot more research now before you put the child in special needs. Junior Primary School Principal

She was also asked about the impact of Early Start on other Junior Infants who did not take part in the programme and whether this hinders their progress in school.

> Some of the more marginalised kids would have been sitting at home and watching TV and doing nothing and it takes them ages to settle in but having said that coming into a group who are settled themselves has an effect. Junior Primary School Principal

Interestingly, the Principal conveyed the positive impact that Early Start students might have on non-Early Start students in Junior Infants because they were settled into the school. Some of the parents in Group A also felt they themselves had a positive impact on other parents whose children did not do Early Start as they could provide these parents with support and reassurance when their children started in Junior Infants.

7.2.5 Role of Early Start in encouraging parent involvement

The role of Early Start in encouraging parent involvement was discussed and all participants felt it was very influential in encouraging parent involvement. In particular school personnel mentioned the positive nature of parent involvement in Early Start. The Childcare Worker identified a number of ways in which Early Start supported families. These included the early identification of special learning needs and the development of a positive relationship between the home and the school at the beginning of the child's education. In relation to home-school relations the Childcare Worker identified the role of the HSCL as a key aspect of this. The HSCL offered advice to parents on how to develop various skills and the Childcare Worker stated that "if we had problems relating to the child's attendance, hygiene or worried about the child they would pay a visit. They also organised courses which we as a team, the HSCL and teachers thought the parents might need". The types of courses that parents were attending appeared to be dictated by the school personnel rather than the parents.

The school personnel were viewed as the experts in terms of parents needs by both the parents in this study and the teachers.

The HSCL discussed the role of Early Start in providing positive contacts between the school and parents.

> We had some new parents training as parent educational visitors this year, one is a parent from Early Start and the others I got to know from the Early Start. They engaged enough with me and the school to do the course. HSCL (Primary school)

This concurs with Lewis and Archer (2006) who also found in their research that Early Start allowed parents to develop a rapport with the HSCL particularly if they had a number of children attending the programme over a number of years. Also in their study they found that HSCLs tended to perceive their role in Early Start as more positive than their work with older pupils. Reasons given for this included parents being more enthusiastic than parents of older children and parents needing more support because their children were younger. Also the study found that the majority of HSCLs perceived Early Start as having a positive impact on parents' attitudes to teachers. The role of the HSCL in Early Start was mentioned by teachers in this current study as crucial to the success of parent involvement with the programme. School personnel felt that the needs of working parents were not met by the programme and in particular there was a change in the nature of parent involvement in the area as more parents became engaged in the labour force.

> I think it was always difficult to get as many parents involved as you would like and in latter years it is harder because more parents are working, so I mean they would be good and they will take time off to do some programmes if it is once a week for four weeks but really at the beginning there was almost a daily Rota where you have two of them in helping you. This is not happening any more because of practical reasons more than anything. Former Early Start Teacher

> It doesn't serve working parents at all, it ends at 11am. I think there should be one session and it should go on until lunch time or even after lunch, the dual day is ridiculous. Junior Primary School Principal

In relation to the contribution of Early Start to parent employment in the area one Principal mentioned that it has indirectly contributed in a positive way.

> I am sure there would be a knock on effect, certainly we would have noticed that parents who start here doing any small course at all lead on to something else, they would go on to FAS, that used to be the case but now with the tiger economy they don't need to. The Community Employment Scheme here was terribly valuable for women. Junior Primary School Principal

7.2.6 Parent involvement at primary school

Teachers were asked if they felt that the initial active parent involvement associated with Early Start was continued throughout their child's education and if parents are involved in a meaningful way in their childrens' primary school education.

> They are currently involved in Maths for Fun and I would say all those parents involved were involved in Early Start, I think it does mean they are going to stay involved if they are caught early. I know that as a staff and as a school we are arrogant in our professionalism as all professionals are. But I think if you ask parents if they are strong and forceful enough they get their way, we don't just pay them lip service. Now, the more marginalised you are the less you have a say. Junior Primary School Principal

Similarly Lewis and Archer (2006) also found in their research that the HSCL coordinators reported that "it was not unusual for a core group of supporters to form during the Early Start year and to remain supportive as their child progressed through school" (p24).

Teachers were asked about the gap in educational knowledge between the home and the school and how the school attempts to addresses this.

> It is very difficult to know how to bridge that gap, I mean you can hand out policies to them, you hand out books and you hand out notes to them and there are a section of people who will not read the stuff and take it on board. Now we do try in the school to inform parents and have them involved. Their take-up of that is about two-thirds I suppose. There was a lot more parent involvement in the early 1990s when the HSCL started first because a lot of parents weren't in

> the workforce. The HSCL provided assertiveness courses and parent development courses and parents got wings, the same thing isn't true now, they are winged already. It's a different society. Junior Primary School Principal

> Yeah I would say there is a huge gap, they are very familiar with what goes on in preschool, because obviously a lot of what they do is brought home such as arts and crafts or songs with the kids. As the child goes further on into primary education I would say their knowledge of what goes on is decreasing. Senior Primary School Principal

The primary school teachers indicated that the levels of parent involvement dropped-off as the children got older. Teachers were asked about the parents expectations of educational outcomes for their children and all the teachers felt their expectations were higher now than in the past. In terms of educational decision, making one of the Principals felt that the school takes responsibility for most of the decisions and that this is based on trust which has been established between parents and the school over the last number of years.

> If we are going to put a child into resource classes or learning support we consult the parents and ask them if they want that to go ahead but I think the longer the school is in operation and the school record is good and the people in the locality have confidence in the Principal. They will be very supportive of what you are doing and realise your heart is in the right place as regards the Childs welfare. Senior Primary School Principal

There was a consensus among the primary school staff that the current understanding of parent involvement needs to be broadened to account for the increasing number of parents working and more grandparents taking primary responsibility for contacts with the school. In the cases of some children, the school is aware that the extended family has become more involved in the primary care of children particularly because of the increase in the number of lone parents in the area and this issue needs to be factored into any strategies promoting parent involvement to recognise these care arrangements.

7.2.7 Parent involvement at secondary school

Primary school teachers were asked about the differences between parent involvement at primary school and secondary school and the HSCL spoke about the issue of transfer to second level.

> Secondary School Principals are administrators and would have a very different role to primary school principals, if you walk in here, our Principal is at the door with handshakes and hugging parents and kissing parents and shaking hands with babies it's a totally different role in secondary and I don't know who replaces that.
> It boils down to professionalism, secondary schools see themselves as professionals and their professional status is to deliver the curriculum and all this other stuff is peripheral and if the parents are afraid to come up to the school well that is the parents problem, go and get a counsellor. HSCL (Primary school)

The language of professionalism and the social construction of the teacher as the educational professional was acknowledged by all of the school personnel in the study and the primary school HSCL indicated that this overtly professional status is a barrier to parent involvement at second level. Also the primary school personnel indicated that in the primary school the teachers perceive themselves as responsible for parent involvement while at secondary school there is a shift in responsibility from the teachers onto the parents to initiate contacts with the school.

> The local secondary school would have 780 pupils and if you spoke to the Principal in that school the chances are he won't have an intimate knowledge of those kids, I have 250 here I would have an intimate knowledge of most of them if not all of them. Also if a parent wants to consult a teacher here the parent comes down here and has access to her pretty quickly and she could speak at length about that child and would have a very intimate knowledge about that child so with the result that parents find it more satisfactory to come to the primary school and they love to know that you are familiar with their child. Senior Primary School Principal

Parents in the study also mentioned the importance of teachers knowing their child and parents mainly had low expectations about the second level schools knowledge of their child. One of the primary school Principals felt that the primary school contributed to

lack of parent engagement with the secondary school by being too welcoming in primary and not preparing parents for the different culture of the second level system.

> In some ways the way we treat parents and children here in this school is not doing the children any favours. It creates a dependency, they go to the secondary school and there is no way they are going to be handfed (by the school), it is a very tough system, the exam system is tough, it is very tough. Junior Primary School Principal

This principal points to her fears of a hand-holding pedagogy operating in primary school for parents which may be a disadvantage as it does not prepare them for the challenges of interaction with the second level system. She also felt that many parents and children had high expectations in primary school but these were lowered when they got to secondary school because they were unprepared for the rigidity and exam orientation of the second level system. Davis et al. (1994) point to the dangers of a hand-holding pedagogy in access programmes at University which can foster dependency in students and contribute to students inabilities to cope with transitions. Other primary school teachers felt that second level schools needed to be more responsive to parents' needs and that many parents were disempowered by their contacts with the secondary school.

> To be honest I have found a level of frustration in parents, if something goes wrong in secondary school the chain of command they have to go through to get to the person who is dealing with it is frustrating. They are dealing with so many different people, it bogs them down. I think they have a long way to go in being more parent-friendly and more open to parents. Senior Primary School Principal

Lynch (1999) also found that some teachers' perceived parents as being intimidated by teachers and that this was a barrier to equality of opportunity. According to Lewis and Archer (2006) the main barriers to sustained parent involvement are "levels of deprivation and the absence of appropriate supports" (p31)

7.2.8 Predictors of Early School Leaving

Teachers were asked to highlight what they felt were the main predictors of success and failure in education.

> An awful lot has to do with the family and family contact with the school. If from day one the family make contact with the school and try their very best to make all meetings, it is very important that parents would see the school as a resource. If they speak about school as a dump and so on their child will have no confidence in school so anything we can do to improve the PR of the school in the area is good. Senior Primary School Principal

> A history of early school leaving still tends to repeat itself and often times if the child starts from a poor behavioural and language base I think it is a very strong predictor of difficulties to come. Former Early Start Teacher

Contacts between the home and school are perceived as being of primary importance for school completion and the influence of parents was perceived as the most important factor. Also the perception of the school in the wider community is seen as a factor. The HSCL perceives the child's confidence and enthusiasm for learning as the key to success for a child in school.

Another factor identified as influential was the overall attitude to education in the local community and the normalisation of academic achievement in the community.

> Middle-class people see third level as a norm, it is not seen here as a norm. I say to parents in Early Start this is the first meeting you will have now and it will end when you child is age twenty-two and you go to her graduation, I really believe that eighty per cent of them can do that, I know the teachers believe that, but they go over there to the secondary school, they go out in the world and it falls, they don't have the parental back-up at home and the rest is not enough. I think education is becoming more alien in this community, I think because of the Celtic Tiger economy now people have money. You can get a job now and right, they are probably dead end jobs but they are providing an immediate reward and an immediate reward is what people in this area want and the need to be educated is not as great a need as it was perceived to be in the past. There isn't an ownership of education. There are reasons I don't know, it is money too and it is seen as middle-class and the reward is not immediate.
> Junior Primary School Principal

Educational attainment may be perceived as an alien concept in the community due to economic insecurities in the locality (see section 5.2.1). Lynch (1999) in a study of socio-economic barriers to third level found that "students' ambitions and aspirations for the future were influenced by the economic and social conditions in which they lived" and families were perceived by local community activists in the study as often not having the "time, money or energy to encourage educational ambitions" (p104-105). Teachers in the study also reported that low-income working-class schools had "a cultural climate not conducive to educational success" and this climate was created by the students rather than the teachers (ibid, p108). Lynch (1999) contends that poverty and insecure income creates a culture where "people lacked 'a sense of ownership' of powerful institutions in society, including higher education which lowers people's hopes and aspirations for themselves and their children" (p107).

The HSCL pointed out that there needs to be more teachers in the local schools who are originally from the local areas.

> We need teachers from this area to serve this school. If you were to take any local school possibly all teachers are from the country, rural or urban middle-class backgrounds and parachuted into so called urban disadvantage. There are other issues about how kids are related to. HSCL

This concurs with Lynch (1999) who reported that community activists in her study viewed teaching staff as being predominantly from middle-class backgrounds and often did not understand working-class values, culture or lifestyle. Also teachers in the same study demonstrated awareness of the "cultural differences between themselves and students in working-class backgrounds" particularly in large urban schools (ibid, p114). The HSCL highlights the potential difficulties in teacher-pupil relations because of cultural differences and the contribution of this to alienating the local community from the school. Related to this issue is a recent increase in the number of Traveller children attending the Early Start project in this study. This has been facilitated by the work of the Traveller Support Worker who is attached to the school and is herself a Traveller. The Support Worker liaises between the school and local Traveller families to increase

enrolment in Early Start and has helped overcome some of the previous obstacles to the participation of Traveller children in Early Start such as families lacking information on enrolment and negotiating cultural barriers.

In addition to Early Start an extra year in junior primary school was recommended by two of the primary school staff as a way of combating early school leaving. Interestingly several parents also felt that their children, all boys, were too young starting school and this had a negative impact on their current academic attainment in second level. These parents also suggested a second year of Early Start for children who were not mature enough for formal school. Ryan et al (1998) stated that two principals in their study felt that children should be able to attend Early Start for a second year particularly if the child experienced behavioural or emotional problems. Lewis and Archer (2006) also reported that a HSCL in their study felt a second year of Early Start would be beneficial.

7.3 Second level teachers' perspective

7.3.1 Introduction

School personnel from the local second level school where the majority (twenty-six) of the study participants were enrolled were interviewed about Early Start. The HSCL and three Year Heads were interviewed. All of the second level teachers had been teaching in the school for over ten years. Teachers in the local second level school were asked if they could identify any differences in social and academic outcomes between Group A and Group B in the study. The 5th Year Head, who had previously been the 1st Year Head for both of the study groups, felt that students in both groups had mixed abilities. Students in both groups were in the top and the bottom streams but there were a slightly higher percentage of higher achievers in the Early Start group. The 5th Year Head recommended that instead of a preschool programme such as Early Start it would be more beneficial to have an extra year at the start of secondary school to allow the child to successfully transfer to second level. This was in contrast to the

recommendations by the primary school staff that there should be an extra year in Junior Primary to allow the children to settle into formal education.

7.3.2 Parent involvement in second level

The second level HSCL felt that there was no noticeable difference regarding parent involvement between parents in both groups. The school does not currently ask parents information regarding preschool background when the children register. The 3rd Year Head felt that the majority of the Early Start parents were interested in parent involvement. The 5th Year Head asserted that there was limited parent involvement for most of the parents in the school and that this is in contrast to parent involvement in schools in areas with a higher socio-economic profile.

> There would be parent involvement on request, they would never actually ring us up and say my son didn't get homework in Maths for 3 days what's wrong? You would never get that sort of middle-class response to that situation.
> 5th Year Head

The HSCL felt that parents in the area allowed their children to make the majority of educational decisions once their children enrolled in secondary school.

> Parents in our catchments area grant their children a considerable degree of autonomy amazingly early in their life and by and large it is the child who decides what secondary school they go to, now I find this inconceivable. There is definitely a literacy problem so if the circular is written in words of more than three syllables it may get lost. We have a gap at the moment in our Board of Management for a parent, we put a notice in the school newsletter that every pupil got for their parents but we got no applicants, none what so ever and we have 700 pupils. Getting parents involved here is very difficult. HSCL (Secondary school)

A cultural deficit explanation is offered by teachers for the lack of parent involvement in the school and the lack of parental interest seem to be perceived as the main reason for limited parent-teacher partnership. The second level teachers in the study seem to attribute much of the cause of educational disadvantage to individual family factors and attitude while the primary school personnel were more likely to highlight the

contribution of economic and structural causes to educational disadvantage in the area. The 3rd Year Head explained why she felt that parents were not taking responsibility for educational decisions.

> In my experience a lot of parents abdicate responsibility and the earlier that happens, the more chance of loss of educational attainment and early school leaving. This abdication could be due to lack of confidence in their parenting skills, lack of interest in their children (maybe due to more pressing personal problems) or an immature desire to be 'friends' with their children. 3rd Year Head

In relation to parent involvement the 5th Year Head felt there were already a number of ways that parents could be involved in the school including an open door policy in place to meet Year Heads and Tutors but parents rarely used these facilities. Parent-teacher meetings were available and the HSCL was available but these were used only by the 'already committed and interested parents'. She felt that the same was true of the open days, school events and career talks available at the school. The 4th Year Head stated that the Adult Education courses available at the school were one of the strongest methods of parent involvement available to parents as the example set by parents who took part in these courses was a brilliant motivator to children. This sentiment is also expressed by parents in the study who have returned to education and felt this motivated their children to succeed in school.

The 5th Year Head discussed the gap in knowledge between parents and the school and felt that parents were given numerous opportunities to contribute to decision-making in their child's education. She did, however, also mention the anxieties that some parents may have about contacting the school.

> In first year all the parents are met by myself, the HSCL and the Guidance Counsellor and we spend a huge amount of time talking with them. We have even started an opening day but we have a very poor up-take for those meetings. We communicate with the parents as much as we can but if they won't come to us we can't do anything about it.
> We break down barriers as best we can but I think parents here all have had such bad experiences in school themselves that they find it difficult, it is hugely

> important that people who are dealing with parents break down barriers. Parents are very anxious coming here but it is something every single teacher in this school is conscious of, whether they react to it positively or not is another ball game and I have seen some appalling confrontation over the years that I would love to have intervened on.
> The other side is that very often teachers also feel very threatened by the parents. There would be parents who are very aggressive and attack is the best form of defence to them. 5th Year Head

There appears to be a level of frustration among some of the second level teachers about the lack of parent involvement. The 4th Year Head also felt that the school makes a huge effort to bridge this gap with parents and it is the least well informed parents whose children were most likely to drop out of school. Kilkenny (2007) discusses the need for parents and professionals working in education to understand each others perspectives, "for example, teachers need to understand that parents who have themselves suffered educational disadvantage may not be in the best position to appreciate the importance of education for their child" (p145). A more mutual understanding between parents and teachers would contribute to more meaningful communication and provide greater support for children to reach their academic potential. The primary school personnel in the study and the community participants all felt that the second level schools needed to be more proactive in encouraging parent involvement. A number of parents in the study also expressed similar sentiments and were unhappy with their contacts with the school. The HSCL discussed parents' role as advocates for their child and also the role of the HSCL as an advocate for parents.

