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School Connectedness: A qualitative case study through an occupational lens

Thesis presented by

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University College Cork

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2022

DECLARATION

"This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism."

Signature

_____

Jennifer O'Leary

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late Godfather, Frank. Thank you for being my greatest supporter. While losing you made this thesis challenging to complete, I persevered knowing how proud you were of me. Thank you for continuously commending my hard work. I am grateful to know I have made you proud, and I promise to continue to do so as you watch over me.

Dearly loved and sadly missed, you will forever remain in my heart.

Acknowledgements

The support and advice of a few people was necessary to complete this thesis. I would like to express my gratitude to these people for their assistance throughout this research study.

While words do not justify my gratitude, I would like to express my appreciation to my research supervisors, Dr. Bryan Boyle and Dr. Helen Lynch. Their continuous advice and expertise allowed me to complete this research. No question was ever too big or too small and they were never but a phone call away. They pushed me to work hard and think of new perspectives, while continuously appreciating both my professional and personal life. Their patience, dedication, and engagement throughout this project has been impeccable.

Thank you to all participants of this study. Your ability to engage online during the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated your kindness and enthusiasm. This study simply would have not been possible without you. Thank you ever so much for working with me and providing such rich insights.

Thank you to my family for providing me with endless cups of tea, lunch, and attempting to explain to your friends what my thesis was about. Thank you for being a listening ear throughout this process. Thank you for always encouraging and supporting me.

Abstract

Background: School connectedness is an under researched concept in all professions. While the term "belonging" has been used within occupational science, "connectedness" is not a term frequently used. To date, there is one study based on school connectedness and occupation and there is no study in an Irish context. The relationship, if any, between occupation and school connectedness is not understood. Given the strong position of belonging in occupational science, this concept must be understood in a school context. Since the passing of Ann Wilcock (1940-2019), there has been a call for research which continues to build on her Occupational Perspective of Health (doing, being, becoming, belonging). This study aims to do so within a school context.

Aim/ Objectives: This research study had three aims; 1) To better understand students and their school's personnel perceptions of school connectedness 2) To further understand what determines a student's sense of connectedness to the school environment according to the students and the school personnel 3) To explore the relationship between student's school-based occupations and their sense of school connectedness.

Study Design: This research study is a qualitative single instrumental case study. This study commenced by an entire sixth class group completing a creative exercise to elicit data. Ten students engaged in a focus group and individual semi-structured interviews. This study also had four school personnel engage in individual semi-structured interviews. Thematic data analysis was conducted.

Findings: Four themes emerged from the findings; 1) The Importance of the Student's Social Context on School Connectedness 2) Occupational Influence on

School Connectedness 3) Co-constructing an Environment for School Connectedness 4) How Community Connectedness is Reflected in the School.

Conclusions: This study established a new perspective of school connectedness through an occupational lens. School connectedness is necessary for enhancing every student's school occupational performance. Findings outline that due to the impact school connectedness has on occupational participation, occupational therapists should promote school connectedness through a whole school approach. Findings enhance the need to consider the value of interdependence as an outcome to practice.

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Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1- Introduction: The introduction outlines the position of school connectedness in wellbeing and the context of school-based occupational therapy in Ireland. School connectedness is the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as them as individuals (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2009). The introduction introduces the concept of school connectedness and outlines the context in which this research took place.

Chapter 2- Unravelling School Connectedness: This is the first the chapter of the literature review. This chapter gives a brief overview of wellbeing. This chapter then positions school connectedness within wellbeing and highlights the need for the phenomenon of school connectedness to be further examined. This chapter discusses the current determinants of school connectedness in the literature. This chapter also details the current approach to school connectedness in schools.

Chapter 3- An Occupational Lens: This is the second chapter of the literature review. This chapter explores the position of connectedness and belonging in occupational science underpinnings and literature. Various concepts in occupational science such as belonging and interdependence are outlined.

Chapter 4- Research Design: This chapter outlined the research approach taken. This is a qualitative single instrumental case study. The participants in this study include 25 students in a projective technique, ten students in a focus group and individual semi-structured interviews, and four school personnel through a semi-structured interview. Ethical permission was received to conduct this study. Data was gathered through online means due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter 5- Context of the Case: Due to this being an instrumental case study, detailed description of the case is necessary in order to allow readers to understand the findings with enough information of the case as possible. This chapter outlines the various approaches to practice in the school and the environment. This thick description prepares the reader for the findings.

Chapter 6- Findings: This chapter outlines the findings which has four themes each with three subthemes. The main themes include 1) The Importance of the Student's Social Context on School Connectedness 2) Occupational Influence on School Connectedness 3) Co-constructing an Environment for School Connectedness 4) How Community Connectedness is Reflected in the School.

Chapter 7- Discussion:

This chapter takes the findings from the participants in this study and review them with existing literature. This chapter highlights the need for interdependence to be a valuable goal in school-based occupational therapy. The discussion explores the significant influence relationships within the school as well as wider social structures have on student's school connectedness. It is outlined in the discussion that as school connectedness is important for all students, it must be addressed from a whole school perspective. The discussion also outlined the implications of this study for occupational therapy, study limitations, and areas of future research.

Chapter 8-Conclusion:

This chapter outlines the contribution this study has made to current evidence and practice. This chapter outlines the main findings and value of this research. This chapter applies the findings to current practice in Ireland. This conclusion discusses

the implementation of the promotion of school connectedness through a whole school approach.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the background and context to the study. It provides an overview of occupational science and the evolvement of school-based occupational therapy in Ireland over several years. It explains various changes to practice over these years to provide an inclusive school-based service. It discusses the core concepts of this study to include wellbeing and school connectedness. This chapter gives a brief overview of these topics to outline the research focus and set the scene for further discussion in later chapters.

1.1 Occupational Science

Occupational science has been defined as "an interdisciplinary academic discipline in the social and behavioural sciences dedicated to the study of the form, the function, and the meaning of human occupations" (Zemke & Clark, 1996). The discipline of occupational science was established in the 1980s primarily under the leadership of Dr Elizabeth Yerxa (World Federation of Occupational Therapists [WFOT], 2012). WFOT (2012) outlines the significant value occupational science has in informing occupational therapy and acknowledges that it is the duty of the occupational therapy profession to support the enhancement of occupational science in order for occupational therapy to grow. The theoretical foundations of occupational science aim to describe the unique relationship between engagement in meaningful occupations and wellbeing among other things (Hitch et al., 2014). One underlying assumption of occupational science and occupational therapy is that engagement in occupations promotes and facilitates health and wellbeing (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). This study will focus on three aspects of

occupational science; people are viewed as occupational beings, the relationship between occupation, health and wellbeing is a primary concern, and occupation must be considered in context (Yerxa, 1998). It is proposed that occupational science informs occupational therapy practice to give the profession a unique power to describe its perspective of how occupations influence health and wellbeing (Hocking & Clair, 2011). It is understood that occupational science provides the knowledge to understand human occupation as both a therapeutic means and an end, while providing a theoretical framework for occupational therapy (WFOT, 2012).

1.2 Setting the Scene: Education in Ireland

Education in Ireland is governed by The Department of Education and Skills (DES). The DES (2004) recognise that education is fundamental to economic and social enhancement of Irish society, and therefore, it is vital that Irish education is an inclusive environment to enable all citizens to participate. The aims of the Department of Education and Science (2004) include ensuring each student establishes their potential, enabling each student to progress in their social environment and preparing the child to continue their learning. In Ireland, many children attend pre-primary education however, this is not mandatory. A child then attends compulsory primary education from the ages of five to twelve. Following primary education, a student progresses to post primary schooling. In Ireland, education is mandatory from the age of six to sixteen. Primary schools divide students into eight 'classes' (i.e grades or years) by age. This starts in junior infants, then senior infants, then first class up to sixth class. Each class group is taught by one teacher for every subject in the curriculum (Bennett et al., 2016). However, in rural school's teachers may have more than one class (year or grade) in their classroom depending on the number of students in each class group (Bennett et al., 2016).

School-based occupational therapy is an evolving area of practice internationally (WFOT, 2016). The World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT) (2016) defines school-based occupational therapy as the support of student's wellbeing that aims to promote and assist them in participation, by identifying strengths and resources to find solutions, and in turn limit or remove challenges they face in accessing learning and participation. In Ireland, while paediatric occupational therapy is well established, school-based occupational therapy is continuously developing (Buchorn & Lynch, 2010). Furthermore, school-based occupational therapy in Ireland is an area of focus that requires further establishment and research (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). School-based occupational therapy has evolved over many years Ireland. For example, the Association of Occupational Therapists Ireland (AOTI) published a document in 1991 outlining the role of the occupational therapists in integrating students with disabilities into mainstream education. It was outlined that while occupational therapy would take place in mainstream schools, it was only accessed by students with a disability and therefore, it was not accessible by all students (AOTI, 1991). Paediatric occupational therapy practice has been established in Ireland for many years, however, this practice has typically been within community clinics rather than in any mainstream schools (Lynch et al., 2020). Originally, paediatric practice in Ireland typically took place in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and special schools. However, for many recent years, paediatric occupational therapists have been hired by the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) which is run by the Department of Health (DoH). Rather than working in solely NGOs, these occupational therapists mainly work in specialised services such as early intervention programs, community clinics, and hospitals (Buchorn & Lynch, 2010). Under this recent clinic-based model of practice in Ireland, schools governed by the DES access

occupational therapy by requesting an assessment for a specific student with the aim to typically receive various resources such as student resource hours, or extra exam time (Buchorn & Lynch, 2010). This assessment is typically a diagnostic assessment as in Ireland, a diagnosis is typically a necessity to access further supports (Lynch et al., 2020). Due to large waiting lists and the aim to distribute resources fairly, children will generally receive six intervention sessions following their assessment (Lynch et al., 2020). Additionally, the efficacy of this intervention is evaluated based on its ability to reduce the waiting list rather than the interventions success in meeting the child's goals (Lynch et al., 2020). This intervention is deemed effective if it reduces the waiting list rather than reaching child-centred goals (Lynch et al., 2020). Furthermore, due to the limited intervention and as waiting lists for paediatric occupational therapy in the public health service can be up two years, private paediatric practice has significantly expanded (Buchorn & Lynch, 2010). Consequently, it is often the case that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds access resources and supports from private assessments much quicker than those students reliant on the public health service (Shevlin et al., 2013).

Clinic-based models include children attending clinic within the community which is primarily focused on these children's impairments and deficits and identifying diagnoses (Lynch et al., 2020). Various issues of the clinic-based model of practice have been identified. In a recent descriptive quantitative Irish study that explored current school-based occupational therapy practice in Ireland, it was determined that therapists very rarely work in the same school frequently and consequently, the use of newer approaches such as a multi-tiered model of therapy (see below for further information) support is scarce (O'Donoghue et., 2021). Occupational therapists in Ireland also explained that training that is specific to

working in schools is limited (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). Another key area of concern for both teachers and therapists of the clinic-based model of service delivery is the lack of effective collaboration between clinics and schools in Ireland (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). It is well known in Ireland that over the years there has not been sufficient co-ordination of the health and education departments due to limited resources (Patton et al., 2015). As occupational therapists work under the DoH and teachers are employed under the DES, there has not been sufficient collaboration despite the evidence (Echsel et al., 2019) proving its necessity in meeting student's needs. Yet, despite this challenge, therapists and teachers do sometimes collaborate. However, this collaboration is not always based on best evidence and rather due to a lack of resources, for example, Irish therapists have highlighted that this collaboration was mainly to involve teachers due to a lack of therapists (Quinn & Mulally, 2008). Additionally, teachers have highlighted while they are aware of the need for therapy services, it is difficult for them to access these supports in a timely manner due to a lack of therapists (Watson, 2009).