> I try to act as advocate for the parents. Our school Principal is something of a bureaucrat, he understands institutions and process but not the human side. He doesn't appreciate a child being late for family reasons. I feel it is my job to make the plea but I almost never win. I know they are trying to run like a well-oiled machine with all the classes and teachers and pupils but there is a human side. That's the difference with primary school they are all little families and they can start off the day with painting and if a kid comes in late it doesn't matter. HSCL (Secondary school)

The notion of the second level system being inflexible to the needs of the individual child was also mentioned by primary school teachers and community personnel

interviewed in the study. In connection with this inflexibility it was noted by two teachers that some students preferred the flexibility of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) which suited their learning styles compared to the more structured Junior Certificate programme.

7.3.4 Predictors of early school leaving

The 5th Year Head identified the role of a peer group and students ability to set goals for themselves as predictors of success in school. The 4th Year Head felt that the key factor for successful completion of school was home support and "parents who have awareness of the education system and want their child to do well". He also stated that in situations where the support is not coming from the parent or guardian then there has to be a significant other such as an older sibling or an aunt who motivates the student. Occasionally this motivator might be a community worker or teacher who encourages the student and instils self-confidence. In relation to failure in school, the 4th Year Head identified a number of factors including poor attendance and casual absence, lack of parental interest, history of early school leaving in the family, lack of confidence and poor social skills. The HSCL felt that many of the students in the school had few long-term plans compared to middle-class students who make "long term plans much earlier in their life". Lack of future orientation was identified as a significant factor in early school leaving.

7.3.5 Risk behaviour

Secondary school personnel discussed some of the risk factors faced by children in the study. The 5th Year Head specifically identified a student, James who is in the Group A, as a cause of concern in the school personnel.

> James is hugely capable, probably one of the most capable kids in the school with probably the worst extra-curricular record of any student that I have ever known. He is highly intelligent, could be a fantastic achiever and I don't know if he will make it because I would worry for his safety sometimes. When he is out of school he is living the life of a semi-criminal. There are problems associated with the family. His mother would deny that but I can tell you I know him and we sit and chat a lot, he is in a gang they are absolutely

> unbelievable, they are running riot. There are kids not coming to school because of this gang, there is a child that I teach who hasn't been in school since the 25th of January because two of those people gave him such a bad beating-up that he is afraid to come to school. 5th Year Head

The HSCL also discussed a number of students in the study who were in a gang and even though all of the students had attended Early Start he felt there was no correlation between Early Start participation and involvement in such activities. The 3rd Year Head also raised concerns she had about some of the Early Start group being involved in a gang.

> I think what is going on outside of school is more important than inside of school there is a gang element outside of school. James is in that gang and they seem to think that they are in charge and that everyone is afraid of them, and you can see that is starting to come in here and they are trying to do the same with the staff, intimidate them. I have had countless meetings with James and he is now reporting to the Principal. James' father gave me an awful hard time at a meeting last year so the Principal said look I will deal with him.
> 3rd Year Head

The 5th Year Head identified a number of risk factors in the area such as alcohol, drugs, depression, mental illness and family breakdown. He also highlighted the malign influence of gangs and problem families in the area.

7.4 Community Perspectives of Early Start

7.4.1 Introduction

According to Garbarino and Ganzel (2000) an ecological perspective demands a focus on both the interactions between the child and the immediate social environment and an examination of the interplay of the broader social systems on the child's social environment.

> We must recognise that the habitat of the child at-risk includes family, friends, neighbourhoods, church, and school as well as less immediate forces that constitute the social geography and climate (e.g., laws, institutions and values) and the physical environment. (Garbarino and Ganzel, 2000, p76)

Similarly Earls and Buka (2000) contend that communities are important to study "because economic, geographic and cultural factors matter in human development" (p309). Five professionals working in educational disadvantage in the local community were interviewed to contextualise the role and impact of Early Start in the local community. These included the Manager of the Local Youth Services which provided targeted after-school clubs, summer projects and a wide rage of activities for children aged from four years to eighteen years. The local School Completion Co-ordinator was interviewed. The School Completion Programme is a Department of Education and Science funded initiative which targets children in the area at-risk of early school leaving (see Appendix 1 for further information on the School Completion Programme). The Coordinators of two community afterschool projects which target children at-risk of early school leaving were also interviewed. The first of these, Project A, targets children from two local primary schools who are in second and third class and provides breakfast clubs and weekly homework clubs. Project B targets children from the same schools who are in sixth class and focus on supporting the childrens transfer to second level. Finally the Manager of the local Community Crèche was interviewed. This crèche provides preschool and afterschool childcare for parents who are working or are in full-time education.

All of the participants were asked about the formal links that their organisations had with Early Start. Early Start does not have any formal link with any of the community participants but all are aware of the programme and students from Early Start were not specifically targeted for other educational supports by these community groups. The Community Crèche has developed informal links with Early Start and some children in their crèche attend Early Start in the morning or afternoon.

Participants were asked about whether or not there was a sense of community ownership of the local Early Start project.

> I would say it is school owned not community, but I wouldn't say that is an issue for the parents as far as they are concerned their kids are getting a start and that is all they are concerned with and it is not costing them anything so here is something provided by the state and the school which they know is professionally run and is getting them ready for the school the next year. Manager Local Youth Services

All of the participants felt that the position of Early Start within the school grounds was a positive factor.

7.4.2 Role of preschool programmes in tackling educational disadvantage

Participants were asked about the role of a preschool programme in tackling early school leaving in the area and al agreed that it supported children in their transition to primary school.

> They are getting a year of extra experience that they wouldn't have and that it very important for a child at that age and a year for a child at that age is a long time. School Completion Co-ordinator

One participant points out the need for more investment in early years' interventions in the area, particularly in the provision of services for very young children, prenatal care and formal parent support and parent education programmes. The importance of targeting formal support at parents was also reiterated by another participant.

> I think it can give them a great start if it addresses things like social skills and language skills and self esteem, I would see it having even greater value if it is tied into formal support for the parents. My worry is now there is less parent involvement, obviously there are more working parents but there is still a bit of work to be done in convincing parents that this work needs to be done with their children. I was actually at a meeting last week talking to parents who are in prison and the biggest message I wanted to get across is, if your child is offered extra support in the community that you should take it with open arms. Manager Local Youth Services

This concern about the current levels of parent involvement in the area was reiterated by the primary school personnel in the study who felt that recent employment gains were having an adverse effect on parent involvement in education. One of the

community participants felt that Early Start had a number of shortcomings in meeting the needs of families in the area and expressed some reservations about the nature of the programme.

> It is inappropriate to be training a child at such a young age to fit into such a formal system. We have made the system the focus rather than the child. Many European countries don't start school until they are 6 and Early Start is doing it on the cheap, bringing them into Early Start, into formal school before we have given them good quality preschool care, a lot of the skills that are necessary for reading could be built on in an informal setting which would be better for the child, we are providing childcare in a cheap way for disadvantaged children. Project B Co-ordinator

This community activist was concerned about the nature of Early Start which she felt was too focused on getting children to 'fit into' the formal school system and presents a very Functionalist analysis of the role of Early Start. She questioned the rationale for having a system of preschool just for the most disadvantaged children in our society and questioned whether or not this led to the creation of one system for middle-class and one system for the working-class children in Irish society.

7.4.3 School readiness

School readiness was identified by the community participants as the main benefit of Early Start. Early Start was perceived as playing a key role in teaching children the social skills needed for school participation particularly for children who were coming from homes with alcohol or drug problems.

> My worry is that, particularly, coming from homes where there is heroin or alcohol present or girls rearing children on their own and under pressure that the kids' general social skills and language aren't developed and their ability to cope in a group isn't developed so I think that is a huge benefit from Early Start. Some would have difficulties around discipline, exhibiting inappropriate language that they hear at home and not realising that it is inappropriate, telling other kids to 'fuck off' or just getting up and walking around, the parenting at home is poor. Early Start has a major part to play in those issues and teaching children what is appropriate and the social preparation, obviously it should be fun so the child knows that it is a fun and safe place to be. Manager Local Youth Services

Participants were asked about parents and teachers perceptions of school readiness.

> Parents would be thinking more along the lines of practicality and teachers would be thinking more along the lines of academic and behavioural readiness expectations, there is a big dividing factor about what age to send your child to school, whether it is four or five. School Completion Co-ordinator

> There are some teachers in the area who have a great empathy and understanding but I think it can be really hard for a teacher from a different social back ground to understand what a child here goes through before they come to school unless they have had specific training and I don't think they are receiving that. Teachers should be learning about the community that the child is coming from. Project B Co-ordinator

The class differences between teachers and the local community was previously identified by some of the primary school personnel in this study and the community participants highlighted the fact that class differences may mean that parents and teachers have different school-readiness expectations. The Manager of the Local Community Crèche was asked specifically about what she felt school readiness meant and she cited the ability to solve problems as central to a childs readiness to attend formal education.

As well as readiness for school Early Start was cited as providing children with the skills to take part in local youth club activities.

> Now we have clubs for children aged four, we find them easier to manage because they have been in a group before, they are more used to not being with their mothers and relating to other adults. They have better developed social skills. Manager Youth Services

Piotrkowski et al. (2000, p537) argue that school readiness is 'locally constituted' because the child is prepared for school based on locally made day-to-day decisions and this period of initial adjustment to school for a child is particularly important in high-need communities such as Sunbury. Often parents and preschool teachers are preparing children for school based on their own implicit beliefs of what the child needs rather

than "empirically documented criteria of what young children should know and be able to do when they are 4 or 5 years old" (Piotrkowski et al, 2000: 538). The Northside Partnership (2006) in a discussion on improving school readiness in the Northhside of Dublin in an area with similar socio-economic conditions to Sunbury indicate that effective programmes need to be flexible to the needs of families and focus on capacity building to overcome adversity. Also the integration of new and existing services is critical.

7.4.5 Parent involvement in education

The participants discussed the current barriers associated with parent involvement in the area.

> I don't think schools are really listening to parents yet and schools are only becoming aware that a collaborative relationship with parents is the only way to proceed. Co-ordinator Project B

Another issue identified was the increase in employment, particularly part-time and unskilled employment available to women in the area. The role of the HSCL in promoting parent involvement was mentioned by the participants. All the participants except the Crèche Manager would have contacts with the HSCL on a regular basis and two of the projects have a local HSCL involved in their management committees. In particular the participants were conscious that the HSCL was perceived by parents in the area as a member of the school staff and this acted as a barrier to the effectiveness of the role.

> We have an Outreach Worker here and parents don't see her as representing the interests of the school. I think it would be one of the weaknesses of the Dept of Education and Science in that they are not willing to draw in other professionals into the role of HSCLs with different experiences and background, just because you are a teacher doesn't mean you are qualified to do all other roles in school. School Completion Co-ordinator

> There is a grave danger that HSCLs are an advocate for the school and not for the parent and that what we are trying to do is to get parents to conform with the system. We have a parent resource worker to advocate for the parents and the schools ask 'why do we need that we have the HSCL?' In general if the parent

> is having a problem the HSCL is identified with the school and if you are having problem with the school it is the last place you will go to resolve the issue.
> I think anyone who is identified by parents as a professional, even social workers are in danger of alienating people and they will not approach you if they have a genuine need, people have a distrust of professionals.
> Co-ordinator Project B

Community participants highlighted the difference they perceived between parent involvement in primary schools and parent involvement at second level.

> Primary school is much more child-centered and much more open to parents. I know that in secondary we are told that subjects are the focus of education and not the child anymore but I think it is horrendous that over a summer we expect a child to change from one system to another, I would think the secondary school system is not parent friendly. Co-ordinator Project B

> Primary school system is much more accessible. I think it is a fault of the secondary school system. Parents should be comfortable going up there. Virtually the only contact they have is if their child is misbehaving and it is a note and a phone call. Parents absolutely hate going up to the school.
> We see sixth class kids come in and they are a happy bunch and then in First Year they are aggressive and a different bunch altogether. Manager Youth Services

There were a variety of issues highlighted relating to the lack of parent involvement at second level and the difficulties that children faced when settling into second level including the lack of key contact personnel and the difficult transition to first year for students. Downes et al (2007) contend that the current open atmosphere within Irish primary schools "may create expectations in pupils of an emotionally communicative and supportive environment at second level that could lead to a heightened sense of disillusionment if the atmosphere is not sustained across the transition to second level" (p414). The transition to second level was seen as a factor in de-motivating some children and this issue was also identified by some parents and teachers in the study. The pressure to conform and the inflexibility of the second level system can become a risk factor for the child.

7.4.5 Knowledge gap

The community participants were very conscious of parents' lack of knowledge regarding the different types of academic programmes available in the school and again the importance of supporting educational transitions for children was identified, in particular transition between primary and secondary school.

> I think the schools would do as much as they can in having information nights and leaflets but informing parents falls a lot of the time to community groups because parents feel more comfortable in going to this group rather than the school directly. I would see it when children transfer to secondary and the importance of subject choice and the difference between Junior Cert and Junior Certificate Schools Programme and the qualification level children will get. I don't think there is enough explanation for that for the parent and child. It has a huge impact for them for Leaving Cert and third level. I would love to see the schools and local communities come together and address this. School Completion Co-ordinator

> As an impact of all the initiatives in the area, there is a small but growing number of people more aware of education than they were before. For a large number of people here second level was thought of as college, they wouldn't even have been aware of third level. Their knowledge of different levels say ordinary to higher level is still very poor, there are some people, in general it is children who are teaching parents. In middle-class schools parents are totally aware and they are guiding the child. In a terrible way parents are fools, they think someone coming out with a foundation level Junior Cert has employment possibilities. We are leading them to believe that if they go to school and get their Junior Cert or Leaving Cert that that means better employment but that is not the case because credential inflation has happened in this country and if you want a good job you need your Leaving Cert and even that is no guarantee anymore you nearly need a third level qualification. Project B Co-ordinator

There was a strong belief that the lack of information on the significance of academic choices has an impact on future choices for students in the area and directly impacts on access to third level education. Lynch and Lodge (2002) discuss the issue of placing students in allocated tracks within school and assert that those placed in higher tracks are given access to different forms of learning and this "can and does advantage certain students and disadvantage others in terms of educational and occupational opportunities, and in terms of their sense of themselves as persons and as learners" (p36). Lynch and Lodge assert that this is one way in which the education system

redistributes educational 'goods' and highlights the issue of distributive justice in the education system. In relation to education decision making the knowledge gap between parents and the school puts parents at a disadvantage.

> The primary school runs parenting programmes to engage with the parents but the secondary school runs adult education programmes and that's a different approach. Parents don't necessarily feel they are in a position to encourage their child to do their Leaving Cert or do as many honours subjects, it has to do with low educational attainment of parents and low self-esteem in this area. We act as an advocate some times for parents and might go up to the school because the parents feel they might lose their head or might not be able to articulate themselves properly but we don't have any formal role in that and sometimes it is difficult for us to work with the schools and do that. Manager Youth Services

There appears to be a lack of suitable advocates for parents who can engage with the schools on the parent's behalf in the community and some community groups felt that their working relationship with the local schools would be negatively affected if they were perceived as being strong advocates for local parents. Similarly, this issue was mentioned by the second level HSCL who found it difficult to advocate on behalf of parents because he was a member of school staff. This would indicate that there is an imbalance of power between the schools and community groups and there is a fear of causing conflict with the school. Some of the parents in the study expressed similar concerns about raising sensitive issues with the school and indicated that they felt disempowered by their contacts with the second level schools in particular. Community participants were critical of the lack of opportunities for parent to engage with the second level schools in a way which encourages equal partnership.

> It's a cultural thing where you have parents who leave school early and sometimes they become advocates for having their child stay in school and others say "well I didn't do so badly so why should I force my child to stay in school". You need to address it with parents and children from day one in a positive way and increase awareness of the value of going to Third Level. Going back to basics and explaining the difference between the second level community college and third level education because some children refer to community college as college and may not know the difference between college and secondary school. School Completion Co-ordinator

Most of the parents in this study who had left school early were renegotiating their negative experience of the education system through encouraging their children to do their Leaving certificate and were conscious of their role as advocates for their children. The role of community organisations in supporting parents and acting as advocates for parents was mentioned by three of the community participants.

> Some parents are starting to ask questions which I find quite up-lifting. We are building up social capital in the area and there is a growing awareness of information on grants etc. Schools let us come in with the local Area Partnership and we give them information about grants and Third Level. You do find a lot of parents come with their child to find out about the grant but at that stage we are not talking about the most marginalised. Project B Co-ordinator

It is clear from the above quotes that community groups can contribute to parent empowerment and strengthen social and educational capital in the area and also that the community itself feels that it needs to respond to educational disadvantage. Availability of educational information was viewed as central to building social capital in the area. However, there is some concern among community participants that the most marginalised families are not being reached.

Lynch (1999) in a study of equality of access to third level education found that teachers, students and community activists all perceived economic constraints as the main obstacle to equality of opportunity within the Irish education system. In particular community activists were aware of "the role that structural (state-managed) conditions and systems played in perpetuating inequalities" particularly unemployment and the lack of job security and low pay common in working-class areas (ibid, p101). In this study community participants were most concerned about the contribution of structural inequalities to perpetuating educational disadvantage.

7.4.6 Integrated responses to early school leaving in the area

The role of Early Start as part of an integrated response to early school leaving in the area was discussed. According to the Project A Co-ordinator integration between

services should be seamless from the child's perspective and services in the area are currently working towards this.