Interestingly, an Irish publication based on prevailing paediatric occupational therapy practice in Ireland in 2010, illustrated that "the coming decade [in paediatric occupational therapy in Ireland] will tell a lot" (Buchorn & Lynch, 2010). Since then, the model of paediatric therapy service delivery has been reviewed. It has been understood that the clinic-based model of service delivery lacks efficiency in terms of time and cost, and lacks efficacy in providing supports and intervention to children. Following the aim to promote inclusion in education in Ireland and many international countries, practice in schools has shifted from a two-tiered model that consists of mainstream education or special education to a multi-tiered continuum of support model within mainstream schools that strives to promote inclusivity (Bazyk & Cahill,

2015). The continuum of support model includes three tiers. Tier one focuses on a whole school, universal design approach which ensures that the needs of every child are met through a promotion and prevention framework (Missiuna et al., 2012), even students who do not present with challenges (Bazyk & Cahill, 2015). One goal of the tier one whole school approach is to enable collaboration between teachers and therapists that provides teachers with the skillset to execute strategies without the therapist present (Ohl et al., 2013). This study is primarily focused on a tier one perspective. The researcher's focus was placed on tier one following a previous study the researcher conducted which highlighted the lack of practice on this tier amongst Irish paediatric therapists (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). However, while the efficacy of a whole school approach has been identified within the literature, findings in the author's previous study based on Irish paediatric occupational therapists' perspectives of school-based occupational therapy identified that the most common approach adopted by therapists in school-based occupational therapy in Ireland was a 1:1 pull out method. The 1:1 pull out method includes a therapist is based in the school and removes the student from the class to provide therapy. This study further highlighted that there was no whole class or whole school approaches in use (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). While a pull-out approach has merit, it does not reflect advancements in international practices that recommend more whole school (tier one) approaches (WFOT, 2016). Tier one is the tier that relates most of whole school connectedness and wellbeing and therefore, it was through this lens that the researcher began to explore these topics in more detail. To give further context to this model, all tiers are described in table 1. This continuum of support model is based on international evidence supporting the need to provide support to all students (Ehren et al., 2010; Lane et al., 2013; Missiuna et al., 2012). Multi-tiered approaches are informed by

Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Sugai & Horner, 2002), Response to Intervention (RtI) (AOTA, 2007; Cahill et al., 2014), and the Comprehensive, Integrated, Three-Tiered Model of Prevention (CI3T) (Lane et al., 2015) frameworks. These frameworks aim to enable interventions at different levels of input and support to students based on the student's needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Lane et al., 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Following the identification of the effective use of a multi-tiered continuum of support model in other countries, the In-School and Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project was implemented in Ireland by the DES, NCSE (National Council for Special Education), DCYA (Department of Children and Youth Affairs), HSE, and DoH to promote inclusive educational practice (Lynch et al., 2020). This project is taking place in 150 education settings in Ireland. In summary, it is evident that a multi-tiered continuum of support model is the most effective model to ensure effective use of resources and achieving student-centred goals. However, as this model currently involves a limited number of education settings in Ireland and therefore, the clinic-based model is more prevalent in Ireland. Paediatric occupational therapy practice in Ireland has changed and evolved over many years. It is clear that current best evidence identifies that the most effective approach to practice is through the use of a multi-tiered continuum of support. While it is identified that the use of this support model throughout Ireland is required, further evidence is required to determine how this can be implemented.

Table 1

Description of the Multi-Tiered Model of Practice

Tier	Description
One (Universal Intervention)	Tier one is based on knowledge sharing and working collaboratively amongst therapists, school personnel and

	families to provide an inclusive educational setting (Lynch et al., 2020). Example: Providing training to all staff
Two (Targeted Intervention)	Tier two is based on ensuring support for groups of at-risk students, for example, handwriting and motor development groups (Bazyk & Cahill, 2015; Lynch et al., 2020). This tier focuses on differentiated instruction of a smaller group of students (Missiuna et al., 2012). This tier is implemented when a group of students are behind the norm performance of their year group (Chu, 2017). While some students receive this intervention, they continue to receive tier one universal intervention (Bruhn et al., 2014; Chu, 2017). Example: Smaller groups focusing on specific skills such as handwriting or training to teaching staff to implement specific programmes such as assistive technology.
Three (Intensive Intervention)	Tier three includes individual support to students that require it (Lynch et al., 2020). Tier three accommodates the needs of a specific student when intensive interventions are necessary as their challenges are disrupting the students learning (Bazyk & Cahill, 2015). Student receives tier three input continue to receive tier two and tier one intervention. A student in this tier focuses on individual goals within an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) (Chu, 2017).

1.3 Beginning with Wellbeing

The researcher's interest began with focusing on health promotion and the whole school population rather than solely students with diagnoses. Consequently, this led the researcher to the topic of wellbeing (see table 2 for definition of wellbeing). Wellbeing is considered from a whole school perspective in many policies. In May

2016, wellbeing promotion was made a priority of the government of Ireland in "A Programme for a Partnership Government". This report highlights that developing resilience and emotional coping skills must begin at a young age and that schools can play a key role in providing this (Government of Ireland, 2016). This report outlined that taking this wellbeing promotion approach will "pay dividends into the future in terms of academic and social progress" (Government of Ireland, 2016). Additionally, in 2015, guidelines for mental health promotion and wellbeing in primary schools in Ireland had been developed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Department of Health (DOH), Department of Education and Skills (DES), HSE, and DCYA (2015a). These guidelines aim to ensure safe and supportive school environments which enable all students to develop life skills, resilience, and a sense of connectedness to their school (NEPS et al., 2015a). The Department of Education currently aim to meet these guidelines by completing school self-evaluations (SSE), teaching Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curricula, and implementing of the NEPS supports (NEPS et al., 2015a).

In the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice by the DES (2018), it is outlined that being connected to your school is a key determinant of success. Furthermore, throughout international literature, the importance of school connectedness (see table 2 for definition) to enhancing a child's overall wellbeing is evident (Kim et al., 2020; Frydenberg et al., 2009; McNeely et al., 2002). However, in Ireland while mentioned as a necessity throughout wellbeing frameworks, there is no study found that is specific to the phenomenon of school connectedness as it is quite a recent concept. Furthermore, only one study was found (Marczuk et al., 2014) that focuses on school connectedness from an occupational science perspective. However, throughout all of these studies, it is clear that a core shared feature of school

connectedness is belonging. While there is little focus on school connectedness in occupational science and occupational therapy literature, there has been emphasis on the concept of belonging (see table 2 for definition) (Wilcock, 2006). Furthermore, belonging is considered to be a component of wellbeing (Hammell & Iwama, 2012) (see table 2 for definition of belonging).

In occupational therapy or occupational science[1] literature although the term "school connectedness" is not frequently used, term "belonging" (see table 2) is frequently considered particularly in terms of school engagement and participation. For example, two studies conducted in schools both identified the connection between wellbeing and feelings of belonging (Asbjornslett & Hemmingsson, 2008; Echsel et al., 2019). In both cases, belonging was valued by the children and contributed to their sense of wellbeing.

Table 2

Definitions of School Connectedness, Wellbeing, and Belonging

School Connectedness	The belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as them as individuals (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2009).
Wellbeing	"Wellbeing is a state of flourishing that consists of the following elements: positive emotion, engagement, or flow, *meaning* (a sense of belonging to or serving something larger than oneself), positive relationships and accomplishment or achievement" (Seligman, 2018).

[1] An interdisciplinary academic discipline in the social and behavioural sciences dedicated to the study of the form, the function, and the meaning of human occupations" (Zemke & Clark, 1996).

Belonging	An interpersonal connection between people while they participate in occupations (Wilcock, 2007).

While the importance of school connectedness has been acknowledged in Ireland, little focus has been given to it specifically as yet. Student and school personnel perspectives of the phenomenon of school connectedness has not been researched, and furthermore, the determinants of Irish student's sense of connected to their school has not been established. There has also been scarce emphasis on the effect school connectedness has on a student's occupational participation and consequently, it is not entirely understood if there is a relationship between both of these concepts.

Therefore, this research aims to answer the following questions from the perspectives of the student, school personnel and the school community

Research Question 1: What is the understanding of connectedness to the school environment?

Research Question 2: What are the determinants of connectedness in a school environment?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between occupational participation and school connectedness?

The aim of this research is to inform school practitioners of the phenomenon of school connectedness, the effect it has on student's school performance, and create a foundation for the establishment of a whole school approach to promoting student's sense of school connectedness. It is important to note that this research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic while students were not present in the physical school environment. This provided a unique and intensified perspective as students compared

their sense of connectedness and disconnectedness from when they were and were not in school.

The main concepts and context for the study have now been introduced. The next two chapters will now proceed to further expand on these core concepts. Chapter two will position school connectedness within wellbeing. Chapter two commences by discussing wellbeing and establishing school connectedness in place. Chapter two will then explore the factors that influence school connectedness and also how it is promoted in schools. As the evolution and exploration of school connectedness from various perspectives will then be established, chapter three considers the position of school connectedness within both occupational science and occupational therapy literature.

Chapter 2 Unravelling School Connectedness

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will commence by describing the core concepts of wellbeing, the difficulties researchers have had defining wellbeing and consequently, the challenges measuring wellbeing. Furthermore, this chapter will establish the important position school connectedness has in promoting students wellbeing. This chapter will consider the importance of focusing on the phenomenon of school connectedness. This chapter will discuss the current determinants of school connectedness within the literature.

To begin, the literature review search for this chapter was conducted using the databases, CINAHL, ERIC, Medline, psycARTICLES, and psycINFO. The key search terms used included “school connectedness” OR “school belonging” OR “school attachment”. From this reading, the researcher established the position school connectedness has within wellbeing. The literature review search was then expanded to include the search terms “wellbeing” OR “child wellbeing” AND “school connectedness” OR “school belonging” OR “school attachment”. This review also included gathering the various frameworks, policies and strategies that inform wellbeing in schools in Ireland to gather an entire accurate understanding. The researcher reviewed articles generated from these search terms however due to the limited results, the researcher also reviewed many of the research that was referenced in the articles found to obtain further relevant studies not found in the database search.

2.2 Situating School Connectedness Within a Wellbeing Perspective

2.2.1 Thinking Beyond Health: Wellbeing as a Right

The concept of child and young people's wellbeing has evolved over the past couple of decades with a lot of research contributing to the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) which outlines the requirement of the inclusion of children's voices in research exploring their wellbeing. This is explicit in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) under the principle "respect for the view of the child", which outlines that children have a right to have their voices and perspectives heard on matters that affect them. While this commitment to incorporating children's voice has been promoted since 1989, it remains an underdeveloped and evolving aspect of research (Casas, 2011). Furthermore, gathering the child's voice in research is not solely based on the necessity to abide by children's rights, but also, as they have the ability to make meaningful insights and contributions to various topics (Gillett-Swan, 2014), which includes the subjective experience of well-being.

2.2.2 Different Perspectives of Wellbeing

Wellbeing has been the focus of many studies in recent times. As there has been studies from many perspectives, various definitions of wellbeing have been developed. For example, as noted on Table 2, according to Seligman (2018), wellbeing is about meaning and belonging, however in contrast, a more recent definition from an education perspective outlines that "wellbeing is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community" (DES, 2018). This definition differs from Seligman's (2018)

definition as suggests that a person has a state of control over their own wellbeing through “realising” and “taking care” of their wellbeing. While they are different definitions, they both highlight the importance of belonging to a group or community.

It has become increasingly known that there is a significant amount of difficulty precisely defining wellbeing (Bharara et al., 2019; Dodge et al., 2012; Pollard & Lee, 2003). Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) reviewed the literature on child wellbeing and established that although there are similarities within child wellbeing research, there is no universal definition. Various studies have attempted to define child wellbeing, yet, it has not been universally agreed what defines child wellbeing (Raghavan & Alexandrova, 2015; Gennings et al., 2021; Pollard & Lee, 2003). While there have been positive shifts in child wellbeing research, the term child wellbeing is still being used differently across contexts and disciplines (Dunlop-Bennett et al., 2019; McLellan & Steward, 2015; Pollard & Lee, 2003). Furthermore, child wellbeing changes over time, cultures, and geographical locations (Fattore et al., 2009). Consequently, while much research has progressed to understand that child wellbeing must be considered from the child perspective, research must further explore the diversity of children and therefore, child wellbeing will not be the same for every child (Fattore et al., 2009).

Child wellbeing research has been dominated by adult ideas about what wellbeing is but not by asking the child. However, there has been a shift in the approach taken of some child wellbeing research, as the need for the child’s subjective view of their wellbeing is becoming more understood (Casas, 2011). More research is beginning to acknowledge that children are active participants in society rather than solely subjects for societies concern (Ben-Arieh, 2005). For example, Bharara et al. (2019) utilised a mixed-methods approach to explore the differences in 11-13 year

olds perceptions of their wellbeing compared to the perceptions of current wellbeing experts. This New Zealand study identified various components of wellbeing by focusing on the child perspective that were not investigated in the academic models being used by the wellbeing experts (Keyes, 2005) for example, being kind, physical health, safety, and enjoyment (Bharara et al., 2019). Understandings of child wellbeing have also shifted from "child well becoming" to "child wellbeing", which signifies that research must focus on the current wellbeing of the child rather than how the child's wellbeing will be when they become adults (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2007; Fattore et al., 2007). However, others have argued the need to be aware of children's position as the future adults of society and therefore, defending that child wellbeing should encompass their current wellbeing as well as who they will become in the future (Frones, 2007). Additionally, the focus of child wellbeing has progressed beyond solely survival needs to development and participation (Fattore et al., 2007). It is evident that there are various new perspectives of researching child wellbeing. It is clear that child wellbeing research is continuously evolving and more emphasis is being placed on it.

As there is difficulty defining wellbeing, there is challenges measuring wellbeing and consequently, there is an issue informing policy (Ben-Arieh, 2005). This may be due to the subjective nature of the understanding of wellbeing. Many studies have aimed to develop and establish subjective key indicators that can measure wellbeing (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Newland et al., 2019; UNICEF, 2007). These indicators allow for child wellbeing to be compared across geographical areas and over time (Statham & Chase, 2010). However, as noted, due to the different domains and understandings of wellbeing, there is consequently difficulty in measuring levels of wellbeing and therefore, difficulty in comparing wellbeing between different

contexts (Gennings et al., 2021; Statham & Chase, 2010). In the Irish context, similar efforts have been evident in developing wellbeing indicators. For example, a study took place in 2005 which aimed to gather a child perspective that could contribute to the development of child wellbeing indicators (Nic Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2005). This study included 16 classes from eight different schools (Nic Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2005). Through the use of creative research, this study identified the key themes of child wellbeing according to students in primary and post primary schools include their relationships with family, friends and animals and the importance of having valued activities to do (Nic Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2005). It was illustrated that through the merging of their valued relationships and activities the students gained a sense of belonging, being, safety, love, and value (Nic Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2005).

In 2014, the Irish government committed to improving the wellbeing of children in Ireland in the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (DCYA, 2014). This framework established various wellbeing indicators. The aim of this framework was to collaborate cross-departmental policies to achieve the best outcomes possible for young people (DCYA, 2014). This framework outlines various goals to strive to improve children's wellbeing. The first goal of this framework was to support parents by supporting them to parent confidently. Parents are vital to support a universal approach as they are the adult who spends a significant amount of time with the child (DCYA, 2014). The second goal of the framework is to provide earlier intervention while to reduce the number of children experiencing difficulties without support. The framework acknowledges that this will need to be conducted through a universal approach (DCYA, 2014). The third goal of this framework is to include the voices of young people in decisions that concern them (DCYA, 2014). The fourth goal includes

providing quality services in a timeless manner (DCYA, 2014). The framework has highlighted that these services will demonstrate effective outcomes (DCYA, 2014). The fifth goal of the framework is to strengthen transitions such as from preschool-primary school and primary school to secondary school (DCYA, 2014). Lastly, the final goal of the framework is to increase cross-government collaboration by connecting various departments to ensure equity services (DCYA, 2014). While this report has over 100 indicators, they have been categorised into six outcomes which include being active and healthy, achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development, safe and protected from harm, economic security and opportunity, and connected, respected and contributing (DCYA, 2014).

The results of some of these indicator development studies is that organisations like UNICEF can now publish data on child wellbeing from an international perspective. While the DCYA's (2014) framework is one example of how wellbeing indicators have been established, it is also necessary to discuss an example of how wellbeing indicators have been examined and reported on. More recently, in September 2020, UNICEF published the Worlds of Influence; Understanding what Shapes Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries report. This report was timely given the international concern of child wellbeing amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. This report investigated mental wellbeing, physical health, and children's life skills to include social and academics of 41 countries (UNICEF, 2020). In this report, Ireland placed 12th overall however, Ireland was placed 26th in the domain of mental wellbeing signifying an area of concern. Wellbeing indicator sets have been designed to gather data and although it is complex, it gives us some idea about wellbeing in childhood.

2.2.3 Wellbeing in Schools: Promotion and Prevention from International to National Contexts

Wellbeing is commonly addressed in schools through health promotion. In Ireland, the promotion of wellbeing within the school has become a vital part of the school routine as school is an essential component of the enhancement of a student's wellbeing due to the large amount of time spent in school throughout their developing years (DES, 2018). This commitment to wellbeing is not in a vacuum however, but is influenced by policy from an international to a national and local level.

The whole school approach to wellbeing promotion in Ireland corresponds with the World Health Organisation's Health Promoting Schools framework. Health promotion includes a large host of social and environmental interventions that aim to protect individuals and community's health and quality of life through the prevention of ill health and addressing the root of the health concern (WHO, 2016). Since 1986, WHO has adopted the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion model which is an environmental approach that aims to create supportive environments for cross-organisational collaboration (WHO, 1986). The Ottawa Charter emphasizes that the health and wellbeing of a person is developed through the settings in which they live, learn and play (Lindegaard Nordin et al., 2018). Within the Ottawa Charter model (WHO, 1986), a supportive environment, whole systems approach is taken which led to the development of the health promoting school's initiative (Thompson et al., 2018). The global standards for health promoting schools was developed by WHO and UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) (2018) to create effective measures to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of children that are sustainable and in a setting that targets the vast majority of the youth population. From the WHO perspective, the health promoting school has been defined

as “a school constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning, and working” (WHO, 1998). A health promoting school views health as physical, social, and emotional wellbeing and aims to incorporate health into every aspect of life (WHO, 2000). WHO has also highlighted the need for the “health promoting schools” initiative to be enrolled internationally. Furthermore, WHO has emphasised that health encompasses not only absence from illness but also ensuring wellbeing. However, barriers exist to the health promoting school’s initiative. Some of these barriers include inadequate planning, inadequate understanding of school health programmes, inadequate collaboration, a lack of sense of ownership to improve health promotion in schools, and a lack of resources (WHO Expert Committee, 1997). The main barriers of a health promoting school have been identified for over a decade (WHO Expert Committee, 1997), however addressing these barriers has proven difficult throughout the implementation of the healthy promoting school initiative. Some of these barriers include inadequate planning, inadequate understanding of school health programmes, inadequate collaboration, a lack of sense of ownership to improve health promotion in schools, and a lack of resources (WHO Expert Committee, 1997).

Ireland has been contributing to the health promoting school’s initiative since they joined the European Network of Health Promoting Schools in 1992 (now known as the Schools for Health in Europe since 2009) and developed the Irish Network of Health Promoting Schools in 1993. This initiative led to the development of the subject Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) into the curriculum. Furthermore, Irelands interest in health promotion in schools has expanded. In 2013, The national framework “Schools for Health in Ireland Framework for Developing a Health Promoting School for Primary Schools” was published by the HSE. This framework

aimed to outline what can be done to promote health and wellbeing in schools and explain why and how the promotion of health and wellbeing in primary schools is important (HSE, 2013).

This acknowledgement of the importance of wellbeing is evident in a number of documents published by the DES. For example, the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 was developed by the DES in 2018 and then revised in October 2019. Within this document, the various strategies being used for the promotion of wellbeing in schools is listed to include DEIS (Delivery Equality Opportunity in Schools), NEPS, guidance counselling, anti-bullying, Children's First National Guidance, school staff wellbeing and physical education. In Ireland, the education system acknowledges the central role they have in the promotion of wellbeing for all children (DES, 2018). For example, the DES (2018) has highlighted three aims for wellbeing promotion in schools by 2023. These include ensuring that wellbeing promotion is central to the ethos of every school, all approaches used to promote wellbeing will be evidence based, and Ireland will be acknowledged as a leader in wellbeing promotion in schools (DES, 2018). It is clear from these aims that the DES has expressed that wellbeing must be addressed through a promotion perspective. The DES have demonstrated their understanding of the importance of promoting wellbeing in schools in Ireland. Details of these frameworks and other advancements in Ireland towards wellbeing promotion in schools are outlined in table 3.

Table 3

Frameworks and Strategies to Advance Wellbeing in Primary Schools in Ireland

Year	Name of Advancement	Description of Advancement
1992	European Network of Health Promoting Schools	Ireland joined this network. They supported the expansion of the health promoting school's initiative into Ireland.
1993	Irish Network of Health Promoting Schools (DES, 1993)	This network was formed. It led to the development of SPHE.
2013	Schools for Health in Ireland Framework for Developing a Health Promoting School for Primary Schools (HSE, 2013)	This framework outlined what can be done to promote health and wellbeing in schools and explain why and how the promotion of health and wellbeing in primary schools is important. Four criteria examined; • The environment • Curriculum and learning • Policy and planning • Partnerships
2015	Guidelines for mental health promotion and wellbeing in primary schools in Ireland (NEPS, DOH, DES, HSE, DCYA, 2015a)	These guidelines aim to ensure safe and supportive school environments which enable all students to develop life skills, resilience, and a sense of connectedness to their school. Current strategies in these guidelines; • School self-evaluations • SPHE • Implementation of the NEPS supports • Collaboration between many governmental departments • Continuum of support model

		• Health promoting school's framework
2016	Looking at Our School (DES & Inspectorate, 2016)	This outlined that wellbeing is vital to enable a student to learn and it is also an outcome of learning in schools. It also outlined that children's wellbeing must be considered throughout the development of learning plans and policies It supports schools in conducting evaluations on their current wellbeing promotion approach
2016	A Programme for a Partnership Government (Government of Ireland, 2016)	Wellbeing was made a priority by the Government of Ireland. This highlighted the need for schools to play a key role in promotion of resilience and coping skills through early intervention.
Formed- 2018 Revised- 2019 Implementation- 2018-2023	Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 (DES, 2018).	This framework identifies current strategies being used in schools (DEIS, NEPS, guidance counselling, anti-bullying, Children's First National Guidance, school staff wellbeing and physical education). Three aims; • Wellbeing promotion is central to the ethos of every school. • Approaches used to promote wellbeing will be evidence based • Ireland will be a leader in wellbeing promotion in schools.
2020-2022	Covid-19 Pandemic (NEPS, 2020)	During the Covid-19 pandemic, child wellbeing is of critical concern.

		The NEPS service was still operating with a mixture of face to face and remote work Online continuous professional development courses are being held for teachers Various resources made for parents by the DES to support their children while they do not physically attend school.

2.2.4 Conclusion of Wellbeing

In conclusion, child wellbeing is a multi-faceted concept that is becoming a focus in schools. As there is difficulty precisely defining child wellbeing, it makes it more challenging to promote. Children's views are being considered more in child wellbeing research which adds an invaluable contribution. It is understood in Ireland and internationally that the most effective way to promote wellbeing is through a continuum of support model. Currently in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic, child wellbeing is of critical concern (O'Sullivan et al., 2021). Efforts have been made to attempt to continue and support student's wellbeing. For example, NEPS was still operating with a mixture of face to face and remote work and various online continuous professional development courses were being held for teachers (NEPS, 2020). Various resources were also made for parents by the DES to support their children when they did not physically attend school.

2.3 Positioning School Connectedness

Wellbeing has how been introduced as a national issue concerning children's lives. The focus of this study is school connectedness, a subcomponent of wellbeing. Due to the complexity of wellbeing, each subcomponent must be examined individually. This section explains the rationale for choosing to examine the concept

of school connectedness more closely and why it is important. Various terms can be seen used interchangeably across the literature including “school connectedness”, “school belonging”, and “school attachment”. While these terms are used interchangeably, for the purpose of clarity, this study uses the term “school connectedness” as it encompasses belonging and attachment. Following along from a national commitment to children’s wellbeing, in the school sector wellbeing has been incorporated into policy and guidelines. For example, in the Irish Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework 2018-2023, a sense of belonging, security, and connectedness to school through positive school climate, participation in school activities, and positive relationships with peers and teachers is highlighted as a protective factor to wellbeing promotion in schools (DES, 2018). Furthermore, this framework outlines that a sense of belonging, feeling safe, connected, and supported is one of the wellbeing promotion indicators of success (DES, 2018). It is evident that connectedness is a core constituent of wellbeing. As noted in section 2.2 and from this framework, it is clear that wellbeing is a multi-faceted concept and therefore, to successfully promote wellbeing, there is a need to address each of its subcomponents. Hence, this is the first reason that this study focuses specifically on school connectedness.

Secondly, the need to further explore school connectedness is timely with the current global Covid-19 pandemic which involved students being removed from the physical and a significant proportion of the social environment of their school and consequently, entering the virtual environment as they rely on the use of online mediums to attend school. A study that has been published exploring the effect of school closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic on students with diverse learning needs on their sense of school connectedness in Australia explained that students experience

social isolation and a lack of connection to their school during remote learning which can consequently lead to low mood and loneliness (Page et al., 2021). Additionally, an Irish study which researched the effect of at home schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic found the lack of social connection with peers to be the most negative effect of school closure (Flynn et al., 2021). Furthermore, NEPS (2020) have issued guidance for supporting the wellbeing of school communities as they reopen following closure due to Covid-19. This guidance emphasises that to reopen schools safely following school closure due to Covid-19, there must be an emphasis on the promotion of five factors; a sense of calm, a sense of belonging and connectedness, a sense of safety, a sense of self-efficacy and community-efficacy, and a sense of hope (Hobfoll et al., 2007; NEPS, 2020). This guidance highlights that these elements are necessary to promote wellbeing in the school environment (NEPS, 2020). While NEPS (2020) have considered that it is likely that school connectedness will need to be promoted following school closure, this has not been studied further in an Irish context. Therefore, this study aims to appreciate this unique time and its effect on school connectedness in Ireland. To summarise, school connectedness as an individual subcomponent of wellbeing needs to be further examined in order to successfully promote it within schools particularly during school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.4 What is School Connectedness?