> I think it is no harm that they are short term interventions in themselves but if those short-term interventions are operating in isolation from each other than that is a difficulty. In some cases they are not as integrated as they could be for instance if you make recommendations to the SCP there is no guarantee that they will be picked by the SCP because planning often takes place in the school. It has become more integrated and some of the schools have become more open to the community. There is certainly a thing where schools see themselves as the educators and other people do things that are not really educational. Project A Co-ordinator

> Every now and then the government will introduce a Rapid Plan and look at all the integrated services but they never really put their money where their mouth is and they never tackle it with something like a twenty year plan which will take into account the health needs or the housing needs, everything in a community has an impact on a child and until you tackle all these things you will only make a minimal impact on education. Schools have a very narrow focus, even though they are part of the community they see themselves apart from the community, there is no sense of partnership with the community. Project B Co-ordinator

The social construction of schools as being solely responsible for education within the community was perceived as a barrier to service integration and was also perceived as a barrier to community 'ownership' of education. The need for long term planning to tackle educational disadvantage in the area was also mentioned by the primary school personnel. Early Start is seen as being in a prime position to contribute to combating educational disadvantage in the area because its' position within the primary school allows it to be part of a statutory and structural response. The limitations of short-term interventions and the need for integrated responses were recognised as important by the community participants and there was a view expressed by the local Youth Services Manger that interventions lasting less than two years were inadequate. In particular he felt that these short-term interventions did not allow local professionals to develop meaningful relationships with young people in the area.

The Co-ordinator of Project B identified some of the successes that recent integrated educational initiatives and local women's groups have made in terms of raising awareness of educational achievement in the area. Kilkenny (2007) in a recent review of Children's Rights in Ireland calls for greater coordination between school-based initiatives and community education initiatives "with less emphasis on the development of once-off initiatives or pilot projects" (p112).

7.4.7 Risk factors

Community participants identified a number of risk factors for children in the community.

> In the economy we live in there is a widening gap economically where you have the middle-classes doing better but there are still a group of people who aren't benefiting from the Celtic Tiger. For the families that we work with you can have a lot of issues with older siblings looking after younger siblings, drug and alcohol addictions and there are a lot of family issues.
> School Completion Co-ordinator

> Early school leaving to me is only a symptom of a much greater problem. People are not looking at all the other factors that impact on a child as they head into education, like poverty, over-crowding, parenting, issues of substance abuse, all of those things where there are multi-stressors, these have a huge impact on the family and the child. Co-ordinator Project B

Concurring with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory there is a recognition among community participants of the need to respond to educational disadvantage in a way which recognises the impact of various other systems on the lives of children. Also the fear of violence echoes concerns from parents and teachers in the study about the prevalence of violence in the community. The Manger of the local Youth Services discussed the issue of parents' fears about their child's peers and disengaging from youth services in area.

> I notice there are kids you never see after the primary school summer projects and parents fear that their kids will get in with the wrong crowd and start hanging around the shops. It is a negative thing in the area because they say "this is a community that we live in because we don't have any choice but we don't want our kids growing up here".

> I would worry about it for the image for the area, we are trying to get a positive image for the area and we have gone out of our way to recruit children for some of the clubs who don't go to school in the area and would be seen as high achievers. We are conscious of the image of the Youth Centre that we don't want it to be seen to be working with just troubled youngsters even though that is where the funding is coming from we would be concerned about that. Manager Youth Services

The Manger of the Youth Services is conscious of the centre being perceived as a facility for all children in the area and contends that removing children from the local area for activities is negative for the development of social capital in the area. If the students who are perceived as high achievers are not involved in any local activities it can lead to less role models in the community. Many of the current funding initiatives available to the Youth Service require them to target the most at-risk young people in their community. One of the impacts of this is that young people who are not deemed at-risk may be excluded from these activities and this inadvertently contributes to the decline of social capital in the community.

7.5 Discussion

Overall, Early Start is perceived as making a positive contribution to combating educational disadvantage by schools and community participants in this study. Study participants concurred with the OECD (2004) in their recent review of Irish ECCE policy and practice which recommend that Early Start should be extended with a number of changes including provision of full day sessions rather than the current half day sessions and in particular the expansion of the service in partnership with local community and voluntary agencies. The impact of the increasing number of working parents in the area had led to difficulties for parents in accessing the current half-day sessions in Early Start and was widely perceived as having a negative impact on parent involvement in the area. In general Early Start was perceived by all participants as making a positive contribution to parent involvement in education and strengthening educational capital in the area.

Community involvement in Early Start was very limited and there were no links between the project and local organisations or ECCE structures such as the County Childcare Committee. This concurs with the OCED (2004) report which found that the original objective of the programme to be part of the wider community response to education disadvantage has never come to fruition and it is currently operating in isolation from other statutory and community supports. Early years' interventions according to the OECD are more successful in breaking the poverty cycle when part of a more general anti-poverty and community development strategy including links to job training, housing policy, substance misuse programmes and other social and community supports. Similarly Earls and Buka (2000) claim that the "traditional institutions of civil society (e.g. the police, schools and child welfare agencies) cannot accomplish their missions alone. Ideally, top-down strategies initiated by governments need to be linked to bottom-up strategies from local communities" (p310). This is similar to views of community participants in this study who were very conscious of the need for intense family supports in the area which would operate over a number of years and address broader issues relating to child poverty in the community rather than just focusing on educational attainment such as the focus of the current DEIS (2005) strategy.

Parent support for education was perceived as paramount by the community and school participants in the study for tackling educational disadvantage but there was some disagreement among participants about developing and strengthening parent involvement in education. The community representatives refuted the notion put forward by some of the teaching personnel in the study that some parents are apathetic about involvement in their child's education and asserted that lack of involvement stemmed mainly from structural inequalities and lack of a parent fora and parent advocates in the community. Also the second level teachers tended to put more emphasis on lack of parent support for education as the main contributing factor to early school leaving than the other participants and viewed parents as failing their children in education rather than the education system failing parents and children. Greenberg (1998) highlights Bruner's(1996) contention that Head Start developed

models of parental involvement that are often guilty of deficit-based assumptions about the parents and instead of overcoming 'cultural deprivation' the parents are blamed in a condescending manner for their child's educational failure. There was evidence of 'deficit-based assumptions' among some of the teaching personnel in this study and such assumptions can act as barriers to creating an equal partnership between parents and schools.

All of the school personnel and community participants were very concerned about the difficulties in transfer to second level for children in the area and in particular that some parents and children lowered their expectations for academic attainment once they were in the second level system. The rigidity of the second level system appears to damage the human capacity of some of the children in the area and affect their potential for self-actualisation. Also two mothers in the study mentioned the fact that their academic expectations of their children were lowered when their child reached second level. One of the second level teachers felt an additional year at second level would help children make the transition between primary and secondary would be more beneficial than an intervention when the children are only aged 3 because so many children in the area were finding the transition difficult. The next chapter outlines the recommendations and conclusions of this thesis.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore the outcomes of participation in Early Start for parents and students and to investigate the contribution of Early Start to combating educational disadvantage in the Sunbury area. In addition, this study sought to explore the outcomes of the Early Start programme from a systems theory perspective and to develop a holistic picture of the Early Start participants' social and educational development. Sigel (2004) calls for an ecological approach to the evaluation of early years' interventions such as Head Start to acknowledge that educational intervention takes place in a developmental context which links preschool to later education. There are a number of specific research questions which guided the data collection for this thesis.

- Does participation in Early Start have an impact on academic attainment as measured by the Junior Certificate results?
- What are the long-term social outcomes (such as community behaviour and attitude to school) of participation in Early Start?
- Does participation in Early Start have an impact on the students' self-esteem?
- What is the impact of participation in Early Start on parental participation in and parental attitude to education?
- What are teachers' perceptions of pupils who have participated in Early Start and their view of the long-term benefits of participation in an early years' intervention programme?
- How has Early Start impacted on the local community with respect to its contribution in building up social and cultural capital?

The conclusions to each of these research questions will be explored individually.

8.2 Conclusions

8.2.1 Academic attainment for Early Start participants

This study did not find a significant difference between Group A and Group B relating to placement in special education or learning support. This is similar to Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) who also found in the Rutland Street study that placement in special

education was not significantly different for the study or comparison groups. However participation in Early Start was identified by teachers and parents in this research as contributing to earlier identification of speech and language difficulties.

Students studied up to ten subjects for their Junior Certificate including the core subjects Maths, Irish and English. In Group A (N=20) all students completed their Junior Certificate Exams and in Group B (N=15) fourteen of the students completed their Junior Certificate Exams. In Group A, the majority of students were participating in the traditional Junior Certificate (seventeen students) while in Group B there was a much smaller majority participating in the traditional Junior Certificate (eight students participated in the Junior Certificate Programme, six in the Junior Certificate Schools Programme and one student was attended an out-of-school project and did not sit his Junior Certificate). Students from Group A were more likely to take honours levels subjects for their Junior Certificate with five students from Group B and only two students from Group A taking no honours subjects for their Leaving Certificate.

There appears to be a positive correlation between participation in Early Start and higher marks in the Junior Certificate Maths exam (P value was 0.043). A positive correlation also emerges between participation in Early Start and higher achievements in Science in the Junior Certificate (P value was 0.020). A higher percentage of Group A (twenty-five per cent) did honours level Maths for their Junior Certificate compared to Group B (seven per cent). A higher percentage of Group B (forty percent of non-Early Start participants) took the foundation level Maths paper for their Junior Certificate compared to Group A (twenty per cent). A possible explanation for the positive correlation between participation in Early Start and improved results in Maths may be that the Early Start environment provided an early introduction to mathematical concepts or 'number sense' which was beneficial to the participants when they started formal education. Dunphy (2007) contends that developing 'number sense' for young children is an important factor in later mathematical attainment. This development of number sense may also have been beneficial to Group A in their Junior Certificate attainment in Science since some aspects of the Maths and Science curriculum are

closely related. In relation to students' self perception of their own intelligence and ability, Group A also perceived themselves as being better at Maths than Group B participants and their exam results indicate that they are achieving higher results in Maths. Participation in Early Start appears to have supported the students' academic attainment in Maths and Science and this finding demonstrates the importance of early years' intervention in supporting the acquisition of numeracy. Also the positive learning environment identified by teachers in Early Start may have bolstered the child's confidence and contributed to the development of a positive attitude towards learning particularly in the Maths and Sciences. No significant relationship emerges between participation in Early Start and the participants' results in other Junior Certificate subjects such as English and Irish.

Some of the primary school personnel and two parents felt that an extra year of Early Start or a similar junior school programme would be beneficial to children in their adjustment to formal education. The increase in duration of the programme may be beneficial as according to Reynolds and Temple (1998) there is increasing evidence that the duration of programme participation is an important factor in increasing the effectiveness of early childhood interventions. Transition to second level was also perceived as problematic for some students and some secondary school teachers and community participants recommended a year long transition programme between primary and secondary school to allow children adjust to the second level system. Problems with transition to second level are not unique to the Sunbury area. A recent study conducted in Blanchardstown in Dublin found that children experienced a major 'jolt in school climate' between primary and secondary school (Downes et al, 2007, p413). Rather than focusing on the individual student or teacher the study recommends focusing on supporting problems at a systematic level and in particular better communication and cooperation between teachers and students at second level.

8.2.2 Long-term social outcomes for Early Start participants

Both parents and primary school teachers in the study identified aspects of school readiness as the main benefit of Early Start participation and parents and teachers were

very positive about the role of Early Start in preparing children for the transition to formal school. Also in relation to social outcomes for students, Group A were rated more positively by their second level teachers in terms of social skills and also a larger percentage of Group A were rated as 'good' at setting goals by their teachers compared to Group B. This may be an example of the 'sleeper effect' which O'Toole (2000, p140) describes as improvements in the child in which 'cognitive processes remain dormant until triggered by new demands in the young person's life'.

Students were asked to identify their favourite past-time and the most popular past-time identified was football, followed by hanging out with friends and either playing or listening to music. Only two students, both from Group A, were attending music classes and two girls in Group A were also attending Speech and Drama classes on a weekly basis. One of these was attending music through school and she appeared to be the only student doing this and it was through a Gael Scoil. It was not clear if other schools were offering this to students. Six children were taking part in no organised activities at all. As reported by Lynch (1999) involvement in extra-curricular activities in school can contribute to positive student-teacher relations and assist students' sense of belonging in the school which may help prevent early school leaving. Only nine of the students in this study were taking part in a weekly youth club (twenty-six percent) and four of these were involved in a crime diversion youth club. There was not a strong statistical correlation between participation in Early Start and participation in a weekly youth club. Several parents and students in the study expressed concern about the lack of organised activities for young people in the area and there was a perception that young people were only offered youth activities when they became involved in anti-social behaviour in the community.

Students were asked if they had taken illegal drugs and six students said that they had done so. Students from Group B were slightly more likely to take drugs with three of them saying that they had smoked hash and one student who claimed he had tried heroin compared to two students from Group A who had tried Hash. While more students had taken drugs in Group B, these students were also one year older and are

more likely to have increased exposure to these substances. There was also a significant statistical relationship between Group B and regular consumption of alcohol (using a non-parametric Spearman's Rho the P value was 0.032) but the age of the participants is also a significant consideration. Students were asked if their parents were aware of their alcohol consumption and five students from Group A and eight from Group B said their parents were aware that they consumed alcohol.

In relation to involvement in criminal activities, seven of the thirty-five students, all male, have been in trouble with the Gardai. Mainly these students have had contact with the Gardai over minor incidents but one student from Group A has appeared before a Juvenile Court recently and two other students (one from each group), have regular contacts with a Juvenile Liaison Officer. There was no significant correlation between participation in Early Start and involvement in criminal activities.

A small number of students felt they were bullied sometimes (two) and three students felt they were picked on 'very often'. All of the students who experienced this bullying were from Group A. Students from Group B are older so maybe they are less likely to still be experiencing bullying or might have left the system. Also in the interviews with parents, some parents from Group B mentioned incidents of bullying which affected their children when they were younger. It also appears that three of the students in the study are involved in bullying other pupils. Parents were concerned about the issue of bullying in the area and in particular about the level of violent bullying which took place. Students were asked if they had, in the past, brought a weapon into school and five students who were all from Group B had done so. This is a significant issue for the school and a second level teacher reported that the school collects a significant number of weapons from students every year.

Lack of future orientation was identified by teachers in this research as being a significant contributing factor to early school leaving. In relation to future orientation a number of differences emerged between the two study groups. A slightly higher percentage of Group A (thirty-five per cent) identified careers which involved a third

level qualification compared to Group B (twenty-five per cent) and these students were predominantly female. A greater number of Group B students identified a Trade (i.e. carpenter, mechanic etc.) as their future career aspiration and this was the most common career identified by the group. Also in relation to future orientation more of the Early Start participants felt their parents wanted them to go to third level and more parents in Group A had third level aspirations for their children compared to parents in Group B. The majority of students felt that their parents wanted them to do well in school exams and to do their Leaving. The main differences emerging between Group A and Group B were in terms of the students' perception of their parents' attitude to college. Students from Group A were far more likely to perceive college attendance as something which was very important to their parents. A slightly higher number of Early Start parents (thirty-three per cent) wanted their sons to go to college than non-Early Start parents (twenty-two percent). This is similar to research on parent's attitude in Head Start which revealed that parents of the Head Start children wanted more managerial and skilled jobs for their children (O'Flaherty, 1995). There was a significant statistical relationship between gender and educational aspirations with a greater number of girls intending to pursue third level education compared to boys. Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) found that the students who had been in the Rutland Street preschool programme reported that significantly more of them received encouragement to go to second level from their homes. Similarly, this study found that the programme participants received more encouragement to go to third level than Group B which might indicate that Group A parents have higher aspirations for their children in terms of educational attainment.

8.2.3 Does participation in Early Start have an impact on the students' self-esteem?

According to Downes et al. (2007) Rosenberg "describes self-esteem as feeling that you are 'good enough" and self esteem is associated with school achievement (p410). The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem (RSE) scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to measure students' self-esteem in this study. There was no correlation between the RSE score and participation in Early Start found in this study. Further analysis found no correlation

between the RSE score and gender (Value of P was 0.096). There was a correlation between RSE score and how students felt they were perceived by their teachers at second level. Students with a higher score on RSE which indicates higher levels of self-esteem were more likely to indicate that "most teachers think I am a good student". Cullen (2000) found in a study of Irish students deemed at-risk of educational disadvantage that central to the pathway of early school leaving was a breakdown in their relationship with certain teachers "along with a clearly expressed frustration and a sense of not being listened to or taken seriously" (ibid). This study also found evidence of a link between individual student-teacher relationships and the students' confidence in their academic ability. In relation to student voice within the school there appears to be a desire among students for greater student participation in school decisions. Lynch and Lodge (2002) found in their research that fifty per cent of second level students wanted more student consultation in the running of the school and increased democratic involvement in decisions which affect them.

8.2.4 Impact of participation in Early Start on parental participation and parental attitude to education

Parents from Group A were very satisfied with their experiences of Early Start and felt that it impacted positively on their on-going relationship with their child's primary school. The results are also similar to Ghate and Hazels (2002) study which found preschools offer parents an opportunity to increase their social support network. Early Start was identified as supporting families in a number of ways including the development of positive relationships between home and school and the early detection of learning difficulties and language difficulties. Early Start made a contribution to social capital for parent in the study by facilitating the development of informal networks of parents which have provided continued supports for some of parents as their child progressed through the education system.

In relation to parents' perceptions of the benefits of Early Start, parents tended to focus on the importance of discipline for their child and the role of Early Start in helping their child fit into the school routine. This is similar to the 'resource model of school

readiness' as described by Piotrkowski (2000) and parents in this study also tended to de-emphasis interests and curiosity and instead emphasises concrete skills to help students adjust quickly and successfully to classroom. Parents and teachers views did concur on the practical preparation of children for school and the importance of routine but teachers tended to put more emphasis on children developing a positive attitude to learning and language development during Early Start. Parents were very concerned with the role of Early Start in providing routine and discipline for their children and in seeking the primary school teachers' approval for their child's behaviour once they entered formal education. One community activist was concerned about the nature of Early Start which she felt was too focused on getting children to 'fit in to' the formal school system. She also questioned the rationale of having a system of preschool just for the most disadvantaged children in our society and whether or not this led to the creation of one system for the middle-class and one system for the working-class children in Irish society. This is similar to Greenberg's (1998) contention that Head Start does not challenge the inequality within the system but merely assists children to function more successfully within such a system and therefore is in-line with a meritocratic view of the education system. This critique could also be applied to Early Start as the focus of the programme appears to be school-readiness and in relation to parent involvement it has not equipped parents with the skills required to challenge or confront the education system particularly the second level system.