The importance of school connectedness has been acknowledged across the world by a variety of disciplines. In Ireland, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) identified “being connected” as a key wellbeing indicator (NCCA, 2017). Additionally, University College Dublin School of Psychology and Jigsaw have conducted two “My World Surveys” which is the most comprehensive

study of young people's mental health and wellbeing in Ireland as it captures the views of more than 19,000 young people. These surveys were conducted in 2012 and 2019. These surveys have identified that school connectedness has significantly reduced between 2012 to 2019 and consequently, it has been identified as a key domain of concern for the next few years focus (Dooley et al., 2019). This highlights a need to further explore school connectedness and how it can be promoted in schools. School connectedness has clearly been identified as an issue that must be addressed nationally in Ireland.

On an international basis, there appears to be a universal definition of school connectedness that was developed by Robert Blum (2004) and then later adopted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2009). This definition has been used across various literature. As previously outlined in table 2, this definition states that school connectedness is "the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as them as individuals" (CDC, 2009). Although the concept of school connectedness is relatively recent, its constituents are established for a long time (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010). It is understood that school connectedness requires attachment and relationships with those all people at one's school and a commitment of the school to create a connectedness culture (Monahan et al., 2010). School connectedness has been found to be a key contributor to student's mental health (Millings et al., 2012). School connectedness has been seen across the evidence as an important protective factor for students which makes them less likely to engage in risk behaviours and have fewer behavioural problems (Arif et al., 2019; CDC, 2009; Marczuk et al., 2014; Monahan et al., 2010). Furthermore, a positive school connection has been found to increase a student's likelihood of better grades, increased self-esteem, school attendance, and lower the risk of school dropout (CDC,

2009; Marino et al., 2020, Monahan et al., 2010). Due to the direct link between school connectedness and positive outcomes and avoidance of other risks it makes school connectedness a vital targeted goal and therefore, an aim in health promotion (Monohan et al., 2010). A quantitative Australian study highlighted that more research is needed on the role of school connectedness in inclusive education practices in more countries, as current research is predominantly in the United States (Vaz et al.,2015). This study also examined contributors to school connectedness for primary school students (Vaz et al., 2015). These contributors include peer acceptance, interactions with the teacher, physical appearance, coping strategies, student involvement, and bullying (Vaz et al., 2015).

Although school connectedness is important for every developmental stage, school connectedness has been found to become increasingly important for early adolescence (Arif et al., 2019; McNeely et al., 2002). Adolescence is a developmental stage where the child becomes more reliant on relationships outside of their family such as their classmates and teachers and therefore, the need to be connected to a larger social network increases (Blum., 2005). As an adolescent undergoes various biological changes, they also enter a new social-psychological life phase which seeks an increased amount support and time spent with peers and less time with family (Moretti & Paled, 2004). Adolescence is also a time where the student seeks further autonomy (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010). Additionally, school is the environment in which adolescents spend most of their time and consequently it can shape their identities and prepare for their future (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). It is the case that some adolescents thrive and connect with school, some cope with the school experience, and some find school a place of alienation (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). To summarise, school connectedness plays a significant role in all developmental stages, however, it

becomes increasingly important during adolescence due to the further reliance of peer relationships.

2.5 The Evolution of School Connectedness

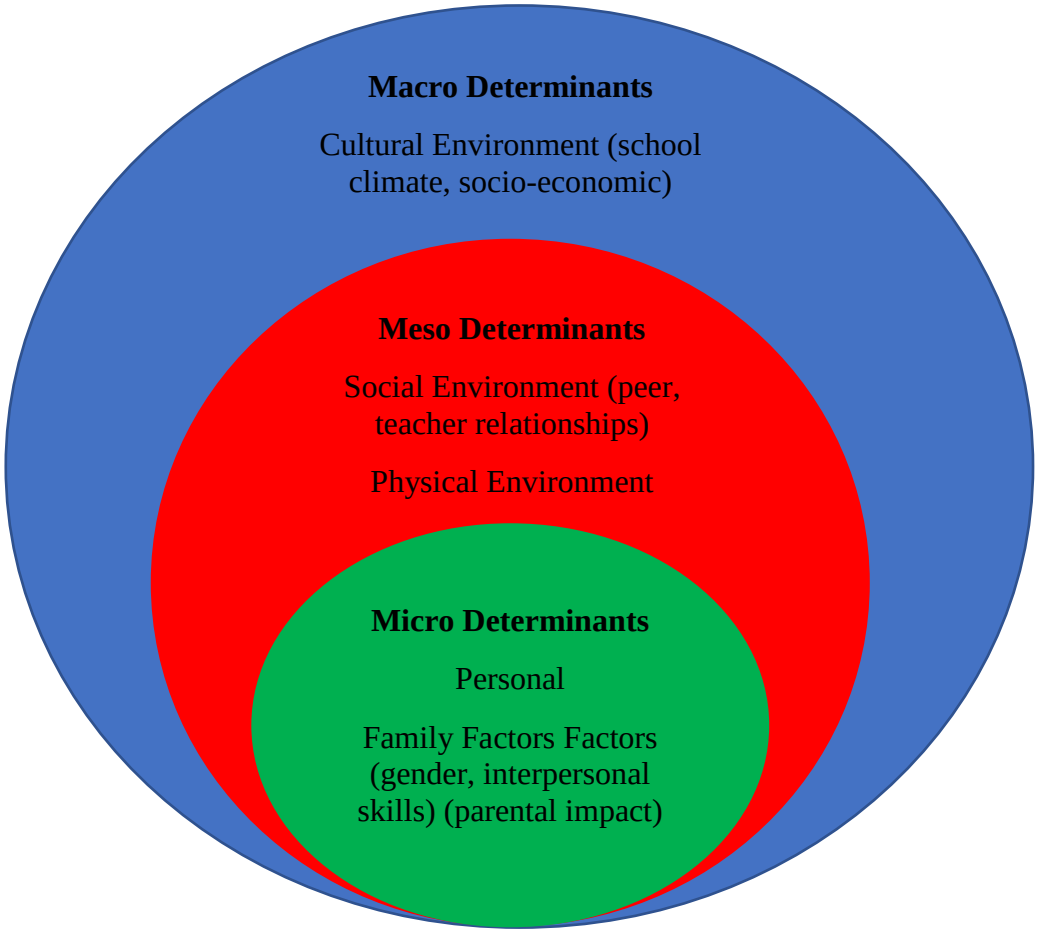
The concept of school connectedness has evolved over many years and continues to do so currently. In June 2003, the Wingspread Declaration on School Connections was developed by an interdisciplinary group of professionals including researchers, American government, education, and health representatives. They declared that high academic expectations and support for learning, positive student-adult relationships, and safety are required for a student to experience school connectedness (Blum et al., 2004). As previously discussed, they also declared that from review of the evidence that was current at that time, that an increase in school connection across students will impact academic performance and motivation positively, increase classroom engagement, reduce absenteeism, increase school completion rates, reduce the occurrence of bullying and vandalism, reduce emotional distress, and disruptive behaviour (Blum et al., 2004). Following on from this declaration, Robert Blum (one of the main contributors to the declaration) wrote a piece on how to increase student's school connectedness (Blum, 2005). While this American study outlined techniques for teachers to promote school connectedness, there was not much emphasis placed on the impact of all school personnel. However, since then, school connectedness research has further evolved. Further research has been conducted to identify that school connectedness involves the creation of a culture from all aspects of the school not just the formal learning environment provided by teachers (Ekelman et al, 2013). While not always recognised, school connectedness research is now at a stage where it appreciates the role of the entire student environment in contributing to student school connectedness.

2.6 The Environmental and Contextual Perspective of School Connectedness from Micro to Macro Determinants

As the meaning of school connectedness has been discussed, this section will explore the current determinants of school connectedness in the literature. This section presents the various determinants according to a micro, meso, and macro structure. This structure abides by Brofenbrenner's Bioecological model (Brofenbrenner, 1974) which suggests that we must look at all environments of the student's development. While this model has micro, meso, and macro dimensions, it is not intended for them to be entirely separate and rather that they all influence each other, hence the model being within the one large circle. As school connectedness has various determinants that influence one another this model was utilised. Micro determinants include the personal and family factors. Meso determinants include the social and physical environments. Macro determinants includes the cultural perspective. Outcomes of each section is also explored. Figure 1 outlines the determinants of school connectedness placed within the ecological model. The determinants have been gathered from reviewing the literature based on school determinants and it provides an overview and broader picture of all the determinants.

Figure 1

Micro-Meso-Macro Model of School Connectedness Determinants from the Literature (based on Brofenhenner's Ecological Model)



2.6.1 Micro Determinants

This section discusses the range of micro determinants that effect a student's sense of school connectedness. This includes various personal factors such as gender and interpersonal skills, and also the effect of the student's family on their sense of school connectedness. Furthermore, the relationship between mental health and school connectedness is considered.

2.6.1.1 Gender

The difference between the school connectedness of genders is frequently considered. Studies have shown that generally girls present with increased school

connectedness compared to boys (Crespo et al., 2013; McNeely et al., 2002; Vaz et al., 2015). One study reported that this may be due to teacher bias, and that teachers should reflect on how they interact with and support male students (Vaz et al., 2015). Additionally, an American study also identified that girls report greater school connectedness than boys however, it was hypothesised that this may be linked with academic and behavioural outcomes and therefore, acknowledged that further research is necessary to understand the complex correlation between gender and school connectedness (Nickerson et al., 2011). Another study exploring relatedness and academic engagement supported this stance by identifying that girls related to their teachers more than boys did (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). However, this study found no difference between girls and boys in their relatedness to their peers and parents (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). In conclusion, while to date it has been found that girls typically have an increased sense of school connectedness than boys, further research is necessary to determine the reasoning for this.

2.6.1.2 Interpersonal Skills

It has been reported that a student's coping strategies and ability to problem solve can greatly affect their school connectedness. For example, non-productive coping strategies such as worrying or self-blame can negatively impact student's school connectedness (Vaz et al., 2015). However, it has also been identified that students who use productive coping strategies have increased school connectedness (Frydenberg et al., 2009). Therefore, teaching coping skills has been found to be an appropriate intervention to improve student's connectedness to their school (Frydenberg et al., 2009). However, it is understood that although this is a personal factor, it is beneficial for schools to provide opportunity to practice problem solving and coping as well as support for all students (Vaz et al., 2015). In conclusion, strong

coping strategies have been found to enhance school connectedness, however, the ability to develop these coping strategies should be facilitated within the school.

2.6.1.3 Child-Parent Attachment Impact on School Connectedness

Child-parent attachment can also significantly influence school connectedness. In an Australian study, it was established that the security experienced in a child's relationship with their parents forms a basis for further relationships in their life including teachers and peers (Shochet et al., 2007). As previously outlined, relationships in the school environment are central to school connectedness, the original attachment and security experienced by a child with their parent can establish the foundations for school relationships and consequently affecting school connectedness (Shochet et al., 2007). Additionally, students who are more attached to their parents experience greater security and therefore, they are more confident to explore and involve themselves in school activities (Shochet et al., 2007). While family relationships can positively influence the development of school connectedness, a further study has shown that family strain and obligations can negatively affect a student's school connectedness (Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2009). For example, the formation of peer relationships becomes more important in adolescence, however, family obligations for some students means that they have less time to spend with peers which can cause emotional distress (Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011). It is suggested that a balance between school and family demands are established and clarity in competence, autonomy, and quality of relationships is understood (Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011). It is evident that establishing positive family relationships can influence the development of further relationships in school which can increase student's school connectedness.

2.6.1.4 Personal Relationship between School Connectedness and Mental Health

While gender, interpersonal skills, and parental impact are considered personal determinants of school connectedness, it is also necessary to acknowledge the relationship between school connectedness and a student's mental health. The relationship between school connectedness and student's mental health has been evident in various studies. In a study that took place over two years using standardised Likert scales it was found that increased school connectedness resulted in fewer mental health issues half a year and a year later (Liu et al., 2021). Furthermore, this study discussed that low school connectedness can correlate with reduced mental health by identifying that more mental health problems were associated with students with lower levels of school connectedness (Liu et al., 2021). Additionally, a stronger sense of school connectedness has shown to be a protective factor over suicidal ideation and therefore, in an effort to reduce suicide, school connectedness should be promoted (Areba et al., 2021). In conclusion, it is strongly evident that school connectedness is a protective factor.

To conclude, on a micro level, there are various factors that can effect school connectedness such as gender, interpersonal skills and parental effect. Although these factors, have been discussed in the literature, further evidence is required to explore their direct correlation with school connectedness and also to be able to incorporate the promotion of these factors into practice. There is also evidence which discusses the relationship between school connectedness and mental health. Further research is required to identify the direct impact of each of these factors on one another.

2.6.2 Meso Determinants

This section explores the meso determinants that effect school connectedness. The first determinant discussed is the social environment which includes peer-peer

relationships and student-teacher relationships. The social environment is considered to be the strongest influence of school connectedness. The second determinant considered is the physical environment of the school and how this can impact a student's sense of school connectedness.

2.6.2.1 Social Environment

To date, the social environment is the most researched environment in relation to school connectedness. School connectedness is typically fostered through positive interactions with peers and school staff (Marino et al., 2020). Typically, students who believe that they are socially accepted amongst their peers have increased school connectedness (Vaz et al., 2015). Peer support, parent support, and teacher support have been found to greatly impact a student's connectedness to their school (Allen et al., 2018).

In three studies, students identified that their peer relationships were the most valued component of school for them (Gowing, 2019; Gristy, 2012; Yuen et al., 2012). Schools can promote a safe and engaging environment to foster the formation and maintenance of peer relationships (Gowing, 2019; Bradshaw et al., 2014). School can also become active in identifying the breakdown of friendships and how this can reduce school connection for students (Gowing, 2019; Rönkä et al., 2017). However, while further focus needs to be on the positive influence of peer relationships on school connectedness, it is evident that the negative influence of peers on school connectedness has been the point of focus so far due to its significant impact. Peer victimisation and bullying has been found to increase in adolescence and negatively impact a student's sense of school connectedness and consequently, a student's mental health and wellbeing (Arif et al., 2019; Vaz et al., 2015; Skues et al., 2005). A study that explored the effect of peer victimisation on mental wellbeing while considering

school connectedness as a protective factor, highlighted that peer victimisation negatively impacts a student's sense of connectedness and subsequently mental wellbeing as a victim will not only have a negative association with the perpetrator but also the environment of victimisation (Arif et al., 2019). As this environment is commonly the school, it develops the victimised students fear of a lack of security and consequently directly impacts their sense of connectedness. Another study found similar findings which included that students reported lower levels of school connectedness when they had experienced bullying (O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010). It is clear that peers can increase and decrease a student's sense of school connectedness depending on the student's relationship with their peers. Therefore, the importance of promoting positive peer relationships is evident.

Furthermore, in recent times, the virtual context is increasingly becoming a factor that affects how students socialise and consequently their school connectedness. Use of social media is becoming more common, with the age of usage continuously decreasing. For example, in Ireland in 2020, 93% of 8 –12 year olds owned their own smart device (CyberSafe, 2020). In Ireland, youth perceive participation in social media to be beneficial to peer relationships and believe that without use of social media, they would not be as connected to their peers (Kennedy & Lynch, 2016). Additionally, social media in Ireland plays a role in adolescents' social validation through sense of identity, confidence, and self-esteem through online feedback from peers (Kennedy & Lynch, 2015). Social media is an outlet that allows people to accessibly connect and interact with others, however, although it enables communication, it limits face to face interactions which can create a disconnection (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2019). A large quantitative study consisting of 10272 students across many schools in Canada, identified that there is a drastic negative

correlation found between heavy use of social media amongst students and school connectedness and academic performance (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2019). This study also highlighted a need for a preventative strategy such as parent and school professional's education to be able provide support and limits to social media use amongst students (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2019). Yet, in a qualitative study based on adolescence, it was highlighted that while a lack of face to face interaction is acknowledged, social media enables students to connect with peers regardless of the time or place, receive validation on their thoughts and experiences, and allows young people the opportunity to broaden their friendship groups with people of similar interests (Davis, 2012). Another study presents an alternative perspective by determining that gender plays a role in the correlation between a sense of belonging and social media use (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). This study reports that boys who use social media gain more friendships and a feeling of belonging, whereas for girls there is significant difference (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). The rationale used for this finding is that typically boy's self-disclosure is significantly lower than girls, however, it tends to increase through online platforms (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). While further research is necessary, it is clear that while social media promotes further discussion amongst students, it also decreases the amount of face to face connection between peers.

Cyberbullying is becoming increasingly common amongst all age groups and particularly adolescence. In a report by Cyber Safe Ireland (2019), teachers reported that cyberbullying is the biggest online safety issue that they deal with. One study has highlighted that school connectedness acts as a moderator between cyberbullying and suicidal ideation and that those victims of cyberbullying who are more connected to their school are less likely to have suicidal ideation (Kim et al., 2020). Additionally, it

has been established that schools who foster and promote school connectedness are less likely to have incidents of cyberbullying amongst their students (Acosta et al., 2019). It is evident that although cyberbullying takes place online, it can effect a student's sense of school connectedness if it occurs amongst students in the same school.

School personnel can also play an integral part in student's school connectedness. The quality of student's relationships with teachers has been found to have an influence on social, emotional, and academic development (Biag, 2016). Student who feel supported by teachers and believe that teachers care to spend time on them succeeding are more likely to feel connected (Blum et al., 2004). Teacher support has been found to increase the amount students enjoy school and feel like they belong. Furthermore, one study highlighted that teacher support is one of the most significant predictors of school connectedness (Allen et al., 2018). Additionally, a study from a social care perspective found that school connectedness is promoted through beneficial relationships between students and teachers and it consequently lowers symptoms of depression amongst students (Joyce, 2019). To conclude, strong relationships between teachers and students have been found to increase a student's sense of school connectedness.

2.6.2.2 Physical Environment

There is a direct link between the influence of the social and physical environment and its impact on school connectedness. It is widely known that an accessible physical school environment is of critical importance (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). However, in a Norwegian study exploring students with physical disabilities between the ages of 13 and 18 school participation, the core reason for an accessible environment is to enable social participation with their classmates

(Asbjørnslett & Hemmingsson, 2008). These students did not identify their own physical disability as a problem and rather felt the problem was how other students and teachers viewed them (Asbjørnslett & Hemmingsson, 2008). These students expressed that their teachers are unaware of the scope of their abilities in various occupations and therefore, they are frequently disconnected from the class group (Asbjørnslett & Hemmingsson, 2008). Furthermore, an Icelandic study added that the ability of teachers to be able to modify activities to enable participation of those with physical disabilities was of most importance (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). Research shows that it is necessary to alter school environments or activities to prevent isolation of those with physical disabilities (Egilson & Trustadottir, 2009). Moreover, research shows that students in smaller schools are more connected to their school than students in larger schools (McNeely et al., 2002). The rationale for this is because it is possible for teachers to make more personal relationships with each student in a smaller school however, this is quite challenging in a larger school (McNeely et al., 2002). It is clear that while the physical environment can hinder a person's sense of school connectedness, it is also vital to ensure teachers are aware of student's physical abilities to ensure inclusion in activities.

Furthermore, although not widely researched, a school's physical environment does not only influence the school connectedness of those with a physical disability, but it can also impact all students. For example, an Australian study based identified that the built environment can impact a student's connectedness such as seating and allocation plan to be inclusive, vandalism and school maintenance which impact the aesthetics of the school environment, and an opportunity to have a private space to seek support (Waters et al., 2010). Contributing to this, the CDC (2009) highlighted that a pleasant physical environment adds to the two components of school

connectedness, safety, and relationships, by increasing a student's feeling of safety and creates a positive environment for respectful relationships. Additionally, another study added that enabling students to have an opportunity to engage in the appearance of their schools physical environment perhaps through displaying their artwork or photographs, promotes school pride and a sense of connectedness to their environment (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). More research is necessary to identify exactly which parts of a physical environment promote school connectedness.

On a meso level, according to current best evidence leads to the conclusion that the most significant determinant of school connectedness is the student's social environment. However, it is important to recognise that the physical environment has not been researched as much as the social environment in relation to school connectedness. In conclusion, if a student feels connected to their peers and teachers they are more likely to excel in their school environment. While the social environment plays the greatest role, the physical environment must also be considered when examining student's school connectedness. An accessible and welcoming environment promotes students school connection.

2.6.3 Macro Determinants

This section outlined the macro determinants that can influence a student's sense of school connectedness according to the literature. This is considered to be from a cultural perspective. School culture is created through various factors including the school ethos, students, teachers, policies, national guidance from the DES, and location. This section considers the schools culture through the creation of a school climate that can promote student's school connectedness, the socio-economic status of the school that may affect this, and the policies that inform the schools operations.

2.6.3.1 School Climate

School climate is defined as the collective experience of students, parents, and school personnel of school life that is influenced by school norms, beliefs, relationships, pedagogy, and organisation (National School Climate Center, 2020). Creating a school climate that involves students in classroom decisions such as planning learning activities and rules has been found to enhance a student's sense of connectedness as it increases independence, participation, and ability to problem solve (Vaz et al., 2015). Many of the components of school climate can affect school connectedness for example, research has shown that poor classroom management such as a teaching pedagogy and disciplinary procedures can negatively affect a student sense of connectedness to their school (McNeely et al., 2002). Furthermore, it is generally reported by students with a strong sense of school connectedness have a positive school climate (Wilson, 2004). It is clear that the school climate can influence student's sense of school connected by incorporating student voice and ensuring effective management throughout the school.

School policies impact a school's climate and affect the day to day operation of the school. School policies such as management policies, safety policies, and anti-bullying policies are essential to promoting school connectedness (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). It has been considered that the involvement of students in policy formation and decision making is essential given that students are the key players in these policies and therefore, to ensure the efficacy of the policy it is important to consider the perspectives of students (Rawatial & Petersen, 2012). This is particularly relevant for the compliance and perceptions of policies from students. If a student feel that policies are unfair, unreasonable, or inconsistent it increases the likelihood of negative connotations with their school and can lead to a disconnection (Yuen et al., 2012). One

study highlighted that a school environment that has a no tolerance to bullying policy is paramount as students who are bullied at school have reduced self-esteem and consequently lower levels of connectedness in their school with peers and teachers (Skues et al., 2005). However, a more recent study highlighted that policies need to deal with bullying and also to prevent it from occurring (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). Furthermore, there is recent argument for the use of the individualised behaviour management systems to consider personal and environmental factors for each student (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). It is clear that effective policies need to be in place in schools to ensure the welfare of students and consequently, ensure student's school connectedness.

2.6.3.2 Socio-economic Status

In an Australian study, socio-economic status was found to have no effect on school connectedness of twelve-year old students (Vaz et al., 2015). However, in a case study in an urban low income school in the United States, it is acknowledged that within this population dropping out of school rates are significantly high as students do not feel connected to their school (Biag, 2016). Yet, this study highlighted that although it is likely students from this background will experience less school connectedness due to their circumstances such as greater exposure to health and safety risks, school personnel must remain critical of their cultural bias and re-evaluate their assumptions of these students' behaviours prior to disciplinary measures (Biag, 2016). Furthermore, a study investigating socio-economic status and school connectedness and its consequential impact on psychological distress, identified that higher socio-economic status is associated with increased school connectedness (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2016). One example includes

schools of lower socio-economic status with fewer resources. A student's extra-curricular activities is frequently the main contribution to their connectedness to their school as it involves the participation of collective activities. Extra-curriculars can promote connectedness through enjoyment of an activity that is an interest of the student and through fostering friendships (McNeely et al., 2002; Rowe & Stewart., 2009; Whitlock, 2006) and have been found to be a key contributor to positive school connectedness throughout the literature. However, it can be the case where schools have fewer resources which deprives students of the opportunity to engage in certain extracurriculars and therefore, can consequently affect their school connectedness (Marczuk et al., 2014). In conclusion, there are differing opinions on the influence of a school socio-economic status on student's school connectedness however, it must be considered that where schools have fewer resources, there is increased risk of students being deprived of opportunities to engage in certain activities.

2.6.4 Conclusion of Micro, Meso, and Macro Determinants of School Connectedness

As explored from a micro, meso, and macro level, there is a significant number of factors that influence student's school connectedness. In order to examine the promotion of school connectedness (next section- 2.7), it is vital to understand what areas impact it. These areas must be clear if there is intent to create an effective intervention to promote connectedness. While some determinants e.g. the social environment have greater baring than others, it is important to consider all of them to take a holistic approach.