Overall, parents involved in Early Start displayed higher levels of parental involvement in primary school compared to the comparison group. Participation in parent education classes had provided the parents with the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the primary school system. Parents were very positive about their experiences of parent involvement during Early Start and most felt they were actively involved in their child's education during Early Start. In the context of Epstein's (2002) model of parent involvement, parents in Group A were actively involved in the first three types of parent involvement, parenting, communicating and volunteering and parents were less involved in the last three learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the

community. The first three types of involvement cited are more passive forms of involvement and are directed by the teachers rather than parent-led.

Differences emerged for both groups in the types of parent involvement at primary and secondary school. While all parents in the study were positive about their involvement at primary school, few parents were actively involved at second level and most parents disengaged from parent involvement when their child entered secondary school. Parents tended to disengage from active parent involvement at the same stage that they themselves had left formal education. The primary school personnel indicated that in the primary school, the teachers perceive themselves as responsible for parent involvement, while at secondary school, there is a shift in responsibility from the teachers onto the parents to initiate contacts with the school. Teacher-led decision-making was common at second level and parents had very limited access to information about the second level school system. Second level teachers acknowledged the gap in knowledge that parents have about school but some teachers blamed parents for not coming to schools more often to access the information and there was an emphasis by some teachers on parents failing their children in education rather than the education system failing children. There were some problems with parent-teacher communication at second level which was mainly one-way and a small number of parents were in direct conflict with the school. Particularly in situations of conflict, parents viewed themselves as an advocate for their child. Some parents felt intimidated about contacts with the school and perceived contact with the school mainly as a negative issue related to their child misbehaving.

Many parents found the change in parent-teacher relations when their child transferred to second level problematic and some primary school teachers were concerned that the 'hand-holding pedagogy', which was perceived as operating in primary school, did not prepare parents and children for the realities of the second level system. However, community participants and some of the primary school personnel felt that second level schools were not doing enough to encourage parent involvement and provide parents with adequate educational information. In particular, there was a concern that there

was a lack of ownership of education within the community and there was a need for a Parent Forum to support parents' participation within the education system.

According to Cullen (2000) many working-class parents are inhibited from meaningful partnerships because they lack the understanding of how important it is for them to engage with their child's school and this is further compounded by "conditions of poverty and exclusion (which) inhibit parental capacities to formulate deeper relationships with schools" (ibid, p37). This is especially evident in communities, which lack social capital due to a lack of civic associations, or lack income generally which inhibits their capacity to improve social and educational choices. Hanafin and Lynch (2002) suggest from their research that parents had shown themselves to be informed and interested in their child's education and that parents failure to participate more fully in their childs' primary school education is attributed to "the structures and practices of the school system as it operates, at least in the working-class areas of our community" (ibid, p46). The authors claim that their research contradicts the common cultural deficit explanation for limited working-class parental involvement as the parents in their study show a good understanding of the school system but are prohibited from greater involvement because of structural issues and their lack of interest in 'tokenistic' forms of involvement such as parent councils. All of the parents in this study emphasised the importance of education for their children and many parents were renegotiating their own negative experiences of education through their childrens' positive experiences. This is in contrast to the assumptions of cultural deficit theories of parent involvement offered by some of the teaching personnel in the study.

8.2.5 Teachers' perceptions of pupils who have participated in Early Start and the long-term benefits of participation in an early years' intervention programme

Primary school teachers were very positive about the benefits of Early Start in supporting children's transition to primary school and in providing children with the confidence and encouragement to learn. At second level, in relation to social skills the students in Group A were rated slightly higher by the teachers and none of the teachers

rated the Early Start students as having poor social skills. In contrast, teachers rated two students (seventeen per cent) in Group B as having poor social skills. In relation to goal setting the results for both groups were similar but a higher percentage of the Group A were rated as having 'good' goal setting ability. A slightly higher percentage of the Group B were rated by teachers as having poor levels of home support. Also in relation to active parental involvement, the Early Start group were rated higher by the teachers as being more actively involved. For both groups the level of 'good' active involvement was not very high and active parent involvement at second level does not appear to be the norm in the Sunbury area. The role of Early Start in encouraging parent involvement was discussed and all participants felt it was very influential in encouraging parent involvement at primary school. In particular school personnel mentioned the positive nature of parent involvement in Early Start.

Teachers in the study highlighted the fact that parents from both groups had higher levels of parents' involvement than more recent Early Start parents as more parents in the area are now engaged in employment. This change might also adversely influence the generalisabilty of this research. Also in connection with this the current half-day sessional structure of Early Start was identified as of a hindrance to parent employment in the area rather than a support and the day-time activities for parents associated with the Early Start programme may be an out-dated model of parent involvement. A comprehensive system of 'after-school care' would contribute to solving this problem.

The second level teachers seemed to attribute much of the cause of educational disadvantage to individual family factors and attitude while the primary school personnel were more likely to highlight the contribution of economic and structural causes to educational disadvantage in the area. Hanafin and Lynch (2002) view the 'cultural deficit model' of explaining educational disadvantage as inherent in "interventions such as Early Start programmes, home-school community links and early school leaving interventions...it is explicitly 'classed', and it seeks to involve parents who are perceived to be on the periphery" (ibid, p35).

8.2.6 The impact of Early Start on the local community with respect to its' contribution in building up social and cultural capital

In general, Early Start was perceived by all participants as making a positive contribution to parent involvement in education and strengthening educational capital in the area. Community involvement in Early Start was very limited and there were no links between the project and local organisations or other Early Childhood Care and Education initiatives such as the County Childcare Committee. This concurs with the OCED (2004) report which found that the original objective of the programme to be part of the wider community response to education disadvantage has never come to fruition and it is currently operating in isolation from other statutory and community supports. The lack of ownership of education within the community was highlighted by the primary school personnel and the community participants as negatively impacting on cultural capital within the area. A positive community perception of local schools was perceived as important by the primary school principals and the primary schools were concerned with having positive public relations with the local community but this was less of an issue for the second level schools. Schools in general were accused by the community participants of having a very narrow focus, even though they are part of the community, they see themselves apart from the community and there was a very limited sense of partnership with the community, particularly for the secondary schools.

Early years' interventions, according to the OECD, are more successful in breaking the poverty cycle when they are part of a more general anti-poverty and community development strategy including links to job training, housing policy, substance misuse programmes and other social and community supports. A recent report by Irelands' Office of the Minster for Children (2006) cited research by Layte et al (2006) which found that "decisions such as how long to stay in school are affected not only by economic circumstances, but also the kinds of cultural and social capital that allow parents and children to successfully negotiate the educational system" (p80). Kilkenny (2007) in a recent review of Children's Rights in Ireland calls for greater coordination

between school-based initiatives and community education initiatives "with less emphasis on the development of once-off initiatives or pilot projects" (p112). One community participant identified some of the successes that recent integrated educational initiatives and local women's groups have made in terms of raising awareness of educational achievement in the area and contributing to social capital. Community participants pointed out the need for more investment in early years' interventions in the area, particularly in the provision of services for very young children, prenatal care, formal parent support and parent education programmes.

Some of parents and children in the study had disengaged from the local area and were choosing not be part of locality by holding back from participation in local activities such as youth clubs. In particular the negative image of the local community and parents fears of their children mixing with children deemed at-risk were the most significant factors influencing this disengagement. Fear of anti-social behaviour and violence were keeping some local children away from the community. Parents' concept of 'risk-behaviour' for their own child was strongly linked to the behaviour of their child's peer group. The issue of safety in the community from physical violence was mentioned by all stakeholders and is similar to recent research in Tallaght which found that ninety per cent of children live in families where they either directly experience or fear anti-social behaviour (Childhood Development Initiative, 2005). The disengagement of some families in the study from community activities was perceived by teachers and community participants as being negative for the development of cultural and social capital in the community as many of those who were disengaging were the highest academic achievers in the study and were perceived as positive role models.

8.3 Recommendations

1. Increase the duration of the Early Start programme and further develop the links to other educational intervention programmes currently in operation

The importance of early years' interventions has been explored throughout this thesis and previous longitudinal studies such as the Perry Preschool Project evaluation (Schweinhart, 2004) provide strong evidence that a high quality early years' intervention programme can have lasting positive benefits for childrens' educational attainment and future employment status. Demaine (2003) questions whether or not sociologists of education are naive to focus on school centred solutions such as school-improvement studies while ignoring wider political and economic issues, therefore, it is important that early years' interventions do not operate in isolation from other aspects of the child's life. Early years' interventions, according to the OECD (2004), are more successful in breaking the poverty cycle when part of a more general anti-poverty and community development strategy including links to job training, housing policy, substance misuse programmes and other social and community supports. In general such programmes need to recognise the need for long-term intervention and support and understand the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. Another important aspect of a successful intervention programme is that they are intensive and full-day programmes and are at least a year long. The impact of the increasing number of working parents in the area had led to difficulties for parents in accessing the current half-day sessions in Early Start and was widely perceived as having a negative impact on parent involvement. The short-term duration of the Early Start was identified as a shortcoming in both the literature and by participants in the study. The extension of the Early Start programme beyond the current provision of two and a half hour sessions would be particularly beneficial to working parents in the study.

2. Develop early years' programmes which support number-sense and maths attainment for young children in disadvantaged areas.

This study clearly demonstrates the advantages of early childhood care and education for increased performance in Maths and Science attainment in the later years. Mullan and Travers (2007) maintain that the majority of children at-risk of failure in Maths are from areas of high socio-economic disadvantage and that there is a need for early intervention in mathematics as research suggests that there can be a "three-year gap in achievement levels in early numeracy' by the time a child enters formal education" (p229). The development of number-sense in young children needs attention within the Irish education system in light of the correlation between social class and mathematics literacy for children.

3. Develop an area wide strategy beginning in primary school to facilitate access to third level would be beneficial for the whole community and provide independent community-based sources of educational support such as tutoring in the community

The Early Start participants were more likely to do honours levels subjects for their Junior Certificate and to do a third language. In general, students in the study from both groups were not sourcing additional academic support outside of the school and none of the students were receiving grinds for any of their exam subjects. While some did attend supervised study in their schools, this facility did not provide individual tutorial support and if students were having a difficulty with a particular school subject there was a tendency to move to pass level rather than seek additional academic support outside of the school. This was also linked to an almost total-reliance on the school for all educational information and parents and students in the area are reliant on the school for almost all educational support. This situation disadvantages the Sunbury area as the norm in middle-class communities in Ireland is to seek support and additional educational tutoring outside of the school and source it in the private market place. To ensure equality of academic outcomes for students there needs to be independent community-based sources of educational support such as tutoring for families in Sunbury which are comparable in quality to the types of private tutorials availed of by

middle-class students. Additionally, the development of an area wide strategy beginning in primary school to facilitate access to third level would be beneficial for the whole community.

4. Establish and fund a parent-forum in the local community and introduce a parent room at second level.

The parent-to-parent contact which occurred during Early Start was highlighted by parents in this current study as being very beneficial and this finding suggests that such contact should be central to any parent involvement strategies for Early Start. The parent room in the primary school contributed to the parents' positive relationship with the primary school and the introduction of a parent room or designated parent space in the secondary school might help overcome some of the current barriers to parent involvement at second level. All participants in the study highlighted the difficulties of sustaining parent involvement in light of the increasing numbers of working parents in the area and new models of parent involvement should be introduced support working parents. There was also a call among community participants to employ Parent Resource Workers to act as advocates for parents. In particular the Parent Resource Worker could act as intermediacies between parents and the schools during conflict situations. There was an obvious need within the community for some type of educational network or support to provide information and advice to parents. The establishment of a Parents Forum in the area was mentioned by some of the community participants in the study and such a forum would support parents in accessing independent educational advice and may act as an important representation of the parent voice within the community. The establishment of a Parent Forum is necessary to address the knowledge gap between parents and schools and support the development of social and cultural capital in the community. In particular, there needs to be more information available to parents on the significance of programme choice at second level such as the difference between the Junior Certificate programme and the Junior Certificate for Schools Programme. In addition, parents and students need information on access to both vocational training and third level education.

5. Provide on-going training on educational disadvantage for school personnel and consider appointing non-teaching professionals to HSCL posts and other support positions within schools.

Teaching personnel in the study appeared to have different understandings and interpretations of the causes of early school leaving. To ensure continued reflection by teaching personnel on the complexity of early school leaving there needs to be on-going training on educational disadvantage for teachers to reflect the diversity of the school population and improve relationships between teachers and parents. In addition to training, the Department of Education and Science could draw on other professionals beside teaching professionals to work in key support positions within schools such as the role of the HSCLs. Parents had very limited contacts with the HSCL teachers in second level, particularly compared to the level of contacts with the primary school personnel, and this role might be extended to incorporate additional contacts with families.

6. Provide additional supports to assist students and their families with the transition from primary school to second level.

There was a need articulated by some parents and students in the study for supports to help with the transition from primary school to second level. The inflexibility of the second level system can become a risk factor for the child. Some children and parents experienced difficulties during the transfer process and in the same way that Early Start supports transition to primary school there needs to be a similar initiative during this next major transition within the child's formal education experience. Early Start allowed parents and teachers to develop an informal relationship and allowed the child to build a positive relationship with the school. A transfer programme to second level could operate in a similar fashion by focusing on the development of positive relationships for all the stakeholders.

7. Develop a Community Peer Mentoring Programme

There was concern expressed by some of the research participants about the disengagement from the community by some of the students with the highest academic

achievements in the study. A possible response to this issue might be the introduction of a Community Peer Mentoring programme. Peer mentoring in the schools has been successful and the adoption of a peer mentoring programme in the community might overcome some of the current disengagement with students who are going to school and leisure activities outside of the community. Also the image of the local youth services as only serving the most at-risk young people needs to be challenged to allow other young people in the community to have a sense of ownership of these local activities. Participants in the study were critical of the general lack of facilities and activities for young people in the community and given the environmental risks that young people face living in Sunbury due to high levels of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage there is a real need to listen to young people and find out what types of facilities they would like in their community. Young peoples' voices need to be represented in any future planning of services within the area.

8. Strengthen the links between Early Start and family support services.

An important development in the Irish government's response to educational disadvantage has been the development of integrative responses to educational disadvantage and in particular the growing recognition of the need to involve home, school and community in educational initiatives. Early Start has an important role to play as part of this integrated response to educational disadvantage because for many parents and students it is the first time they have come into contact with an educational support. Increased flexibility within Early Start would allow it to develop relationships with agencies outside of the school. A key part of providing an integrated response to educational disadvantage is communicating and supporting other agencies. Family and educational supports need to communicate to ensure that the child's needs are central to all educational interventions and it is important that supports do not operate in isolation from each other. It is also important that Early Start personnel are aware of additional supports which are available within the community so as to provide access to additional formal family supports for Early Start participants. Ghate and Hazel's (2002) study of parenting in poor environments found that once parents had made initial contact with a preschool service they tended to utilise more of the facilities in that service. Parents

with preschool children in the study were also more likely to use semi-formal supports compared to parents with older children. Parents in this research tended to be more positive about their relationships with Early Start personnel than other school personnel, particularly second level school personnel and they appeared to be less intimidated about contacts with Early Start staff. As a preschool intervention Early Start is in a unique position to develop positive relations with families as parents identify Early Start as a positive intervention, therefore it can act as important gateway to additional family supports or educational inventions in a non-threatening manner.

9. Develop social policies which can re-address levels of income inequality in Irish society and contribute to creating equality of condition for all Irish citizens particularly children

Finally, it is important to consider the role of early years' interventions in the broader context of equality of opportunity within Irish society. Lynch (1999) points to the work of radical egalitarians who challenge the notion that structural socio-economic inequalities in society are inescapable. They focus particularly on the importance of substantive economic and political equality and the need to eliminate inequalities altogether rather than just redistribute inequalities across different groups. Similar views have recently been expressed by Nolan et al. (2006) in a study of the dynamics of child poverty in Ireland. Child poverty is one of the most critical issues facing Irish society today and it is closely linked to parental employment status. The authors claim that policies focusing solely on children such as child income supports are inefficient in combating child poverty and instead there needs to be an increase in the level of income support more generally available in Irish society. Children living in poverty, including many of the young people interviewed in this thesis, would benefit greatly from policies which address levels of income inequality in Irish society and contribute to creating equality of condition for all Irish citizens.

8.4 Conclusion

Fallon (2003) discusses the assertion that current intervention programmes are not up to the challenge of real change and question whether it is possible to break the cycle of

disadvantage in one generation. Fallon (2003) who was herself an Early Start practitioner contends that for many children one year of intervention is inadequate to meet their needs. Similarly Greaney and Kellaghan (1993) point out that a single intervention into a child's life is of limited value particularly if the child is living in an area with a high level of socio-economic disadvantage. However, the positive impact of Early Start in developing parents' social support networks and increasing parents' social capital can be seen as a positive long-term outcome of participation in the programme. In addition, Early Start appears to have made a positive contribution to academic attainment in Maths and Science at Junior Cert level. Students who had participated in Early Start were also rated more highly by their teachers in terms of goal-setting and future orientation which are important factors in educational attainment. Early Start then can be viewed as providing a positive contribution to the long-term social and academic outcomes for its participants and therefore provides some validation of the importance of investment in the early years for children at-risk of future educational failure.

Appendices

Appendix 1

PRIMARY SCHOOL PROGRAMMES TO COMBAT EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Reference: ***OCED Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland*** **(2004); Annex 4**

Breaking the Cycle

Breaking the Cycle was introduced as a five-year pilot programme in 1996 in schools designated as disadvantaged. Based on research conducted by the Combat Poverty Agency and the ERC on selection criteria, schools were designated as disadvantaged according to a number of social and economic characteristics. These included the proportion of pupils from homes in which the main breadwinner was unemployed for more than one year, the proportion of pupils living in lone parent households and the proportion of pupils whose father and/or mother had, at most, basic educational qualifications. The scheme provided for extra staffing, funding, in-career development and a pupil teacher ratio of 15:1. The purpose of these additional resources was to support each participating school to develop improvement strategies, which are designed to break the cycle of intergenerational educational disadvantage. The pilot phase ended in June 2001 and the future of the scheme will be considered in light of an evaluation report being prepared by the ERC. Thirty-two urban schools accounting for 5,652 pupils and 120 rural schools with 6,052 pupils were catered for under this programme.