2.7 Promotion of School Connectedness

As wellbeing promotion has been considered, the promotion of school connectedness specifically will now be discussed. To date, there are no specific programmes, strategies, or policies for school connectedness specifically. As schools have become key locations for promoting students' wellbeing in Ireland (Sixsmith et al., 2007), it is evident that a whole school promotion approach to school connectedness is most likely to be effective (Shochet et al., 2007; Rowe & Stewart, 2009; Waters et al., 2010). Research has established that the health promoting school model provides a clear framework for increasing the protective factor school connectedness as it is based on the core values of connectedness which include, participation, inclusiveness and democracy across the school environment (Rowe et al., 2007). A qualitative public health study in Australia investigated how a whole-school approach through the health promoting school model promotes school connectedness (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). Through a case study methodology, this study explored various particulars that added to the school connectedness of students. These included whole school celebratory socials to enhance school pride, linking between different classes, school policies and structures such as a fair behaviour management system, and a welcoming and approachable school environment (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). This study also emphasized the importance of partnerships throughout the school including student-staff, parent-staff, school-staff, and school-parent. (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). This study was different in that it specifically focused on school connectedness rather than focusing on all of wellbeing at once.

Schools have been a place to promote health for a long time however, this is traditionally performed through healthy eating, vaccinations, and physical education (McNeely et al., 2002). However, promotion of mental wellbeing to address a

student's need to feel connected to their school environment is not practised as much (McNeely et al., 2005). As noted earlier, there are many reasons for the lack of school connectedness programmes including lack of research and lack of guidelines. One study expressed that the reason for a lack of promotion of school connectedness is due to a lack of a clear practice framework (Allen & Bowles, 2012). There is a need for further training for all professionals working in school to be able use strategies to foster an environment that promotes school connectedness such as modelling respectful behaviour, preparation for school transitions, and the importance of protective factors like school connectedness for students (Niehaus et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2010). Various strategies to promote school connectedness have been identified by the CDC (2009) including, engaging students, family, the community, and staff in decision making, empowering families to be involved in the school, enabling academic, emotional, and social skills of all student to ensure their engagement, fostering a positive learning environment, training for all school staff to support students diverse needs, and promotion of relationships amongst all school stakeholders.

2.8 Conclusion

It is evident that the difficulty defining and measuring wellbeing is due to the large amount of factors that encompass wellbeing. It has been known for a long time that increased school connectedness impacts educational outcomes such as school attendance, reduced likelihood of school dropout, and higher academic test results (CDC, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Goodenow, 1993). Increased school connectedness has found to enhance motivation, effort, happiness, and enthusiasm to learn (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Across the literature the need to provide academic support to all students and motivate all students to achieve their

best has been made clear (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Research has identified that there is a direct link between the social context and academic environment. Students who feel they are socially approved and supported through their relationships in the school environment, will perceive themselves as more capable to perform in academia which may consequently promote school connectedness through achievement (Marino et al., 2019; Wheeler et al., 2010). Additionally, it is understood that students have a greater understanding of the value of their school learning when they feel like they belong (Neel & Fuligni, 2013). Furthermore, it is found that school connectedness positively influences future orientation and provides students with the self-esteem to plan a successful future (Crespo et al., 2013). While the construct of school connectedness is understood from a theoretical perspective, there appears to be difficulty in promoting it in practice (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Further research is necessary to outline how practitioners can promote school connectedness in practice. It is suggested that school connectedness is addressed through a health promoting school approach. As evidenced, there is a large number of factors that influence school connectedness and this could possibly lead to the difficulty in addressing school connectedness in practice. Overall, while it is a complex concept it has a clear value and is an important pursuit for progressing wellbeing promotion in schools. Throughout the review of school connectedness, it is clear that is has mainly been considered from a public health and psychology perspective, little is known about the place of school connectedness in occupational science and occupational therapy. Chapter 3 aims to explore school connectedness within the boundaries of occupational science and occupational therapy evidence.

Chapter 3 : An Occupational Lens

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the relationship between school connectedness, occupational science and occupational therapy. The concepts emphasised in chapter two including child wellbeing, school connectedness, and the promotion of school connectedness for all students will be studied through an occupational lens. While school connectedness is not a term frequently used by occupational therapists, many of occupational science core concepts including belonging and engagement align with the study of school connectedness. This chapter discusses the concept of school connectedness from the perspective of the concept of belonging through an occupational science lens. Furthermore, this chapter explores the difference between independence and interdependence and therefore, the influence of human connection on occupations.

The literature review search for this chapter was conducted using the databases, CINAHL, ERIC, Medline, psycARTICLES, and psycINFO. The key search terms used included “belonging” and “occupational therapy” OR “occupational science”. Following the reading of the results yielded and many of the articles in the reference lists, this literature review search expanded to include terms such as “individualism”, “independence”, “collectivism”, and “interdependence”. From this reading, the researcher established the position school connectedness has within wellbeing. The researcher also reviewed many of the research that was referenced in the articles found to obtain further relevant studies not found in the database search.

3.2 The Positioning of Connectedness in Occupational Science

Occupational science has been understood by a variety of people. One understanding which is widely known throughout occupational science is the Occupational Perspective of Health (Wilcock, 1998). Dr Ann Wilcock (1940-2019) was an occupational science scholar who lead on research investigating the close relationship between occupation and health and furthermore, the complex correlation of occupational engagement and wellbeing (Kosma et al., 2013). Wilcock is known for many concepts in occupational science, including the notion of "doing, being, becoming, and belonging" and her perspective of occupational justice (Wilcock, 2006). Wilcock (2006) established an occupational science perspective to enhance occupational therapy through a health promotion and social justice perspective. Wilcock's theory is known as the Occupational Perspective of Health. This theory was established to describe the unique impact occupations can have on people and groups health (Hitch et al., 2014a). Wilcock viewed her perspective of population health through an occupational lens based on the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (Hocking & Townsend, 2020). Population health focuses on the health disparities that influence a group of people's health and wellbeing (AOTA, 2020). A call has been made for research to continue evolving based on Wilcock's work exploring an occupational lens on population health and furthermore, a health promotion perspective (Hitch et al., 2014; Hocking & Townsend, 2020). In occupational therapy, health promotion is an approach to intervention (AOTA, 2020). Consequently, health, quality of life, wellbeing, and occupational justice are outcomes of health promotion (AOTA, 2020). From an occupational therapy perspective, health promotion has been defined as the aim to prevent or reduce the incidence of illness or disease, accident, injuries, or health disparities and enhance mental health, resiliency and quality of life

to ensure occupational justice across all cultures (AOTA, 2020). The AOTA (2020) statement on Occupational Therapy Services in the Promotion of Health and Well-Being has outlined that occupational therapists' role in health promotion includes promoting healthy lifestyles, advocating for the vital role occupation has in health promotion, and providing strategies to individuals and communities.

As noted in the previous paragraph, Wilcock developed the Occupational Perspective of Health theory by viewing engagement in occupations through four dimensions- doing, being, becoming, and belonging. While the concepts of doing, being, and becoming were known prior to Wilcock, she further emphasized these terms in 2001 (Hitch et al., 2014a). The "doing" of an occupation is the medium through which a person engages in an occupation, including skills and abilities (Hitch et al., 2014a; Wilcock, 1998). "Being" includes a sense of who someone is, and it is expressed through consciousness, creativity, roles, and the occupations they choose to engage in (Hitch et al., 2014; Wilcock, 1998). "Becoming" includes ongoing progression for growth, development, and change across a person's lifetime (Hitch et al., 2014; Wilcock, 1998). The dimensions of doing, being, and becoming were first established, and later in 2006, Wilcock recognised the need for equal emphasis on the dimension of belonging in an occupation following the work of Hammell (2004). "Belonging" consists of a sense of connectedness to other people, places, cultures, communities, and times (Hitch et al., 2014; Wilcock, 1998). While Wilcock's work on an occupational perspective of health is widely known across the profession, there is a significant gap between this theoretical perspective and its application to occupational therapy practice (Hitch et al., 2014b).

The dimension of belonging will be focused on for this literature review as Wilcock highlighted the place of connectedness within this dimension. Belonging was

added as a fourth dimension of Wilcock's Occupational Perspective of Health theory (Wilcock, 2007). Wilcock (2007) emphasised that there should be equal weighting given to the dimension of belonging as there is to the other three dimensions. However, Hitch et al. (2014a) believed that it is not as developed as the other dimensions.

Wilcock (2007) drew from many psychology perspectives to inform occupational science. From an occupational science perspective, belonging was defined by Wilcock (2007) as an interpersonal connection between people while they participate in occupations. Furthermore, Wilcock drew from psychological understandings of belonging to inform her ideas and concepts such as Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory which expresses that the need to form stable relationships is essential for survival. Within psychology, belonging is a human need that provides a fundamental motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The components of belonging include positive interactions with other people and the expression of concern for one another's welfare (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belonging has been characterised as a human need. Maslow (1943) viewed belonging as the need satisfied following physiological and safety needs and before esteem and self-actualisation.

Belonging can be understood as a component of wellbeing, for example Hammell and Iwama (2012) outlined that wellbeing includes ones physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health, personal and economic security, self-worth, a sense of belonging, self-determination, opportunities to engage, and a sense of hope (Hammell & Iwama, 2012). Furthermore, the dimension of "belonging" encompasses social interaction and inclusion, receiving and giving support, feeling valued by those around us, and the ability to contribute to others (Hammell, 2014). Belonging considers a person's feeling of being a part of something bigger than oneself (Mello et al., 2020). Belonging includes a person's connection to other people and places, social

interaction, mutual support, friends, inclusion, and relation to others (Hammell, 2004; Mello et al., 2020). Research has identified that having the ability and opportunities to engage in meaningful occupations fosters a sense of belonging which is consequently linked to positive wellbeing through feelings of appreciation, value, and respect (Hammell, 2014). It has also been argued that one meaning of an occupation for a person can stem from the sense of connection with the occupation and others (Reed et al., 2010) and furthermore, that the meaning of occupational engagement varies based on the presence of others (Nyman & Lund, 2007). It is clear that humans are social beings that identify to various cohorts that promote wellbeing (Gallagher et al., 2015).

3.3 Approach to Practice

Belonging encompasses feeling connected to others while engaging in occupation and therefore, it is evident that occupation is not an individual experience and rather an experience that is influences by other people. The notion of belonging was considered from an occupational scientist perspective earlier in this chapter. However, it can be queried if the importance of belonging during an occupation has been greatly considered in occupational therapy practice. There has been a lot of debate in literature about the influence of individual approaches in occupational therapy practice on interventions and outcomes for clients, when in fact many of their occupations are not done individually but collectively and the absence of this recognition in practice (see next section). While it is suggested that the theory of occupational science informs occupational therapy practice, there is as yet little evidence on the translation of promoting belonging in occupational therapy practice.

3.3.1 Independence Versus Interdependence in Occupational Therapy Practice

In many occupational therapy literature, there is a focus on the goal of occupational therapy practice is for service users to gain more independence (Russell et al., 2002). Some research states that this devalues those who are dependent or interdependent as humans are all interdependent in some way (Hammell, 2009). Additionally, school-based occupational therapy studies have outlined that the goal is to achieve student independence (Onwumere et al., 2021; Wahyuni et al., 2022). For example, a very recent study based on children with Down Syndrome outlined that "one of the developmental tasks that must be achieved by children is independence" (Wahyuni et al., 2022). Furthermore, Collins (2017) debated that there should be no greater significance placed on independence over interdependence, however, dependence could be viewed in a negative light as it implies an incapability of making decisions. This is being considered within this study as it is evident from the definition of independence and interdependence, that the difference between them is the connectedness with other people during occupations. In table 4, the definition of interdependence highlights the importance of being influenced by others (Brea et al., 2012). Chapter two highlighted the effect that connectedness makes to students. Furthermore, the promotion of independence is frequently discussed within occupational therapy (Onwumere et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2002; Wahyuni et al., 2022). It must be queried if this traditional occupational therapy approach is going to be effective if promoting school connectedness in school-based occupational therapy. The 1:1 student-therapist approach described in chapter one focuses typically on individual independence as the child is removed from the setting with their peers and school personnel. However, a health promotion universal approach incorporates an

interdependent collective perspective that promotes the inclusion of other within the student's life.

Table 4

Definitions of Independence, Interdependence and Dependence

Concept	Definition (Brea et al., 2012- WFOT Bulletin).
Independence	The condition of being able to perform everyday activities to a satisfactory level.
Interdependence	The condition of mutual dependence and influence between members of a social group.
Dependence	The condition of needing support in order to be able to perform everyday activities to a satisfactory level.

3.3.2 Individualism in occupational science and occupational therapy

Many people in the Western World participate in occupations that contribute to others and consequently, have been found to be paramount to wellbeing (Hammell, 2015). Yet, writers argue that in the western world, occupation for occupational therapy practice, is analysed through an individualistic lens (Gerlach et al., 2018; Hammell, 2015). Additionally, leading occupational scientists such as Hocking & Clair (2011) consequently believe that as occupational science was established in the Western World, it has evolved based on an individualistic ideology. In recent years, studies have critiqued this individualistic approach that they perceive occupational science to have evolved through (Dickie et al., 2006; Gerlach et al., 2017). While Hammell (2015) expressed that an ideology of individualism does not coincide with

cultures in regions such as Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, she also highlighted that these theories do not align entirely with the Western World where they were formed.