Giving Children an Even Break

This initiative was launched by the DES in 2001 following a survey of primary schools by the ERC. This survey provided an objective basis for the identification of pupils at-risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving and is the most comprehensive survey of the incidence of educational disadvantage in primary schools in Ireland. Based on the concentration of disadvantaged pupils, schools were ranked on the basis of economic and social criteria associated with educational disadvantage. Additional resources were then made available to schools according to the degree of disadvantage as illustrated by their rank position. In urban areas, where the larger concentrations of disadvantaged pupils were located, these resources resulted in a pupil teacher ratio of no more than 20 to one in the infant classes and the following two classes, as well as funding towards additional in-school and out-of school activities. In rural areas, a teacher / coordinator was appointed to work with clusters of 4 to five schools with high levels of at-risk pupils. These coordinators will support schools and teachers in developing ways of meeting the needs of pupils experiencing disadvantage. Individual schools that could not be clustered received additional funding for in-school and out-of-school activities. Teachers and schools are supported in adapting their

teaching styles and strategies to derive maximum benefit from significantly reduced pupil/teacher ratios. Schools and their staff, including new local coordinators, will be supported in the effective use of the new teaching supports and financial allocations in providing enhanced services that meet the needs of at-risk young people in school and out-of-school. A key condition of participation in this programme is that the school subscribes to a holistic interpretation of the child's development.

Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage (Primary)
Until recently, the primary mechanism for addressing the effects of socio-economic deprivation in primary schools was the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. Under this DES funded scheme, special teaching assistance and extra funding was provided to schools in areas designated as disadvantaged. Schools seeking disadvantaged status were assessed and prioritised on the basis of socio-economic and educational indicators such as unemployment levels, housing, medical card holders, information on basic literacy and numeracy and pupil teacher ratios. In the school year 2001/2002, 314 primary schools serving 68,565 pupils received support under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. There are 293 additional over-quota teaching posts in 250 of these schools. For the 2001/2002 school year, a capitation supplement of €38.09 is paid per pupil to schools designated under this scheme. This is to cover general running costs, classroom materials and equipment and home / school liaison activities.

Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)
The HSCL is a key aspect of the DES's strategy to address educational disadvantage at both primary and second level. Under the HSCL, a co-ordinator (teacher) is assigned to a school or group of schools and works with school staff, parents and community agencies to address the educational needs of children at-risk of or experiencing educational disadvantage. In September 1999, all primary and second level schools with disadvantaged status that were not already part of the HSCL scheme were invited to join and most have taken up this invitation. There are currently 176 whole time equivalent posts at primary level. A National Co-ordinator oversees the day-to-day operation of the Scheme. In 2000, almost €9 million was spent on this scheme which serves over 70,000 pupils at primary level.

Children with Special Needs
Education policy in respect of children with special needs seeks to secure the maximum possible level of integration of these children into the mainstream school system. Where this is not possible due to the level of disability, dedicated specialist facilities continue to be made available in a special dedicated class attached to an ordinary school or in a special dedicated school.

Under the Education Act 1998, all children with disabilities within the primary system have an automatic entitlement to a response to their needs, irrespective of their level of need or location. This has resulted in the number of resource teachers supporting children with general learning disabilities in integrated settings in the primary system increasing from 104 in October 1998 to approximately 2,000 in 2002. In addition, the number of special needs assistants supporting children with learning disabilities in the

primary system has grown from less than 300 to 3,000 over the same period. Approximately 13,000 children with special needs attend ordinary primary schools on a fully integrated basis.

Learning Support/Remedial Teachers

The Learning Support Scheme provides assistance for primary school children experiencing learning difficulties, particularly in the core areas of literacy and numeracy. Although the development of this service was closely linked to the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme outlined above, all schools in need of this service now have access to it. Just short of 1,500 teacher posts are currently funded by the DES.

School Development Planning

Introduced in the school year 1999/2000, the School Development Planning Initiative aims to facilitate schools in devising and implementing strategies to achieve maximum school effectiveness. It is targeted specifically at schools with designated disadvantage status, including those participating in the Breaking the Cycle initiative. At the core of this initiative is the belief that combating educational disadvantage involves a 'whole school' philosophy that encompasses the home-school-community approach. A National Co-ordinator, 4 Regional Co-ordinators and 40 facilitators assist schools in implementing this initiative.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Agency was established in September 1999 as an executive Agency of the DES. This has the delegated authority to develop and provide an educational psychological service to all students in primary and post-primary schools and in certain other centres supported by the DES, with particular attention paid to those with special educational needs. Currently, some 86 psychologists are employed in the NEPS. Following a recruitment drive in 2001, just over 60 additional psychologists have been placed on a panel and will join the NEPS by the end of 2002.

School Completion Programme

Incorporating the elements of best practice from previous pilot schemes (specifically the 8-15 Year Old Early School Leaver Initiative (ESLI) and the Stay-in-School Retention Initiative at Second Level (SSRI)), the School Completion Programme focuses on young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years who are educationally disadvantaged and at-risk of leaving school early. The Programme is designed to address the issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage. This Programme is now considered a key component of the DES strategy to address early school leaving. The Programme is operating in 273 primary schools and the second level schools to which pupils progress.

Appendix 2: Letter of introduction to Parents

Contact: 021 4903391

21 September 2005

Dear Parent,

My name is Shirley Martin and I am writing to ask for your help in a study I am doing on **Early Start,** the preschool programme your child attended in **Sunbury School in** 1994/5. The Principal of Sunbury Primary School has kindly given me her support in carrying out this study.

As part of this study I would like to talk to students who were in Early Start in 1994/5 and are now ready to sit their Junior Certificate this year. It has been over 10 years since your child took part in Early Start and in my study I hope to look-at the long-term outcomes of the preschool programme on your child's school performance. I would also like to talk to Parents as part of this study and discuss your opinions on the long-term outcomes of Early Start for you and your child.

I would be very grateful if you would consider taking part in the study. The study will not take up too much of your time and I can meet you in a place which is convenient for you in the Sunbury area at a time that suits you. I am hoping to arrange interviews with parents this October and November. Any information you share with me is **completely confidential and anonymous** and will only be seen by myself and not by any third party such as the school. If you would like to take part in the study please complete and sign the attached form and send it to me in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope and I will be in touch shortly.

Should you have any questions or problems regarding the study please feel free to contact me at anytime.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Shirley Martin

Appendix 3: Rosenberg Self-esteem scale

Read all the statements and circle your answer to each question

1. I feel that I am as good as anyone else

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

6. I take a positive attitude toward myself

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

9. I certainly feel useless at times

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

10. At times I think I am no good at all

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

Appendix 4: Parent Questionnaire Themes

1. Background data

- Parents Education attainment
- Family situation
- Employment status in family
- Home ownership
- Birth order of child
- Educational attainment of siblings

2. Schooling variables/ cognitive outcomes

- Absenteeism from school(reasons for absenteeism)
- Repeating a school year
- Placement in special needs education
- Classroom behaviour
- Does students like school/participate well in class
- Study skills and patterns
- Highest year of schooling planned
- Intention to go to college
- Parent attitude to education
- What kind of jobs do parents want for their children
- Parents participation in their children's education and school career
- Number of contacts with teachers/ communication with school

3. Early Start

- Effects of Early Start on parental employment
- Effects of Early Start on parental education
- Parents perception of programme benefits
- Does it support transition to primary school?

4. Positive community activities and misconduct

- Participation in related educational programmes;
- Participation in Community activities
- Participation in organised activities (sport etc.)
- Childs social and emotional competence
- Childs self-esteem
- Leadership skills in the community or in school (child)
- Leisure activities- hobbies, socialising, TV, music, and reading etc.
- Health and fitness orientation of the child
- Is child participating in paid employment?

6. Worries about your child- 'Social risk behaviour'

- Involvement in crime (contact with Juvenile Liaison Officers)
- Interpersonal aggression
- Drug and alcohol use
- What worries your child most?

Appendix 5: Student interview

1. Your Past-times and Hobbies ☺

1. **Do you play any sport? Yes ☐ No ☐**
2. **If yes what type of sport and how often do you play?**
3. **Are you involved in any after-school activities? Yes ☐ No ☐**
4. **If yes name the activity (*youth clubs, homework club etc*) and how often do you attend?**
5. **What is your favourite past-time? _____**
6. **How much time do you spend watching TV everyday after school?**

_____

7. **How much time do you spend playing computer games every week?**

_____

8. **Besides your school work how many hours a week do you spend reading?**

_____

9. **What kind of material do you read (books, newspaper, magazine, comic etc.)?**

_____

10. **Have read non-school book(s) in last three months? Yes ☐ No ☐**
11. **If yes what was the name of this book(s)?**

_____

12. **How often do you hang-out with your friends outside of school? (*weekday and weekends)*_____**

Read all the statements and circle your answer to each question

1. I feel that I am as good as anyone else

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

6. I take a positive attitude toward myself

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

9. I certainly feel useless at times

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

10. At times I think I am no good at all

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4

4. Please tell us how often you are the following ways.

Please circle your answer. ●

How often are you.....

a. very good at figuring out problems and planning how to solve them.

Never	Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Always
(1)		(2)	(3)	(4)		(5)

b. very good at bouncing back quickly from bad experiences.

Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Almost
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		(5)

c. good at learning from your mistakes.

Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Almost
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		(5)

d. how often do you wish you were different than you are?

Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Almost
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		(5)

e. do you have a hard time getting things done.

Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Almost
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		(5)

f. do you have trouble getting along with other teenagers.

Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Almost
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		(5)

g. Do you ever get picked on by other students in school.

Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Almost
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)		(5)

5. How important is it to your parent(s) or Guardians that you...

	My parents do not want me to do this	My parents do not think it is important	A little important	Fairly important	Very, very important
play sport					
take music or dance lessons					
take on leadership roles					
Help at home					
Get a part-time job during the school year					
Do my Leaving Cert					
Co to College					
Do activities after school					
Get a good job when I finish school					
Do your home work					
Do well in school exams					
have a boyfriend or girlfriend					

6. Here are some questions about your school.

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

a. Most of the classes and subjects in school are boring?

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

b. Teachers care about students as individuals.

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

c. There is good discipline at my school

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

d. Most of my teachers think I am a good student

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

e. In general I like school a lot

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

f. it is good for students and teachers if parents get involved in school

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

g. I get embarrassed if my parents get involved in school

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

h. I like to discuss any homework or school problems with my parents

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

i. Home work is a waste of time

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

j. I have so much work to do at home that I don't have time to do my homework

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

k. I learn more useful things from friends and relations than I do in school

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

l. Getting a good education is the best way to get ahead in life for the teenagers in Clondalkin

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

m. I get on with most people in my class

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

n. I think the Leaving Certificate is important for my future

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

o. Students have a say as to how this school is run

strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	disagree (4)	strongly disagree (5)

2. How good are you at each of the activities listed below?

	Not good 1	2	3	4	5	Very good 6
Maths						
English						
Science						
Making friends						
Sport						
Drama						
Music						

3. How far do you think you will go in school? Pease circle just one.

1. Junior Certificate
2. Leaving Certificate
3. 1 year Post Leaving Certificate Course
4. Apprenticeship (plumber, carpenter, mechanic etc.)
5. 2 year Diploma course
6. 3-4 year Degree
7. Masters degree
8. Phd
9. Don't know

1 What would you like to do after you finish secondary school?

_____

2. How often are you absent from school in the last month? _____

3. What is the main reason that you are absent from school?

_____

Are your parents aware of your absences from school? Yes ☐ No ☐

5. How often are you in trouble with your teachers?

_____

6. If you get in trouble at school what are the main reasons for this?

_____

7. Have you ever been suspended from school? Yes ☐ No ☐

8. How much time do you spend doing your homework every evening?_____

9. What is your favourite thing about school?_____

10. What is your least favourite thing about school?

11. Have you ever been given a leadership role such as captain in a sports team or youth leader in a youth club? (inside or outside of school)

12. Do you have a part-time paid job? Yes ☐ No ☐
If yes what type of job and many hours a week do you work?

13. Have you been in trouble with the Gardai? Yes ☐ No ☐
If yes could be briefly describe the kind of trouble?

The future.....

1. How important do think the following things will be for you in the future when you are an adult? Please tick the box.

	Very important To me	Important	Not important to me at all
Getting Married			
Having children			
Looking after my parents			
Buying a house			
Paying tax			
Voting in the elections			
Go to mass			
Getting a well-paid job			
Helping others in your community/ volunteer			

2. What will be the best thing about being an adult in Ireland in the future?

3. What do you think will be the hardest thing about being an adult in Ireland in the future?

Appendix 6 Teacher Questionnaire

Part 1: individual student profiles

Students Name:_____

1. How would you rate the student at the following activities?

	Not good 1	2	3	4	5	Very good 6
Getting a task completed						
Ability to take direction from adults						
Ability to get on with other students						
Ability to get on with adults						
Punctuality						
Problem solving						
Self-confidence						

2. Briefly comment on the students approach to learning?

_____

_____

3. Comment on the student's ability to set goals for himself/herself (long and short-term)

_____

_____

4. Please comment on the students social skills?

_____

_____

5. How would you describe the student's class room behaviour?

_____

6. Is this student receiving any extra learning supports?

_____

7. How often is the student absent from school?

_____

8. Does this student receive support from home for attending school?

_____

9. Are the parents of this student involved in the school?_____

Teacher interview questions Part 2 (Primary and Secondary School)

A. Early Start as a targeted provision

1. Does position of Early Start in the primary school help or hinder the aims of the program?
2. Are Early Start participants more likely to be involved in other educational intervention programmes than non-Early Start participants; SCP

B. Impact of Early Start on educational/cognitive outcomes

1. Teachers rating of children's approaches to learning, social skills and problem
2. Placement in special needs education
3. Classroom behaviour
4. Absenteeism
5. Participation in learning support or in the JCSP
6. Number of honours subject

C. School readiness ideas:

1. Do parents and teachers share a common belief system about school readiness or academic beliefs?
2. Does preschool intervention foster positive attitudes in children or sense of self-worth?

D. Parental involvement

1. In what ways are parents involved in the school?
2. Are parents involved in decision-making which is meaningful to them?
3. How are educational decisions made?
4. Has culture of parent involvement has changed since more parents are working?
5. Are Early Start parents more likely to be involved in Parent organisations?
6. Do parents have high expectations for their children?
7. How do schools deal with parents with limited literacy/ language differences?
8. Role of HSCL teacher?

E. Community factors;

1. What are main stresses faced by parents in this area?
2. What are main 'risk factors' for children in the area?

F. General themes

1. What is the key to success for children in school?
2. What are main predictors of early school leaving?
3. Can a preschool programme address school failure issues?
4. Do short-term interventions provide sufficient barriers to educational failure?
5. Are children organised when they come to the school?

Appendix 7 Community Participant Questionnaire

Early Start

1. Does Early Start have any links to your programme?
2. Are Early Start participants more likely to be involved in other programmes than non-Early Start participants?
3. Does Early Start help target children most at-risk?
4. Does position of Early Start in the primary school help or hinder the aims of the program?
5. What are your perceptions of achievements of Early Start children?
6. Assess contribution of Early Start to building up Social and Cultural Capital of local Community.
7. Are Early Start children engaged in positive community activities?
8. Can an early years' programmes address school failure?
9. What is school readiness (local constitution of school readiness)?
10. Do parents, preschool workers and teachers share a common belief system about school readiness or academic beliefs?
11. Does preschool intervention foster positive attitudes in children or sense of self-worth and self-esteem?
12. Role of Early Start as an integrated response to educational disadvantage?
13. Do short-term interventions provide insufficient barriers to educational failure?

Parental involvement

1. What do you think is the main function of parental involvement?
2. How effective has Early Start been in promoting parental involvement?
3. Role of HSCL teacher?
4. Is there a knowledge gap, how much do parents know about school choices, curriculum, college options, transition year etc.
5. Has the culture of parent involvement has changed since more parents are working?
6. Do parents have high expectations for their children do the schools?

Community issues

1. What are main causes of early school leaving in the community?
2. What are main risk factors for young people in the community?
3. What are main stresses faced by parents in this area?

Appendix 8

Statistical tests employed using SPSS

The majority of tests to be used for the data analysis in this project will be non-parametric tests. These are called assumption free tests because they make no assumption about the type of data on which they can be used (Field, 2000). Most of these tests work on the principle of ranking data. By ranking data some of the information about the magnitude of difference between scores is lost and because of this non-parametric tests are less powerful than parametric (Field, 2000). Non-parametric tests are distribution free test and therefore do not assume normal distribution. According to Foster (1998) when using nominal scales, there are some parametric tests which are appropriate such as the chi-square. A number of non-parametric tests which are used in this study are described in detail below.

Mann-Whitney test

The Mann-Whitney test is the non-parametric equivalent of the independent t-test and is used to compare data collected in an independent group design. It is used when data are only of ordinal level of measurement. This can be used with samples of different sizes. According to Sarantakos (1998) this test is suitable this test is suitable "for answering questions about whether or not two samples have the same distribution" (p417). The test ranks the results of the two independent samples and tests whether the two samples are different by carrying out a calculation on the rank. According to Field (2000, p52) the Mann-Whitney test "works by looking at differences in the ranked position of scores in different groups" (Field, 2000, p52). Mann Whitney relies on scores being ranked from lowest to highest therefore the group with the lowest mean rank in the group. According to Sarantakos this test tests the null hypothesis about the identity of the population.

> The Mann-Whitney compares the scores on a specified variable of two independent groups. The scores of the two groups are ranked as one set, the sum of the rank values of each group is found and a U statistic is then calculated. (Foster, 1998, p224)

If probability is less than 0.05 there is a significant difference between scores for grouping variables 1 and 2.