Contributing to this debate is the focus on individual subjective experiences within the environment. For example, one study critiqued occupational science by stating that while occupational science has closely explored occupation and the social environment, these are still viewed as separate dimensions (Dickie et al., 2006). This study argued that while individual meaning of an occupation to a person has been closely studied, occupation is rarely an individual experience and frequently involves others yet such collective experiences have rarely been studies (Dickie et al., 2006). In addition, these authors propose that definitions of occupation are based on individualism, therefore viewing the occupation and environment as separate dimensions yet performing an occupation with others builds a sense of connection which shapes the meaning of the occupation (Dickie et al., 2006; Reed et al., 2010). Being with others makes the experience more than solely about the occupation (Dickie et al., 2006; Reed et al., 2010). Furthermore, it has been argued that while an individual can make decisions regarding their occupational engagement, these decisions are limited to opportunities available in social forces and power relations surrounding them (Rudman, 2013). It is necessary therefore to explore the interconnections between groups which shape people's occupational participation (Rudman, 2013).

3.3.3 Collectivism in Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

Collectivism refers to how people connect within a group and feel like they belong and are cared for (Malfitano et al., 2021). Collectivism is considered to be on the other end of the continuum to individualism. Collectivism includes a group of people experiencing shared identity and purpose (Malfitano et al., 2021). While the need for research on a collective approach to occupation has been highlighted, few

studies have been conducted to address this gap to date. Fogelberg and Frauwirth (2010) outlined the potential use of a systems theory framework to guide a new approach to occupational science and occupational therapy that focuses on occupations beyond the individual to a collective approach. Within this exploration, occupational systems were studied from a community level, group level, and individual level (Fogelberg & Frauwirth, 2010). Furthermore, research is exploring occupation through collective occupations which includes the shared and social experience of occupation (Kantartzis & Molineux., 2017). A study which researched the occupations of people living in a Greek town, highlighted that there are three forms of collective occupation which include informal daily encounters in public spaces, organizations and associations, and celebration and commemoration (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017). In another study which interviewed 12 adults from New Zealand who had experience occupational disruption such as retirement or job change found that one meaning of an individual's occupation is based on the interconnectedness of them and their wider context (Reed et al., 2010). Participants in this study expressed that an occupation done with others gives a sense of connection which creates meaning for the occupation and consequently, occupation provides them with an opportunity to be with other people (Reed et al., 2010). These participants described carrying out an occupation with others gave them feelings of obligation, care, mutual interest, and being needed (Reed et al., 2010).

It has been argued that it must be understood that people are social beings that rely on relationships and connections with one another to support our wellbeing (Gallagher et al., 2015), which consequently implies that we are all interdependent (Hammell, 2009). Hammell's (2015) argues that there is a need to explore occupations in settings from a connectedness and interdependent approach. Furthermore, it has

been suggested that while the profession of occupational therapy claims to be holistic, further focus must be given to addressing social inequities and barriers to occupation (Farias & Rudman, 2019). However, it must be queried if this is an issue that lies within occupational science or if difficulty arises between the translation of occupational science into occupational therapy practice. As a vast amount of occupational therapy literature demonstrates a valid point that many therapeutic goals are focused on the independence of an individual, it is not accurate to say that this perspective was developed by the original perspectives of occupational scientists. For example, Pierce (2003) and Pierce (2009) wrote about the importance of co-occupations which she stated were occupations that could not occur without the interaction between people such as games, teaching and caregiving. Furthermore, many occupational scientists outlined that the focus of an occupation is not solely the task but also the social factors to include relationships, participation, and social structures (Clark & Lawlor, 2009; Dickie et al., 2006; Hocking, 2000; Molineux & Whiteford, 1999). Additionally, Pierce (2009) points out that it is not necessary to devalue an individualistic perspective of occupation in order to argue the value of collectivism. Furthermore, Pierce (2009) details that professionals should build on existing knowledge (i.e. perspective of individualism on occupation) to form new perspectives (use of collectivism), rather than making it a situation where one must choose one perspective over another.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter identifies that while school connectedness has not been explored greatly in occupational science or occupational therapy, the concept of belonging has. Hammell (2014) views belonging through two dimensions which include belonging as connectedness and belonging as contributing to others. Hammell (2014) argued that

belonging as connectedness incorporates doing "with" others to include interpersonal connectedness and participation with others. However, belonging as contributing to others encompasses doing "for" others such as volunteering (Hammell, 2014). This can provide a motivation for occupational engagement (Hammell, 2014). Furthermore, individualism entails that occupation is based on a particular individual and consequently, it does not incorporate the wider social structures that shapes this individual's occupational participation (Gerlach et al., 2018). It theorises that those individuals have entire autonomy and choice over their occupations which ignores social structures which may affect the individual's occupations (Gerlach et al., 2018). However, while an individualism approach has been taken in certain areas of practice in occupational therapy, it can be argued that this was not the intent of occupational science. Most research on school connectedness to date has investigated definition, measurement, and the importance particularly within wellbeing studies rather than exploring it as a concept of its own.

While the importance of school connectedness is evident, there is many gaps in the research relating to this phenomenon. Firstly, school connectedness from a student or teacher perspective has not been understood in many countries including Ireland. Secondly, only one study has considered school connectedness through an occupational lens (Marczuk et al., 2014). Thirdly, while the importance of the construct of school connectedness is clear, there is a lack of clarity on it should be implemented in practice (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Fourthly, this research commenced during the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore, the researcher was aware of the unique data that could be gathered during this time due to school closures. The researcher identified the lack of connection students would have to the physical school environment during this time and consequently, availed of the opportunity to carry out

this unique research. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by understanding both a student and teacher perspective of school connectedness and its determinants as well as exploring the relationship between occupation and school connectedness. Consequently, the research questions and research aims include:

Research Questions:

Research Question 1: What is the understanding of connectedness to the school environment from the perspectives of the student, teacher and school?

Research Question 2: What are the determinants of connectedness in a school environment?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between occupational participation and school connectedness?

Research Aims:

- To better understand students and their school's personnel perceptions of school connectedness.
- To further understand what determines a student's sense of connectedness to the school environment according to the students and the school personnel.
- To explore the relationship between student's school-based occupations and their sense of school connectedness.

Chapter 4 : Research Design

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to further the understanding of student and school personnel's perspectives of school connectedness and its relationship with student's occupations. The research design of this study will be examined in this chapter. The reasoning for the qualitative nature of this study is outlined to include the paradigm utilised. Rationale for the use of a case study methodology is presented. Consequently, the decision to choose data gathering methods that correspond to case study research is outlined. This chapter gives a detailed justification for the storage and analysis of data. The data analysis process is explicitly outlined. An in-depth overview of the trustworthiness of this study is also discussed. Finally, the various ethical factors are also that impact this study are described.

4.2 Research

Research is the means by which occupational therapists generate evidence to expand upon the professions theories which is necessary to ensure the development and value of occupational therapy (Taylor, 2017). It was explored whether this study is a form of basic or applied research. Basic research explores a particular phenomenon to further understand the theory and principles however applied research focuses on a particular theory to apply to specific practice (Merriam, 2009). From an occupational perspective, basic research includes the development of theory in occupational science to understand occupational beings (Taylor, 2017), whereas applied research is specific to research (Taylor, 2017) such as the investigation of outcomes following a particular intervention. This study meets the descriptors of basic research in that it contributes

knowledge to the discipline of occupational science through providing a broader understanding of school connectedness and its relation to occupations.

4.3 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is interested in how people develop meaning to the experiences they have in their world (Merriam, 2009). It aims to understand social realities (Leavy, 2014). Qualitative research takes place in the person's natural context to interpret subjective experience, actions, interactions and social contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Taylor, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research utilises an inductive approach whereby they strive to collect data to develop concepts and theory rather than a deductive approach which tests hypotheses or theory (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative research accepts subjectivity of perspectives rather than objectivity and therefore, there is not one truth awaiting to be understood (Leavy, 2014). This study is evidently a qualitative study as it aims to understand this sixth classes group perception of school connectedness.

4.4 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher is viewed to be the core data gathering and analysis instrument (Merriam, 2009). There are many advantages to this including the ability of the human to be adaptive and responsive, the exploration of non-verbal communication, the ability to seek further clarification from participants (Merriam, 2009). However, each researcher has their own biases that can impact their interpretation of findings. It is not possible to disregard the researchers position and assumptions on the study (Nayar & Stanley, 2014). Rather a researcher must outline their position and how they believe it to have an influence throughout the research process (Nayar & Stanley, 2014). It is necessary for researchers to identify which

preconceptions they have that could impact their interpretations, rather than seeking to eliminate these preconceptions (Merriam, 2009). The researcher kept a reflexive journal to detail the research throughout the process.

4.5 Philosophical Basis

It is important for researchers to understand the philosophical foundations that shape their methodologies (Taylor, 2017). A researcher must understand their epistemological and ontological perspectives that makes up their paradigm.

4.5.1 Paradigm

A paradigm is the perspective that is utilised to guide the research (Leavy, 2014). An interpretive paradigm is used throughout this study. Qualitative research rejects positivism (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011) which is the assumption that there is one objective reality that can be determined with the appropriate study design that is not impacted by the individual researcher (Guest et al., 2013). Rather, it adopts an interpretivism approach (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011) which is the position that our understanding of reality is socially constructed by people including researchers, and therefore, there are many subjective realities (Guest et al., 2013). Essentially researchers construct knowledge which means that social constructivism informs interpretivism and therefore, leads to qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). However, qualitative research is more than solely interpreting people's meaning of experiences but challenges and critiques throughout the research process (Merriam, 2009). It involves critical analysis that aims to address a particular injustice to be able impact change (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research developed as people began to critique from an interpretive perspective rather than solely positivism which led to alternative ways of thinking amongst many disciplines aiming for social justice (Leavy, 2014).

In this study, it is understood that there are many interpretations of school connectedness that is individual to each student. It is understood that each student will have a different reality of what constitutes their sense of school connectedness. Throughout the data gathering, the researcher will question the various perspectives of each participant to gain greater insight.

4.5.2 Ontology

An ontology is the philosophical belief about the nature of reality, and how we categorise what is real (Leavy, 2014; Pentland et al., 2018). This study is based on a relativism ontology. Relativism views reality as humans subjective experience and therefore, as there are multiple humans, there are multiple realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, it is the belief that there are multiple experiences of school connectedness.

4.5.3 Epistemology

In research, epistemology includes how things are known and how this belief is justified including how the researcher works and how researchers view their role as researcher (Leavy, 2014; Pentland et al., 2018). The epistemology for this study is social constructivism. Social constructivism is an interpretive perspective where people develop their own meanings of their world following their experiences through social interaction with other people (Creswell, 2013). In this study it is understood that a student's school connectedness is determined based on their interactions with others as school is a social outlet.

4.6 Methodology

4.6.1.Theory of Case Study Research

Qualitative research is an umbrella term for many research approaches (Leavy, 2014) including phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study. All these methodologies have some similar characteristics including, the aim to understand meaning, the researcher is the primary instrument of data gathering and analysis, utilises an inductive approach, and the outcome is significantly descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A qualitative case study methodology was chosen for this study as it allows for rich, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues (Crowe et al., 2011) such as school connectedness. A qualitative case study methodology enables the researcher to analyse a bounded system or many bounded systems through the collection of in-depth descriptive data from many methods over a period of time to develop a themed description of the case (Creswell, 2013). Case study research is used for real life experiences when the phenomenon and its context are of interest to the researcher (Salminen et al., 2006). A case study can be used through a qualitative or quantitative approach. This study utilises a qualitative case study methodology.

The case study approach has three pivotal authors; Robert Yin, Robert Stake, and Sharan Merriam. Although these methodologists oppose and agree on different aspects of the case study methodology, a researcher can utilise different components of each perspective to develop their individual research design that best fits their study (Yazan, 2015).

Yin (2014) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) within its real-life context, especially when

the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident". Therefore, Yin (2014) highlights that the interpretations and context are inseparable. Yin is a positivist, and therefore seeks to discover the objective truth in a study. Consequently, his focus is on the reliability, validity, and generalisability of a study (Yazan, 2015). Furthermore, Yin promotes the utilisation of mixed-methods frameworks. Due to Yin's positivist outlook, this case study will not entirely encompass Yin's theory as the researcher does not believe there is one objective truth that determines a student's sense of connectedness. As stated, this study adopts a social constructivist approach and therefore, does not align entirely with a Yinian outlook. However, although not encompassing this approach, this study values Yin's identification for the necessity of strong rigour and is also able to be placed within Yin's categories of case study.