Bivarate correlations-Spearman's Rho

Spearman's rho is a non-parametric bivarate correlation coefficient. There are two possibilities when using the test. The first is the one-tailed, which should be selected when there is a directional hypothesis. The second option is the two-tailed, which is the weaker of the two tests, is used when the direction of the relationship cannot be predicted. The table of results is referred to as a correlation matrix. Spearman's rho ranks the data and then applies Pearson's equation (a parametric test) to the data. It is used for ordinal data. If the significance value for this correlation coefficient is less than 0.05 it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship (Foster, 1998). The direction of the correlation tells us how the two variables are related. If the correlation is positive, the two variables have a positive relationship (as one increases, the other also increases). If the correlation is negative, the two variables have a negative relationship.

Appendix 9: SPSS Results

Table 1 Correlations: Attitude to school.

			in general like school a lot	it is good for students and teachers if parents get involved	Home -work is a waste of time	I have so much work to do at home that i don't have time to do my home-work	I learn more useful things from friends and relations than i do in school	Getting a good education is the best way to get ahead for teenagers in area	I get on with most people in my class	students have a say in how this school is run
Spearman 's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	.076	-.338	-.229	-.167	-.088	-.049	.059	.088
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.668	[redacted]	.193	.345	.622	.782	.742	.619
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6amost of classes and subjects in school are boring	Correlation Coefficient	-.249	-.008	.526(**)	.258	.249	-.136	.030	.078
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.155	.965	[redacted]	.140	.156	.442	.865	.660
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6b most teachers care about students as individuals	Correlation Coefficient	.269	.107	.121	.173	.033	.318	.103	.410(*)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.124	.546	.495	.328	.855	.067	.560	[redacted]
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6c there is good discipline at my school	Correlation Coefficient	.015	.198	-.094	.140	-.215	.008	-.045	.039
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.933	.261	.596	.429	.222	.964	.801	.827
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6d most teachers think i am a good	Correlation Coefficient	.373(*)	-.134	-.386(*)	-.338	-.127	.113	.161	-.040

	student									
		Sig. (2-tailed)	[illegible]	.448	.024	[illegible]	.474	.524	.363	.821
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6e in general i like school alot	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.374(*)	-.263	-.105	.034	.580(**)	.122	.205
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	[illegible]	.132	.556	.848	[illegible]	.492	.245
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6f it is good for students and teachers if parents get involved	Correlation Coefficient	.374(*)	1.000	-.159	.165	-.258	.403(*)	-.024	.084
		Sig. (2-tailed)	[illegible]	.	.371	.352	.141	[illegible]	.894	.638
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6g i get embarrassed if my parents get involved	Correlation Coefficient	-.362(*)	-.168	.263	.055	.134	-.231	-.363(*)	-.234
		Sig. (2-tailed)	[illegible]	.342	.132	.757	.449	.189	[illegible]	.182
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6h i like to discuss homework problems with my parents	Correlation Coefficient	.303	.124	-.043	.077	.087	.548(**)	-.026	.275
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.081	.484	.808	.665	.624	.001	.886	.116
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6i homework is a waste of time	Correlation Coefficient	-.263	-.159	1.000	.170	.586(**)	-.213	.020	.298
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.132	.371	.	.337	[illegible]	.227	.909	.087
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6j i have so much work to do at home that i don't have time to do my homework	Correlation Coefficient	-.105	.165	.170	1.000	-.149	-.019	-.441(**)	.003

		Sig. (2-tailed)	.556	.352	.337	.	.401	.916	[illegible]	.985
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6k i learn more useful things from friends and relations than i do in school	Correlation Coefficient	.034	-.258	.586(**)	-.149	1.000	-.046	.183	.402(*)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.848	.141	[illegible]	.401	.	.794	.299	.018
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6l getting a good education is the best way to get ahead for teenagers in area	Correlation Coefficient	.580(**)	.403(*)	-.213	-.019	-.046	1.000	.268	.156
		Sig. (2-tailed)	[illegible]	[illegible]	.227	.916	.794	.	.125	.379
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6m i get on with most people in my class	Correlation Coefficient	.122	-.024	.020	-.441(**)	.183	.268	1.000	.226
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.492	.894	.909	[illegible]	.299	.125	.	.199
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6n i think the JC is important for my future	Correlation Coefficient	.243	.118	-.082	-.198	-.068	.376(*)	-.072	-.037
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.166	.507	.643	.261	.704	[illegible]	.684	.836
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	6o students have a say in how this school is run	Correlation Coefficient	.205	.084	.298	.003	.402(*)	.156	.226	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.245	.638	.087	.985	[illegible]	.379	.199	.
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

- Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Self-perception of ability
Cross analysis using gender as a grouping variable
Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	Student gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
7.1 self perception of ability in Maths	female	18	16.42	295.50
	male	16	18.72	299.50
	Total	34		
7.2 Self perception of ability in English	female	18	17.69	318.50
	male	16	17.28	276.50
	Total	34		
7.3 Self perception of ability in science	female	18	18.50	333.00
	male	16	16.38	262.00
	Total	34		
7.4 Self perception of ability to make friends	female	18	16.72	301.00
	male	16	18.38	294.00
	Total	34		
7.5 Self perception of ability in sport	female	18	12.53	225.50
	male	16	23.09	369.50
	Total	34		
7.6 Self-perception of ability in drama	female	18	20.58	370.50
	male	16	14.03	224.50
	Total	34		
7.7 Self perception of ability in music	female	18	21.58	388.50
	male	16	12.91	206.50
	Total	34		

Test Statistics(b)

	ability in Maths	ability in English	ability in science	ability to make friends	ability in sport	ability in drama	ability in music
Mann-Whitney U	124.500	140.500	126.000	130.000	54.500	88.500	70.500
Wilcoxon W	295.500	276.500	262.000	301.000	225.500	224.500	206.500
Z	-.733	-.138	-.663	-.731	-3.441	-1.983	-2.630
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.463	.890	.507	.465	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.506(a)	.905(a)	.551(a)	.646(a)	.001(a)	.055(a)	.010(a)

a Not corrected for ties.
b Grouping Variable: Student gender

Table 3: Correlations between participation in Early Start and Performance in Junior Certificate Subjects

English Junior Certificate Results

			participant in Early Start	Eng
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.111
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.533
		N	35	34
	Eng	Correlation Coefficient	.111	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.533	.
		N	34	34

Irish Junior Certificate Results

			participant in Early Start	Irish
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.188
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.320
		N	35	30
	Irish	Correlation Coefficient	.188	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.320	.
		N	30	30

Science Junior Certificate Results

			participant in Early Start	Science
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.472(*)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.020
		N	35	24
	science	Correlation Coefficient	.472(*)	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.
		N	24	24

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

French Junior Certificate Results

			participant in Early Start	French
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.202
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.488
		N	35	14
	French	Correlation Coefficient	.202	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.488	.
		N	14	14

Maths Junior Certificate Results

			participant in Early Start	Math
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.350(*)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.043
		N	35	34
	Math	Correlation Coefficient	.350(*)	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.043	.
		N	34	34

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Analysis of Rosenberg's self-esteem scale.

Correlation

Correlations

			participant in Early Start	Rosenberg self esteem score
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.288
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.099
		N	35	34
	Rosenberg self esteem score	Correlation Coefficient	-.288	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.099	.
		N	34	34

Correlations

			Rosenberg self esteem score	Student gender
Spearman's rho	Rosenberg self esteem score	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.021
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.906
		N	34	34
	Student gender	Correlation Coefficient	.021	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.906	.
		N	34	35

Table 5: Self-perception of Problem solving ability (Results of non-parametric correlation using Pearson Correlation)

		participant in Early Start	4a how good are you at figuring out problems and planning how to solve them	4b good at bouncing back quickly	4c good at learning from your mistakes	4d how often do you wish you were different	4e do you have hard time getting things done	4fdo you have trouble getting along with other teenagers
participant in Early Start	Pearson Correlation	1	-.152	.098	-.190	.073	.085	.188
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.391	.580	.281	.683	.633	.287
	N	35	34	34	34	34	34	34
4a how good are you at figuring out problems and planning how to solve them	Pearson Correlation	-.152	1	-.094	.169	-.248	-.110	-.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.391		.596	.339	.157	.537	.403
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
4b good at bouncing back quickly	Pearson Correlation	.098	-.094	1	.033	-.033	.181	-.139
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.580	.596		.853	.851	.306	.433
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
4c good at learning from your mistakes	Pearson Correlation	-.190	.169	.033	1	-.229	.059	-.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.281	.339	.853		.193	.739	.871
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
4d how often do you wish you were different	Pearson Correlation	.073	-.248	-.033	-.229	1	.046	.168
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.683	.157	.851	.193		.794	.341
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
4e do you have hard time getting things done	Pearson Correlation	.085	-.110	.181	.059	.046	1	.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.633	.537	.306	.739	.794		.991
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
4fdo you have trouble getting along with other teenagers	Pearson Correlation	.188	-.148	-.139	-.029	.168	.002	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.287	.403	.433	.871	.341	.991	
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

Table 6. Students perception of their parents aspirations for them- Spearman's Rho

Correlations

			participant in Early Start
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	35
	5.1 how important to parents that you play sport	Correlation Coefficient	-.117
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.508
		N	34
	5.2 important to your parents that you take music or dance	Correlation Coefficient	-.246
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.161
		N	34
	5.3 important to your parents that you take on leadership role	Correlation Coefficient	.020
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.913
		N	34
	5.4 important to your parents that you help at home	Correlation Coefficient	.301
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.084
		N	34
	5.5 important to your parents that you get pt job during school	Correlation Coefficient	.165
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.350
		N	34
	5.6 important to your parents that you do LC	Correlation Coefficient	-.054
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.760
		N	34
	5.7 important to your parents that you go to college	Correlation Coefficient	-.404(*)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	[illegible]
		N	34
	5.8 important to your parents that you do after-school activities	Correlation Coefficient	-.326

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.060
	N	34
5.9 important to your parents that you get a good job when you finish school	Correlation Coefficient	.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.781
	N	34
5.10 important to your parents that you do you homework	Correlation Coefficient	-.099
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.578
	N	34
5.11 important to your parents that you do well in school exams	Correlation Coefficient	-.221
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.210
	N	34
5.12 important to your parents that you have a boyfriend/girl friend	Correlation Coefficient	-.403(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	[redacted]
	N	34

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7; Expectations of Adulthood

Correlations

			participant in Early Start	As an adult how important will it be to you to have children	As an adult how important will it be to you to look after your parents	As an adult how important will it be to you to buy a house	As an adult how important will it be to you to pay tax	As an adult how important will it be to you to vote in elections	As an adult how important will it be to you to go to mass
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.106	-.329	.014	.026	.071	.243
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.552	.058	.939	.882	.689	.166
		N	35	34	34	34	34	34	34
	As an adult how important will it be to you to get married	Correlation Coefficient	.248	.539(**)	-.108	.491(**)	.276	.006	.266
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.157	[redacted]	.542	[redacted]	.115	.974	.128
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	As an adult how important will it be to you to have children	Correlation Coefficient	.106	1.000	-.055	.135	.153	.144	.270
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.552	.	.756	.447	.387	.417	.123
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	As an adult how important will it be to you to look after your parents	Correlation Coefficient	-.329	-.055	1.000	-.090	-.094	-.024	.026
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.058	.756	.	.612	.597	.893	.885
		N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	As an adult how important will it be to you to buy a house	Correlation Coefficient	.014	.135	-.090	1.000	.375(*)	.100	-.023
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.939	.447	.612	.	[redacted]	.573	.897

	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
As an adult how important will it be to you to pay tax	Correlation Coefficient	.026	.153	-.094	.375(*)	1.000	.337	.319
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.882	.387	.597	[redacted]	.	.051	.066
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
As an adult how important will it be to you to vote in elections	Correlation Coefficient	.071	.144	-.024	.100	.337	1.000	.150
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.689	.417	.893	.573	.051	.	.396
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
As an adult how important will it be to you to go to mass	Correlation Coefficient	.243	.270	.026	-.023	.319	.150	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.166	.123	.885	.897	.066	.396	.
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
As an adult how important will it be to you to get well-paid job	Correlation Coefficient	-.231	.110	.000	-.053	-.026	.000	-.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.190	.535	1.000	.766	.886	1.000	.960
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
As an adult how important will it be to you to volunteer in your community	Correlation Coefficient	.011	.412(*)	.209	.217	.175	.350(*)	.369(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.952	[redacted]	.235	.217	.321	[redacted]	[redacted]
	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 8: School related outcomes

Correlations

			participant in Early Start	how often are you absent from school	reasons for absence	are your parents aware of your absence	how often are you in trouble in school
Spearman's rho	participant in Early Start	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.203	.159	.	.009
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.243	.362	.	.959
		N	35	35	35	35	35
	how often are you absent from school	Correlation Coefficient	-.203	1.000	-.179	.	-.540(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.243	.	.303	.	[redacted]
		N	35	35	35	35	35
	reasons for absence	Correlation Coefficient	.159	-.179	1.000	.	.303
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.362	.303	.	.	.077
		N	35	35	35	35	35
	are your parents aware of your absence	Correlation Coefficient	.	.	.	.	.
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.	.	.	.
		N	35	35	35	35	35
	how often are you in trouble in school	Correlation Coefficient	.009	-.540(**)	.303	.	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.959	[redacted]	.077	.	.
		N	35	35	35	35	35
	have you been suspended	Correlation Coefficient	-.051	.419(*)	-.199	.	-.630(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.770	[redacted]	.252	.	.000
		N	35	35	35	35	35

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix 10 Parent quotes from Chapter 6

10.1 Encouraged the childrens learning

I think it is good for every child to go to Early Start. They teach normal stuff like, he was a bit slow like, he couldn't tell the difference between animals, a cow would be a horse, the girls all knew the difference when they were growing up. I think the slowness may have been down to that, he was even slow coming out of the nappies, a lot of things that were easy that he should have know, you know that kind of way. Noreen

It definitely helps, she would have been four and then the preschool was great. I thought it was great for kids. I can't put into words but she has really benefited from it without a doubt. She loved it; she was always happy coming and going. It made her want to learn more, she loves studying and school and to do well, no problems there. Patricia
I think it was easier for her to go into mainstream school, her biggest fear was can I have this desk for next year and can Stacy sit beside me and she did come out of herself. I did notice colouring and drawings where children usually scribble it was kind of trying to keep in through the lines and things, I did find it good. Sharon

I feel she got the best, they went to so many different areas while in there, I haven't seen it in any other play school I have been in since, they got a wide variety, the teacher didn't just stick to the nursery rhymes, like she came home one day talking about yachts and she knew the difference between sail boats and I thought wow this is amazing and she came home another day and she said doras and chatair, they taught her a little bit of Irish and gave them jigsaws and colouring and home-stand. They gave them time to tell their news and she would have been very quiet at the time so it would have been a big deal for her and they encouraged her to speak.
I would normally have let them play and put the papers and crayons on the table and let them off but we were told to sit down with them and take to five minutes with them and it taught me to do the same at home. An odd time we would take out paints and do a mess with the paints or let them get involved with the cooking. Little basic things about getting involved with them. Molly

I wouldn't say it encouraged her learning because I was always into the kids learning even the older ones I bought them encyclopaedias but what I found was it gave them socialising, the socialising part of school, I thought it was brilliant they weren't just brought into the classroom and left there. It was a place to learn to be at school, for parents it wasn't just tearing the child away, it delivers easily and it was an introduction, it was a real nice introduction into school, it really was. There was no pressure on them for writing and reading it was a learning time, it was brilliant. Rena F

10.2

Group A: Parent participation in their child's education I (Special needs children)

John

John is aged 14 and is the oldest of three children. John has ADHD and has a full-time SNA since primary school.

> He has a low attention span, it is hard to keep him on track all the time, even for his JC they are getting a reader in because they know he will say he is not finishing it. He had a SNA since Primary school. I think it was the age he started school that is after holding him back. He started school when he was just 4 and the others were gone 5 and they are much more intelligent, he is 14 now. He was way too young he did Early Start at age three. I would let him repeat it again if I could. Because he is on a report sheet I go over Friday from 9.00 to 9.15 and he is there as well. He doesn't mind having an SNA because I think she works with the whole lot of them together as a group so they don't know she is there for him. He is confident but not work-wise, he won't do his homework if the girls are there because he knows he is at the same level as they are at with some of the work he is doing. He gets embarrassed about it. Noreen

> John is possibly the most difficult and in opinion our biggest failure in 3rd year and I don't mean that in that the child has failed but that the system has failed the child. He shouldn't be here and I would have to say straight up that that was marked with his parents when he came here and it has been marked with his parents continuously since he came here and they refuse to allow him to go anywhere else, they just refuse counselling help, he is a serious, serious problem. Its not so much is a bold child but he has serious behavioural difficulties, ADHD and he also has learning difficulties. Quite profound learning difficulties, he is barely reading and writing and he is in 3rd year. 5th Year Head

> He is in a special needs class and is giving constant problems , it is very difficult to keep him on board, I don't mean to keep him in school he would be physically in school but he would be running up and down corridors, speaking out of turn, mess fighting as he calls it. I meet his mother every Friday morning to keep him on board. He should not be here in this school to be very honest, this school is not suitable for his needs. We pointed it out to his mother and at one stage we said he has to go and we did take him back, she was quite shocked when it was pointed out that really this place was into for him that she never heard that before. That's not true, she was told that before. In terms of his behaviour and concentration and attention he is more of a 2 or 3 year old, so he can write a sentence so he is more of a ten year old in that sense but he has no sense right and wrong and having corrected him for something he will do the exact same thing right in front of you. She is struggling with him, she is trying very hard but it is very difficult for her. She did try to go another school last year but they wouldn't take him, it was a smaller unit and more suitable to his needs. I thought at the end of second year, he had done well to get this far and wished him well and then he came back. 3rd year head

Adam

Adam was only recently diagnosed as having ADHD. Adam is the youngest of three children and there is a history of early school leaving among his siblings.

He was only diagnosed in 3rd year and put on medication. He missed a lot of school because he never slept, he would be up till 4 or 5 in the morning and then he would be tired and get into loads of trouble in school, some days I wouldn't let him into school at all. When he got diagnosed with ADHD, it's brilliant now he is on medication and he is a different person. I had never heard of it before but when the school said it to me he had ADHD and I started reading leaflets and information on it and it says if your child answers five or eight questions out of these ten question than your child more than likely have ADHD and every question I read out Adam answered, he was getting them all, more than ten it was lots and I said oh god like. It was very hard to cope like, he was all over the place, even in primary school his teacher Mr F. used to say 'God I am at the end of my tether with this child', but there was never any mention of it then. But they said it's more common now than it was even when Adam was in primary school. Yeah you hear more about it now on the radio and stuff and I never took any notice before. But you hear more negative stuff about it like don't give your child medication, its cocaine, its speed and this and that, some psychologist wrote a book on it, and he was saying don't be handing out all these drugs to kids who have problems, maybe it is counselling that the child needs. But I see a big difference in him.
I was afraid to put him on medication, I didn't want him going around like he was on medication, you know that kind of way but it doesn't do that to him at all I thought he would be going around goofy or stoned looking but I didn't want a personality change, because he is funny and you get a great laugh out of him.
I don't know it was crazy like now it is totally different, his reports from school are brilliant like, there is a big difference. Lola

I don't know, he doesn't know what he wants to do himself, I mean he is so immature he wants to be a wrestler. I wouldn't be asking him what he wants to be because I think he is only getting his own head together now, I wouldn't put pressure on him asking him what he wants to be all I say to him is what are you going to be when you grow up and he says I want to be a wrestler. Lola

He was only diagnosed at beginning of this year with ADHD and we wouldn't have any ongoing problems with him. I think his name was put forward for assessment and it took a long time to come about, I think the mother wouldn't recognise it at the beginning and have anything done and it just takes that much time to get things started, we did apply for him last year and he only started on medication at the end of last year. When he takes his medication absolutely huge improvement in his behaviour, he is actually quite capable of sitting down and getting on with his work, he is quite bright, you would question the class he is in at the moment, he is in special needs, now he should be perhaps in JCSP if he was on his medication, he was refusing to take

his medication so we weren't seeing any changes for a long time and you can tell the day very clearly when Adam is on medication I wouldn't see a lot of evidence of goal setting, he is kind of living from day-to day or week to week, I don't know what his plans are after, if he has any. I have met the mother and I would have to say I find the mother very good and very supportive. Third Year Head

Aoife

Aoife is an only child and has mild learning difficulties.

Parent –teacher meetings two or three a year would be the only time I meet the teachers but if I am worried about anything I can go straight over to the school they will have you an appointment for later on that afternoon or the next morning. Well last year they were revising stuff that Aoife had done in primary school and Aoife's nephews and nieces were teasing her saying they were doing the same stuff and they are only 8 so she said she didn't want to go to school and she was bored. So I went over to the school and she gave Aoife extra work and got Aoife to help the kids who hadn't done it before. She is very lazy and if she gets the book done quick she switches off. I went over straight away and said she is losing interest and she will be gone and they responded straight away.

She studies for an hour or two after her homework every day; she doesn't get a lot of homework so she goes over what she has done and tries to get it into her head. I tell her it is time for homework and she sits down and does it. Mindy

She will do her LC at least but after that I am not sure because she is getting help with her foundation level she might find anything else too hard but maybe she will catch up on herself and take off. I can't see her spending four years in college but she might go off the beauty school and stick that out. Mindy

Sandra

Sandra has been diagnosed with dyslexia and has on older brother who also has dyslexia and is currently studying at Third level.

No I am not satisfied, I know she is capable of much more. Her attitude is a bit that I am not able to do and she has no confidence in her self and a lot of it stems from having dyslexia even though she sees her brother with dyslexia achieving what he has achieved she can't see herself being as capable as him but I know she is but I hope life will kind of sort that out as opposed to school

She has only just changed school last February because I was having a lot of problems in her previous school with regards to both academic, or lack of academic progress or failure actually as well as her relationship with people in the

school including teachers, she had problems with a few teachers and I found those totally unresponsive to me going up to them that they didn't really want to know and it kind of all blew up into huge problems and I changed school and she is much happier in the other school. Oh they were willing to meet me but they didn't make any changes to change her attitude to school or progress in school, I just felt they weren't listening to me and like if I went up with a problem they would throw another problem at me. Like I went up about her failing at every subject and they said do you know she was bullying a girl, and then I found out that that incident of bullying had been sorted out by the Chaplin but the Chaplin hadn't told the year head they he had sorted it out. You know that sort of way. It is not good. I feel the new school seem to have a more positive attitude because it is reflecting in her personality, she is a lot happier in her self than she was a year ago.

I know she learns visually and if I was to go down and say that to them I feel they would be a little bit more open because they were very understanding when I went down to change schools.

She knows she can't leave school without going on to third level because that is just the way life is in our family. I kind of make her feel it is normal going on to third level, it is just expected of her so she knows she is staying there I hope she does third level. Some sort of third level anyway it certainly won't be traditional Maynooth or Trinity or UCD, it might not even be an IT but I am hoping to direct her to some maybe even PLC course. I am not really sure at this stage am just encouraging her artistic nature. I can't see her sitting in an office typing all day long, you know. Claire

10.3 Parent participation- Second level Group A

The school are brilliant, the primary and secondary, there is a close communication there, if you need them they are there and the same vice a versa. It is such a big change when they go secondary when they don't have the one teacher which is part of growing up. She had a few problems but she is managing them with the school and ourselves. Rita

We have very regular parent-teacher meetings, and my girls take part in all the plays and things like that and we do be up for all that kind of thing, concerts and all that, I know most of the teachers, I wouldn't have any problem about picking up the phone and going up. Rena

There are times when I would be worried, Carol doesn't say much about what goes on in school so at times it would be nice to pick up the phone instead of having to organise a meeting but I have never had any reason to have to do that. The (parent-teacher) relationship is non-existent basically. Part of me thinks I know the child, I know her so I could help the teacher along. Maud

They would never have to contact us. Only contact is in the form of newsletters I wouldn't have great contact with the school, I wouldn't have to the only time I go down is for the parent-teacher meetings (Yearly) I don't really need to, the parent-teacher meetings tell you all you need to know. The

teachers think the girls are capable of higher level so we go with the teachers. Eithne

I think it is fine that it is open to be going up and voicing my opinion but I think that they are doing a good job and there is no need for a group of interfering parents, there is a committee up there and if something isn't working they are able for it. They usually call a meeting and write a program of what your child is doing so you are usually well informed. Sharon

The school have never contacted me about anything, I would actually prefer if they did. I always threaten that I will do it and I don't apart from that I am sure I could contact them anytime and I said to him that after these exams I will contact the school if I am not happy. Anna

I go just for the general (meeting), you know when you go around the hall and meet them all I have never had to go down there or anything but I was in work and they rang me to go down and have a chat so I meet the French and religion teachers and they are all behind her as well, they have never said anything about her, nobody has but you know the way when they are on the little slow down, they'd ring me now if she wasn't in, they are very good. Mandy

Yeah I feel that I am being involved in everything now stuff like tours they involve me now. John feels I am more involved now, more involved than with Sam, I feel now I am on an even keel with them. Martha

The parents association has kind of fallen, we meet once a year to see what the school wants. All the older parents are all working now. I wouldn't know the teachers as such, I would know the Home School Liaison Teacher from parent visitation programme but that is only once a year.
They have parent-teacher meetings once a year where you meet the Year Head, you don't get to meet all the teachers, you only get to see one and she has all his comments and things which is ok. I wouldn't really need to see anyone unless anything major happened, I suppose with the exams it might be nice to meet the teachers and discuss whether they are doing higher or lower, some the teachers expect them to do higher and like I mean if they are not able for it they might have to drop down, I don't know if the courses are the same like if they drop down a level but I would hate to see them do higher and fail I would rather them do lower and pass but if they go from one to the other are they the same, obviously there is difference, I know they all like to push them but for the sake of passing I prefer if they did what they could manage, I wouldn't mind meeting about that. Ella

10.4 Parent as advocate for the child- Group B

The last incidence he had I was saying to myself 'have these teachers nothing better to be doing? He got two in-house suspensions. They keep picking the days when he is at sport, because he is brilliant sportsman and I feel they keep punishing him through sport and when there is a football match on they put the in-

house suspension on. They said they hadn't really got a problem with him and I said have you nothing better to do then messing with his education and I was just about to say 'he is entitled to his education' and you know yourself they would have turned around and said 'if you don't like it here you can send him somewhere else' you know what kind of attitude.

They don't listen to the kids until the parents go up, the kids have no say in that school, the Year Head says 'I don't want to know' and I just had to sit there and listen. I think it is very hard to win even if your child is right. Teachers hang you up there. I know a lot of parents that are up in the school, the minute you mention X (teacher), 'Ah are they in trouble again'. But if they sneeze, this business of give me your journal this is their big threat, so they write a note in the journal and if the child refuses to give their journal that is breaking the rules, But you have to see it from there point of view they have so many kids coming in they have to nip it in the bud.

At the end of the day he is missing out I feel that he is getting bullied now not by students but by the teachers. You have to side with them. But it is a big difference to going over to the primary, over there they are the best in the world, they are the best kids, they are brilliant and as soon as they go up there (secondary) it is a different story all together. Connie

He seems to have a good core of friends, I would also say there are a lot of kids who are afraid of him, that they know he one of those gang members we have heard stories about him beating up people and all the kids know him as well and they know not to cross Jim, so it is hard to judge then but there is definitely a core of boys around and some of them would look up to him, I don't know how he would be rated within that gang, he is very definitely leader. 3rd year Head

I am constantly in contact with school, I like to know what is going on, if he is been in trouble I like to ring up and see what's goes on, like I had a run in with a teacher because she upset him in Maths, he is on the school football team and he missed a bit of Maths and he didn't know how to do a piece of homework and she made a big deal of it and gave he detention and I didn't like the way she dealt with it and eventually I got to see and tell her how I felt and she said she was very sorry about the way she spoke to him and she would try to be a bit more patient and tolerant with him but I felt he was being ignored, he is doing something for the school and there should be a slight exception to the rule and even write down on piece of paper the work he missed the few sums or whatever, a bit of compromise reached. I wouldn't let it go and I spoke to his Year Head and told her how upset I was about it at the end of the day he was doing it for the school, a compromise has to be reached somewhere and he is doing a lot better now there isn't as many problems. Martha

Her son is in in-house detention every week for a variety of reason. She comes up when he is suspended but she doesn't really take an active interest in between. You would never see her unless they were suspended. The older son has dropped out of school. 5th Year Head

10.5 Push factors for academic success- Group A

We don't have to tell them to study they do it themselves; we have to tell them to take a break they even study during the midterm. All their friends have done well, they have gone on to do teaching, there are excellent students in their school. The girls wanted to go to the local school but we made the right choice sending them to an all girls school. We are very happy with the school. Rena

I was always strict maybe because of the way I was brought up, I just don't like them being bold in school and I always get good reports from the school even when she was in primary I never had any problem with any of them in school, if I thought they had been cheeky with the teachers they would be grounded. Helen

In Maths I have noticed he is doing an awful lot better than what he did in primary but he doesn't actually talk about education, he doesn't say it means this and it means that but I think he does try his best but I do have to push him a lot. I have him in after school study because he won't study at home. Even the reading I have to be on his back about that I bought him all the Harry Potter books and I have to be on his back about that but once he starts he enjoys them. Sue

I hope John stays; I have tried to explain to him how important it is, Sam is finding it a struggle now, he is trying to find an apprenticeship in England to become an electrician but they don't recognise his school grades there. He doesn't push himself; he is a typical boy he would rather be out with his mates. I am hoping he will do his Leaving Certificate, fingers crosses, he knows how upset I was and he say the struggle he talks to his brother and knows the struggle he is facing so hopefully that will be a warning to him. Martha

He worries a lot if he doesn't pass, he would be disappointed if he didn't do well, he sets himself up for it, he worries too much and I would worry that he might make himself sick for the JC, I would worry he would go too far. He had an Irish exam last week and two days before he had a massive headache and felt sick. With the football if he has a big match it's the same thing. Ella

She has her own room ad she sits up stairs for hours and studies, we had a meeting at the college and they were telling us how long they should study for but I think sometimes they can study too much, I say even if you do an hour and a half and stop and then you can go back to it. It is not that I am worried but you see it in the papers and on the telly and all that kids are under pressure and commit suicide and all this over doing their tests so I never put pressure on her, I always say 'very good' and all this, to me you do the best you can and 'you have to do this and that' I don't believe in. Helen

We had a huge problem with Nelly not doing home work this year and she would have had 20 notes for not doing homework, very difficult to get her motivated. When I meet her and her mother earlier this year she was crying

because she felt people thought she was stupid and dumb. She was getting this from different things that were happening at home her sisters were calling her dumb. I was wondering if the whole exams were getting on top of her and was she felling she wasn't going to succeed when she could succeed and instead of doing something about it she was going to opposite direction and doing no work. 3rd Year Head

I just had a good conversation with John and his mother and we are trying to motivate him to get a good Junior Cert. He is not at all positive, even though he has mostly Cs in his mocks the comments from teachers are not good, I have them here; 'needs to improve' 'needs to work harder' I mean this one here really sums it up 'attitude to school has really disimproved lately'. I mean that is deliberate non-compliance, I have pointed that out to him, you can see the mother is definitely with us and she is definitely trying to motivate Jim but at the same time she is not following up on his homework. She is constantly pushing him but she is at the stage now where she is at the end of her tether. 3rd year Head

10.5 Protecting children from risks – Group A

She is the old fashioned 14 year old she hasn't got to the mini-skirts and all that she is more creative and is more immature and innocent in that way. We do talk about things, if anything she brings home the leaflets to me to give up smoking and all that, she knows what's out there I think we have kind of explained to them, we have let them see Train Spotting and things we think are beneficial. Where they live as well, it used to be horrible coming from the primary school over there and seeing people lying on the ground, it was really shocking so I think they have seen an awful lot themselves. Sharon

He has done the drinking thing alright, a few weeks ago he came home drunk. I think it was the first time really. Ah yeah he was talking to me about it then and said one of his friends had to bring him home because he collapsed and stuff, he was lying down and couldn't move in the field where he was and he managed to bring him home to the door so it wasn't a very good experience. But in this day and age he is not bad because most kids I see them up in the local Early School Leavers Project they are only his age and they are involved in bad stuff so he is not that bad because he is not getting involved in cars and drugs and that.
His sister said that he told her a while ago all his friends smoke hash and he had a few drags and he ended up getting the greens and getting sick and all and now he wouldn't go near anything.
His psychiatrist had a talk with him about how dangerous it was and she kind of exaggerated it abit more. His doctor was saying Adam is a prime candidate for drugs and it would be so easy to get him involved that I wouldn't want him mixing with gangs or hanging around Lola

She is not allowed up to the shops on her own, she goes out and plays with them when I am up here. Both my sisters live up here so she is never far from sight. I will worry about her when she gets older. Because she is an only child

she sits down and talks to me a lot. Michelle

Well it is out there isn't it? But the girls don't go out on the street. They go to a few friends around the corner and they might practice (dancing) but they are back at 7.30. Eithne

Definitely not (worried about) drugs and drink because she is very strong minded and she is totally against cigarettes even though both of her parents smoke. The only worries we have about her is that she is too friendly, she is too trusting and she always was, she takes people at face value, we tell her to be always in a safe place and not to keep secrets and let us know where she us, we tell her there is a reason we have rules and are strict in case anything happens to her or anyone else in the family Rita

I never had a problem with any of them drinking and certainly not Niamh, St Niamh they call her. She pals with a nice bunch and it is definitely the friends they have, it is very important, it doesn't matter where they live it is there friends. Rena

The guards have brought him home once because literally he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, I worry when they all go out together and there is a big gang of them and they all meet up that worries me because that is why he was brought home. They were all in a big gang and the guards said you, you, you follow us and they were brought home and accused of beating someone up and it was nothing to do with them. He has had rows but it is only natural. I worry about peer pressure and smoking drugs and stuff, we have had two incidences where he has came in drunk he paid sorely for it. I am not that worried about him, he is sensible, he knows my rules and he knows I won't tolerate breaking my rules. Drink is the biggest problem around here, what I wanted to know was when he did get drunk how did he get the alcohol, he said that they just asked someone, they literally just stood outside the pub and asked adults and someone went and bought it for them, no questions asked I was devastated.' Martha

Yeah, you can't pick and choose his friends you know when he is in a crowd you are saying 'oh my god', but he hasn't been in trouble so far. The likes of this Halloween he is going I want a few bottles and here I am 'oh god' but he is going to do it behind your back anyway I don't know whether I am wrong or right but I would rather know that he is drinking 6 bottles of Budweiser, I give him the money €10-15 and say go out and play I don't know how, I probably do know how they get them, as long as he is on his phone and I ring him but with having a girlfriend keeps him out of trouble. Connie

ASBOs are big now all around here, because you can be done for loitering and all that and I have found that she has had a drink with this girl as well. She was going to New College, there are a lot of problems down there and she thought she was going there next year and I am thinking where will I send her? I will have to send her to the Convent School. But she said I am not going

down there they are all snobs and at one time like she held her head up. They want to keep her in her old school anyway, I mentioned she wanted to go and they were shocked, they want to keep the good ones. All her cousins are doctors on my husbands side, they went to America and Australia some of them are dieticians, that's why I thought when she said she wanted to be a beautician, they wore all the white coats and I said you get the clean white coat but now I don't know. I said to her in the car this morning how do you think they would feel like all them girls looking at you now and you are the only one that failed and she said well but you didn't go far in school and I said no but I am working my ass off every day of the week so she sort of gets it from there and from the Early Start she is sort of ahead for herself. Mandy

10.6 Parent participation in their child's education I (Special needs students)

Tom

Tom is 15 and at the time of the interview and is now in an LCA class.

Tom is just a torment, he would wreck your head. I have been in the school so many times over Tom. But with Tom it is not always his fault either, do you understand me. He is a bully in his own way, I know he has a temper and all that he wrecks my head. Tom I just didn't understand, from that time (preschool) he screamed the place down. You couldn't even go to the toilet without him, he was a freak. Otherwise they are grand now except for the secondary school.

I hate it. I have to listen to them first and then when they said it to me I did lose it, there was an uproar in the school there, an uproar, and I nearly went to kill the Principal, now I am not being smart but I did. It seems to me that they think it is all down to Tom and I am not having that, I said they need to stop slagging him it is one thing he hates, he can slag but he can't take it back. He is just a wagon.

It is mostly about girls, (the arguments) sorry about the language but it is mostly about fucking girls, he says to me Ma that girl said something I say what have I told you about ignoring them and he says 'Ma it is hard to ignore them' but it always girls.

I think he was lucky to even get through the Junior. He is mad to be a mechanic as well but he doesn't think you need school he thinks you just need to use your head which he does use his head cause he can take a bike apart and out it together, they are trying to make him stay so I have to make sure now he copes with this. But otherwise I fucking told him I will put him into boot camp and brat camp and every camp that I can find do you understand me. You just want to get him and kill him and he just doesn't care.

They went to the homework club in 2nd class. He got pissed off going but I said come here it gives me a break from doing the homework with you. The breakfast club now in school they won't go they say, 'Ma I am not eating someone else's breakfast', they eat a big lunch I buy them chicken baguettes in the butchers. Darina

He is another one of these gang members, he is in a special needs class and he has been before the discipline committee and is about to be brought before the board of management. He is causing a huge amount of problems in school. He is very aggressive, a huge bully. I know there are a lot of things going on outside school. He was in court for another issue last week on Thursday and Friday.
3rd Year Head

Gerard

Gerard is the youngest of 4 children and he left the mainstream education system at age 12 before starting secondary school.

He wasn't the brainiest or anything but he was great up until 6th class and all of a sudden you see I started working, I was working every second week and the weeks I was working I walked him over to the school cause I was working over beside the school and the week I was off I was letting him walk over on his own cause he was in 6th class and all of a sudden the weeks I was off he was going on the hop and I was brought to court. All of a sudden we were getting letters from the Principal saying he missed 41 days or something and the guards were bringing me to court and I was like 'I know people who have been missing mountains and mountains of days'. 41 days, to this day I still remember it and I was saying I know kids you have missed a lot more and all of a sudden you are in court with social workers and this.

The judge even said to me could you not take him by the hand and bring him over the school and I said yeah you try and grab an eleven year old child and bring him to school with all his mates going to school, but the judge didn't see it that way. I remember the judge saying he will have to go to into care but fair play to the Primary school principal and them (social workers) they got him into a project.

Gerard didn't even get in to secondary school. You know they way they do the entrance exam (in 6th class) well he left here that morning and next thing I get a phone call to say he never turned up so I rang the primary school Principal and he arranged another exam and he got on the phone to Mr Fleming who said he sent me a letter to say he never turned up for the second exam. But I know I never got a letter because if I did I would have tore him over to the school myself but he ended up going to the Early School Leaving Project.

I was really annoyed at the start; I was going to the local paper and all about the secondary school Principal. He had an argument with my older son the year before. Of course I was called up to the school and was told they were going to expel him, I said don't expel him a month before his junior certificate. My young fella went and begged him to let him back and just do the junior certificate because he had a good job as a stone mason and he just needed the Junior Certificate to get it but he refused him. So when the secondary school Principal told the primary school Principal that he gave him a second date for the entrance exams I knew in my heart and soul that he

didn't so that's how John ended up out of school. Every one else denies it, the other teachers and the social workers and they said 'ah no that has nothing to do with your older son'. The Social worker got him into the Project because I was going to the court with him in the last year of primary school and they were going to put him into care or else so they put him into the Project.

He is doing massive stuff up in the project. He loves the woodwork and computers. He is not a great writer or anything, sums now he is better than fucking me anyway. According to them he is doing great, it is just when he is standing with the crowd he has to do what they are doing, he is a grand young fella but he has his moments.

The only thing now is drugs wise cause he has to do a urine test every week, I had to sign for that at the start to allow him. Twice now his thing came back positive, the first time they said it was heroin. So they sent me over to my doctor and he did it and it came back negative. So I don't know what that was about. The second time it came back positive but I didn't know I was supposed to tell them I gave him painkillers cause he suffers with his teeth. Whatever was in the tablet was in the whatever you call it so I had to explain to the woman then but tip wood the woman has even said he is doing great. He is drinking now don't get me wrong and the odd Friday night I would say to his mates now go up stairs and get your self a few bottles but make sure it is in the house you know what I mean but he is he is doing grand there. Una

10.7 Bullying- Group B

The girl pulled Nora to the ground and tore the school bag off her and Nora didn't want to fight her she just kept pushing and pushing, she just grabbed her and tore her face, Nora was shaking, she was in shock, she is not like that, she doesn't like fighting especially with girls, she was in a awful state, we had to come straight home from work. I was devastated, we never had any hassle, and I rang and Nora was suspended for four days so we weren't happy and went up to the Year Head and she wasn't happy about it. They wanted to put it on her file and blackened her name, she would have been in the book for fighting, and that would have destroyed her character and she had had a clean slate for four years. And I wasn't happy and if I had to go to the Principal I would. Her tutor said that as far as she was concerned it was self-defence. Suzanne

I was disgusted that the school hadn't rang to ask us to go up and collect her and I was disgusted they let her home in such a state. I told her Tutor they had ignored us for four days, we had rung for an appointment and it was four days before we got to speak to them about how we felt and they had her miss school for 4 days. They should have picked up the phone and rang and asked us to come up to the school. She hadn't even got a note at the time just the school told her not to come back until Thursday. Suzanne

She was bullied in 6th class because she was a little over weight, I went straight to the Principal. He was devastated and the mothers were all called in and had to apologise. I had to go to the secondary school and tell them what

happened just to keep an eye on her but she changed really when she went to secondary and she really came out of herself. Lisa

He was bullied the first week he went to secondary school and it was sorted the first week he went, if anything is going on you can approach them I would say that about them. Carol

He was bullied one time, we took him out of secondary school for a week because he had a gash on his eye and when we went to the Principal about it he treated his Dad like a child, he said he never felt as degraded as he did coming out of that office. Tara

10.8 Decision making at second level Group B-

(i) Reliance on teachers for educational decisions

We don't really get involved in that (education decisions) my knowledge like, we weren't involved in what Nora wanted to do it was more the teachers cause they teach her and they know what she is good at, I don't know how to really say it, you kind of presume that they would know because they are teaching her day to day, like I know she is capable of good results. Suzanne

I have to say I didn't have a clue until they explained it. I didn't know it was a different type of LC. She is not that pushed on it because she is very quiet and she would do anything in her power not to go out but they recommended it and they are the teachers. The teacher explained to me if she went ahead and skipped transition year she would do an extra year or two in college where she wants to do beauty, so for the sake of the year plus she is only 15, she was the youngest in her class so she will still only be 17 when she finishes school. It was really only peer pressure to skip transition year. I only signed it and sent it up and it was very good of them to send for me and explain. Obviously it is a big deal because when they sent for me I didn't know what was going on. Now she was very upset in there and she was saying just tell them I am not doing but when I talked to them they said it was only their job and I decided it was good for her and they were trying to say that she had the ability to do well. ' Lisa

I was insecure about it all the messing he was doing up to his exams and when we went down to the meeting they said 'we are going to ask all the teachers of every child what they actually think do they need transition year or should they go straight onto 5th year' and when he got the letter home it was to go straight to 5th year cause they reckoned he has the brains, and I was humming and hawing cause I heard 4th year you were home more and it was just a doss and I knew he would get bored cause he needs something to keep him going, so I was delighted. I thought it was good all the teachers getting together to say he is able and he must be because they see more of him then I do study wise and they know he is able so if they think he can do it so I will go for it and let him do it. Debby

10.9 Push factors for academic success – Group B

She was watching the way he went and his results and is completely different, she wants to be an architect and interior designer and is going to make sure she does well at school. She is motivated by watching him. Marian

From a very young age she has always seen me study, she would be sitting beside me and I would be doing my homework and she would be doing her homework. Sometimes she might see it as a task but at the same time she sees it as something that has to be done. Barbara

Education is very important because I didn't do it myself and doing it now as an adult it is much harder it is easier when you are young. My son sees me get homework and that and he does say what are you doing and I say I am doing my homework, letting him know that you have to do it and I say to him I should have been doing it when I was your age and I wouldn't be doing it now. I really want him to get a good job and education. Ann

Because they are looking at me and where I work now(in a community project) and I have achieved that in the last five years, I went back to school only a few years age and in five years I am working here and they are kind of shocked. My mother is raging that she took me out of school so young. Sinead

I will put pressure on her to do her LC and she wants to do hair and beauty after that. I would like to see her go to college so she comes out qualified. Lisa

It is all herself even work experience she went out and got it herself and when she wasn't getting what she wanted to do she asked could she get the experience in the classroom and she got it. May

I think it is very important especially for boys because they are working until they are 65 and they are talking about raising it until 70 and they are working for the rest of their lives so I think it is important that they have an education, even if they do nothing with it to actually have it behind them when they leave they can go and do something about it at a later stage, say he does his leaving and he doesn't know what he wants to do he has it to fall back. Men are out working all their lives, not like a girl where they stay at home, well the majority of them do, but for a lad it's important. Carol

Now the teachers at the minute are asking him to leave school and get an apprenticeship, they are saying you should be out getting an apprenticeship, I am waiting for the next meeting and I am going to bring this up teachers, should be enticing children to be staying in school. The other day he did a computer test and got 93% and the teacher said that is absolutely brilliant and if you stay at that in a couple of year's time you could be a computer technician. I was laughing when he came home and I said if that is coming from a teacher there must be something there, Some teachers are telling him to

leave school and get an apprenticeship, but it is probably just Trevor picking them up and he says no they tell him he is excellent and he should be out there. I think they are sick of him and don't want him in the class. I said to his Dad the only reason they are doing that is to get rid of him cause he is a torment in the class. Trevor is one of those kids you doesn't like being criticised. Sometimes he says Ma she(teachers) was getting on my nerves. I have to agree that sometimes the teachers don't always see what is going on and he get caught cause he is the class clown. Debby

It did affect her badly because she didn't like violence naturally and she is working and doing her best in school, the girls actually just put their mind to it, we are not going to be like this and I am always saying please don't be left with a gang of children, get your education. Sinead

10.10 Protecting children from risk- Group B

There is a bit of peer pressure out there from the hard fellas and I saw him a few times coming in because he doesn't want to get involved with gods knows what they are up to. They probably slag him over it but when that does happen it doesn't bother him he goes training or something. He was in a couple of fights with young fellas but like that he would come in and tell us and we would say to keep away from them. He wouldn't hide it from us. We hope he stays like that.

You always have that worry with kids, there is a lot that he grew up with that have left school and gone to a local Early School Leaving Projects and they knock for him but he doesn't go out so I hope he stays like that. He has a bit of cop on, he would come in and say such and such is after being out trying to rob a car but he would come in so he is sensible enough. I think he is just into sport and all he said last week he was coming home from rugby and they said Phil we are getting a few bottles and he said no. They said 'are you turning gay on us' and he said 'no I have a good head on my shoulders I am into my sport' and he just walked away. He would come in and tell you he wouldn't hide it away. Joanne

No worries with drug use, two of his uncles on his daddy's side went really bad on drugs and lost everything so he is totally against it big-time because he saw losing everything, their wives, kids, everything. I would be worried about the area, I do say to him if you have a bottle of lemonade never leave it with the lid off cause they would put anything into it of you are out. I know a couple of fellas that it has happened to around here, Ecstasy tablet and coke being put in. Joanne

She has tried the alcohol and tried the smoking and then meets this anti-Christ, her mother. She hit 13 and she started drinking and smoking you knows like that cocky stage. I was verbally aggressive; it was frightening even for me. I went through it with Daniel and you know what happened. She has had a positive education from what happened to her brother. Marian

He has a girlfriend for about a year, they are together all the time which is great because it keeps him out of trouble. There was a bad group and they asking him to come down but he doesn't go near them. The crowd he was with are doing horrible things but he is out of it I begged him. They ring him up and ask him to come down to the park and I say please don't. These kids are running wild in the area they bash kids up, they are just horrible, they boast about who they bashed up at the weekend but he wouldn't do that that is how I know he is a good kid. He says 'Ma if they ring I am not in'. He knows right from wrong I have to say, if there is a fight they are ringing him to come down and help them and I say please don't'. Fidelma

It is a phase he is going through, he is friendly with these two wild children and they only have to hit him with a pencil tell him to 'go on and annoy the teacher going' and he does it. Denise

He is fascinated with cars and speed and that would be my only worry is cars but he has too much to lose. I would be worried about stolen cars, I don't think he would get into a stolen car. They go to a cruise on Sunday nights, its fellas with their own cars and he said that fellas from Newtown came and told them they would kill them next week and no more cruises, that's it. Denise

From my perspective my main worry would be her getting pregnant, not because she is hanging around but because it happened to me. I had good support from my parents and I was able to go back to college but it was hard and I wouldn't like her to have to go through it. Linda

Education is so important for her self, her self-esteem. You can be streetwise ok but with no education and being streetwise you can be manipulated and education is really important for Sarah as a human being and she feels that herself and she feels that education well everyone needs it. Sinead

10.11 Alcohol and drug use Group B

I know they won't do drugs not at the minute they are so against it, they see a lot of it around here, at the shops over there, I won't go to the shops and the centre is beside the school and the kids see it all which is a disgrace. Nora

I am very open with him and I don't think he would get involved in crime, the only thing I would be worried about would be if he got caught up in drugs, like he is not easily lead, he would make his own decision and wouldn't go along with the gang but I just hope he would be wise enough to make the decision there. Even the JC night I let him drink and cause I let him drink he was knocking on the door every ten minutes. If I hadn't let him I wouldn't have seen him for the night. He wouldn't have any anxieties he tells me about and I would know by him if there was something. Ann

Eric wouldn't drink, I am not just saying that cause he is my child, I have often offered him a drink and he would say no. His friends and that have a drink and he would now, they are 16 some of them, Eric isn't 16 yet, we don't encourage him but if he wants to have a bottle have one, I thought he would have it more in front of us than he would in front of his mates but he has tried it but when he wants it he will take it, it is up to him, there is a limit as well. Even smoking now he doesn't like it and if I smoke he goes mad. Tara

No we let them have a drink for their JC results but we kept an eye on them and they had done so well that we allowed them have a bottle but it would only be in the house, they wouldn't be allowed wander the estate with a bottle or anything like that. Carol

He will be 16 at Christmas and one of his friends is 18 and they had a party at the house and he said Ma 'Marian (the mother) is after getting us all a bottle of Budweiser can I have it' and I said 'at least you asked' cause my parents are dead and I don't know who to be asking but my older brother said say Yeah cause he is going to be doing it anyway. But I didn't mind. Joanne

But I don't mind her drinking if we are there in front of her until she is 18 then she can go off drinking. I think if you stop them and tell they can't do it they will go out and do it anyway. Tamara

No I hope not, she is supervised every where she goes, she is aware of what is out there if I am going to the shop she would say oh you are not doing that on your own, she would be more aware than I am. She knows she is not allowed drink until a certain age, she did go out on JC night but she was collected at 12pm. No worries about drinks and drugs. May

The last few years she is hanging around with these girls who are 17 and are still in her class, I think they are too old for her. I am more worried that when she goes out for a meal with the girls or goes to Karen's house and I think she is having a few bottles over there I can tell by looking at her and she is putting me under a lot of pressure to let her drink so I am not saying anything about it, I am trying to tell her that her friends are older than her, she doesn't see it but it is a big difference. I wouldn't be worried that anything would happen to her down there because they are lovely people but I would be worried about the drinking but I don't want to push it with her, I don't want to force it with her. I don't worry about drugs, she doesn't be around that sort of thing. She has to be home by 10.30 on a school night and 12.00 on a weekend and at the weekend she would push that. Friday or Saturday night I would ring her a few times to check up on her and see of her voice is changing and if it sounds a bit funny. Lisa

10.12 Disengagement from the local area- Group B

She won't join anything around here at the moment; she won't mingle with anyone in this area because of all the drugs. She wouldn't go over to those shops,

she wouldn't even be seen going over to those shops, she keeps saying 'why don't you move' but I would when she finishes school, down the country or Portugal. She has a friend down there (on same road) and one up there and they kind of stick together and they don't like even going over there. She doesn't go anywhere only down to her friend's house. Marian

Living here at the moment worries her, she doesn't like living here, she doesn't like coming home on the bus, they normally get a lift. She hates the bus you know with the druggies on it and I remember one time she came home and the minute she came home she took her uniform off and straight into the wash and I said 'what did you do that for', she said 'because a druggie pushed off me' and she took everything off and wouldn't wear them until they were washed. She would never go over there in the dark, in the daytime she might go over but in the dark never, she says they are disgusting over there all them druggies. I am glad she is like that, my son is the same, he is always saying you should move out of here it is an awful place, but is wasn't always like that. It is only like that in the last few years, it is getting worse, I think too with all these foreigners moving in and all these houses being sold an awful lot of people are renting houses in this area so starting to get run down a bit. I say at least you are in it and you know what it is like and you won't want to touch drugs. Joanne

It is a totally different ball-game here than it is for middle-class parents. It frightens me when I hear parents talk about the risk-factors here. The whole drug thing here and there is a high culture of violence here, huge. It's huge, I know it can happen any where, it is very frightening here and the whole drug thing is a huge fear for some parents. Junior School Principal

They always did, the vast majority of so called 'good' parents wouldn't send their children over to the Youth Centre, not that there is anything wrong with it, not that they aren't very good but the fact of the matter is there is a lot of very challenged children involved in it. I think they are right. I mean when I was growing up there was certain place you weren't allowed go near and you would be asked when you came home who you talked to, you know that it's called snobbery and it is how you perpetuate your class. It's trying to pick your kids friends. Junior School Principal

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