In contrast to Yin's perspective, Stake (1995) adopts a social constructivist approach and therefore, believes that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered, and there are multiple realities. Although Stake did not define what he believes a case study is, he did highlight its key characteristics. Firstly, a case study is holistic which incorporates the case and its contexts (Yazan, 2015). A case study is empirical which highlights that the researcher constitutes the study based on their own interpretations (Yazan, 2015). A case study is interpretive, which as stated means the researcher will form their own perspective (Yazan, 2015). A case study is emphatic meaning the researchers reflects on the experiences of participants (Yazan, 2015). Stake (1998) believes a case study to be a flexible approach and identifies that there is no exact stage that data gathering and analysis starts.

Merriam aligns more so with Stake than Yin. Merriam (1998) demonstrates a social constructivist perspective where multiple interpretations are developed based

on people being social beings that interact to develop their reality. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define a case study as "the in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system". Merriam (1998) identified that a case study is descriptive in that it develops an in-depth description of the topic of interest, particularistic in that its emphasis is on a particular bounded system, and heuristic as it enhances others understanding of the topic (Yazan, 2015). Qualitative case studies are also inductive in that they aim to establish generalisations, concepts, or hypotheses from the data (Merriam, 1988). Like Stake, Merriam also takes a flexible approach to the research process, however, she does outline a phased description of the research process which aids researchers to keep to the point of their study (Yazan, 2015). Due to this study's social constructivist perspective, it will take the perspective of Merriam and Stake. However, it will utilise the data gathering, and analysis process established by Merriam to ensure informative guidelines throughout the study (Merriam, 1988). Although, this study is not in agreement with Yin's positivist outlook, it does incorporate its requirement for rigour, importance of focusing on the research question throughout the data gathering and analysis process, and its categorisation of different case studies.

The qualitative case study approach was established in educational research to evaluate the experience of curriculum development and is now one of the most common qualitative research methodologies to be used in educational research (Taylor & Francis, 2017; Yazan, 2015). Case study research has progressed over the past 40 years and different approaches to its understanding and application have evolved (Harrison et al., 2017). The use of the case study methodology in qualitative research has been used in many disciplines and particularly in occupational therapy in recent years as it can explore a particular delivery intervention, use of theoretical concepts, and clinical reasoning to contribute to practice knowledge (Hercegovac et al., 2020).

4.6.2 Characteristics of this Qualitative Case Study

Stake (1995) describes case studies as either instrument, intrinsic or collective. This is an instrumental case study which means that the purpose of the study is to understand a particular issue and one bounded case is selected to examine this issue (Stake 1995; Creswell, 2013). In this study, the particular issue to be examined is school connectedness and its effect on student's occupations. The one bounded case under examination is sixth class students and their school personnel in a mixed primary school in Ireland. An intrinsic case alternatively would be a case that is unique and unusual and therefore is being described in detail (Creswell, 2013). However, the researcher aimed to purposively select a school that is like many other mainstream schools in Ireland in order to investigate the concept of school connectedness rather than the uniqueness of this school in particular. A collective case study is Stake's description for many cases under comparison.

A collective case study from a Merriam perspective is known as a multi-case study however, they both encompass more than one case under investigation. A researcher can choose between a single case study whereby one unit or case is analysed or a multi-case study design whereby many cases are analysed and compared (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988). Multi-case studies can be beneficial in that they provide many perspectives and therefore, an increased amount of generalisability (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1988). However, the more cases a researcher must study, the less depth is given to each individual case (Creswell, 2013). Given that the phenomenon of school connectedness is evolving, complex, and not well established in occupational therapy, a single case study that provides an in-depth understanding of the case is appropriate.

4.7 Recruitment & Participants

Throughout each of the case study methodology seminal authors works, the most significant perspective that they all agree on is that the most important characteristic of this methodology is 'the case' itself which aims to understand one thing well. 'The case' is also known as 'a bounded system' or 'a unit of analysis'. This bounded system has boundaries which define it such as a single person, a group, or a community (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study's bounded system will include all sixth-class students in a mixed primary school that wish to take part in a projective technique component. Ten of these students will participate in a focus group and individual semi-structured interviews. Any school personnel who wish to take part will participate in an individual semi-structured interview.

It is necessary to determine the boundaries of the specified case that will be studied (Taylor, 2017). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for student participants in this study is outlined in table 5 and for school personnel participants in table 6.

Table 5

Student Participants Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Students	
Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
Student is in sixth class.	Student is not in sixth class.
Student attends a mainstream mixed primary school in Ireland.	Student is not in a mainstream mixed primary school.
Student has given informed assent.	Student does not give informed assent.
Student's parent/ guardian has given informed consent.	Student's parent/ guardian has not given informed consent

Table 6

School Personnel Participants Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

School Personnel	
Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
School personnel works in a mainstream mixed primary school.	School personnel does not work in the mainstream mixed school in this study.
School personnel comes into regular contact with sixth class students participating in the study.	School personnel is not in regular contact with the students participating in this study.
School personnel has given informed consent.	School personnel does not give informed consent.

There are various reasons that this participant group were chosen. Firstly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) highlighted the need for research globally that hears children and young people's point of view (UNCRC, 1989). This publication led to a significant change in child wellbeing research as prior to this child wellbeing was mainly understood from an adult perspective and a little understanding of what wellbeing means to children (Newton & Ponting, 2013). Furthermore, there has also been an increase in the emphasis of focusing on children's current wellbeing rather than how their wellbeing will be as they become adults (Newton & Ponting, 2013).

Moreover, based on the UNCRC, The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (DCYA, 2015) was developed in Ireland to include children's voices in the continuous establishment of school policy and school operations. The need for all school professionals to encompass student's

views into future school planning is required to align with this strategy (Forde et al., 2018). Consequently, the researcher understands that as school-based occupational therapy continues to grow in Ireland, the student's voice must continuously be of critical importance to align with children's rights and Irish educational strategy.

Additionally, school connectedness has been found to vary between genders with the evidence displaying that girls typically have increased school connectedness compared to the boys (Crespo et al., 2013). While this study does not aim to address the complex correlation between gender and school connectedness (Nickerson et al., 2011), it does acknowledge the differing experiences and therefore, the researcher understands the importance of including a mixed gender primary school in this study to gather both perspectives.

Furthermore, the participation of sixth-class students was chosen rather than any other class in primary school. Firstly, sixth-class students were chosen as the researcher recognises that the concept of school connectedness can be challenging to understand and therefore, it is understood that sixth-class students are most likely to be able comprehend this concept given their age and development of understanding. Sixth-class students were also chosen as the most appropriate as school connectedness is a concept that can change and evolve over time. As school connectedness can change throughout the school years, sixth-class students will have the most experience of school connectedness and therefore, are likely to be able provide the richest insight into the phenomenon. Additionally, sixth-class students were chosen based on their developmental stage. According to WHO (2014), adolescence is a person between the age of 10 to 19 years old and therefore, includes sixth class students who are typically between 11 and 12 years old. Although school connectedness is important for every age group, school connectedness has been found to become increasingly important for

adolescence (Arif et al., 2019). Adolescence is a developmental stage where the child becomes more reliant on relationships outside of their family such as their classmates and teachers and therefore, the need to be connected to a larger social network increase (Blum, 2005). Furthermore, peer victimisation and bullying are most prevalent in adolescence (Arif et al., 2019) which are two factors that have been found to significantly effect school connectedness.

Lastly, most current research on school connectedness considers the views of students, rather than adults and while student perspective is invaluable, it is also important to gather school personnel perspective given their responsibility in promoting supportive environments for these students (Biag, 2016). The researcher also made the choice to include any school personnel that interact with the students in the study rather than solely educators. This decision was made as it is understood that school connectedness is impacted by more than just the academic classroom. School connectedness can be shaped by many non-academic periods of school which all school personnel are involved in (Bazyk et al., 2018). Consequently, all school personnel have a role to play in student's school connectedness and therefore, all school personnel were invited to participate in this study.

4.7.1 Pilot Study

Case study theorists do not highlight the importance of conducting a pilot study in its entirety and rather, they emphasise the need to pilot each data gathering instrument (Yazan, 2015). For this reason, the researcher rather than piloting the study with an entire bounded system, piloted each data instrument with a twelve-year-old girl who is not part of the bounded system participating in the study. Particularly due to the online nature of the interviews and focus group in this study, a pilot study was vital to avoid technical difficulties.

4.8 Data Gathering Methods

Case study methodology embraces many methods of data gathering to capture the complexity and a holistic view of the case under study (Taylor & Francis, 2013; Yazan, 2015). It requires the use of more than one method of data gathering to develop data triangulation (Crowe et al., 2011). It is understood that once precise research questions are established, there can be more flexibility in the research process (Yazan, 2015). The main methods proposed for case study research include interviews, observation, and document review (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1998; Yin, 2009). As this study works with children participants, further methods to elicit data from them were examined.

Semi- structured interviews were proposed for use in this case study with school personnel and student participants. See appendix A for student semi-structured interview guide and see appendix B for school personnel semi-structured interview guide. Interviews in research allow the researcher to gather a person's feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Merriam, 1988). It is the most commonly used method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016a). There are three types of interviews; structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Semi-structured interviews were proposed rather than structured or unstructured interviews as they allow for open ended questions which can keep the interview focused on the concept yet allows the participants to express their opinion and what they deem to be relevant (Brinkmann, 2014; Taylor, 2017; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Semi-structured interviews involve having a list of questions or concepts however, they are not ordered or precisely worded ahead of time and rather flow into the natural conversation (Merriam, 1988). The interview method allows for trust and rapport to be built between the researcher and interviewee which promotes further discussion on school connectedness particularly because this may be

a personal subject for some students. Interviews allow for participants to express thoughts, feelings, or interpretations that a researcher cannot understand unless they ask (Merriam, 1988). Interviews can also create a comfortable space for participants to share their experiences due to the individual nature they may not get an opportunity to express in a focus group with other participants present (Brinkmann, 2014; Taylor, 2017).

A focus group was also proposed for data gathering with student participants to explore their sense of school connectedness further. Focus groups involve group discussion focused on a specific concept that is managed by the researcher who encourages all participants to share their experiences (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). Focus groups hold many benefits including gathering an understanding of people's experiences and thoughts on a particular subject and engaging in group discussion which can challenge and enhance each person's thinking (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006; Taylor, 2017). Focus groups allow for a large amount of data from multiple perspectives to be gathered (Taylor, 2017). The main reason for conducting a focus group is to have people interaction as part of the research process. This interaction enables participants to gain a further understanding from other participants, challenging other participants perspectives, finding a commonality in shared experiences which promotes further engagement, and the creation of further awareness of aspect of the concept participants may not have considered before (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). This is particularly beneficial to this case study as school connectedness can be a complex concept for children to understand, and therefore, by participating in group discussion they can assist one another's learning while challenging one another also. Furthermore, it is known that focus groups can enhance empowerment of participants as if they are chosen to participate in the group it is

acknowledged that they know a significant amount about the concept and therefore, the emphasis is put on their knowledge and perspective (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). In this case, it is highlighted that sixth-class students were chosen to participate as they have the greatest experience on school connectedness in the primary school environment and their opinions are highly valued. School connectedness is also a concept that is closely based on the social environment, and therefore, group interaction amongst classmates was key in this study. While focus groups have many advantages, they also have disadvantages including participants responses being altered due to the influence of others in the group, participants not expressing all their thoughts due to other people being present and participants not feeling like they have got a chance to express all their thoughts (Acocella et al., 2012). However, due to these disadvantages, participants also engaged in an interview. See appendix C for student focus group guide.

Due to the many interactions between students in the focus group, observation was also proposed as a method in this study. Observation is often utilised throughout the data gathering process. Observation allows a researcher to record behaviour as it occurs (Merriam, 1988). Observation is the best technique to be used for an activity or situation (Merriam, 1988). Observation was proposed to be used for the activities in the focus group. Merriam (1988) discusses a range of components of observation that a researcher must consider. Firstly, the setting must be considered which includes the environment, context and how it effects the participant (Merriam, 1988). The participants also must be examined to include their roles and how many of them there are (Merriam, 1988). The researcher must also observe how the participants engage in the activity and with others during the activity (Merriam, 1988). The frequency of the observation or interaction must also be examined (Merriam, 1988). Lastly, subtle

factors that may not be as planned or prominent such as nonverbal communication must be explored by the researcher (Merriam, 1988). Stake (1998) explains how observation is a vital part of case study research as it gives a greater level of detail to add to the story to allow readers to understand.

Document review was proposed as another method. As schools are required to develop various policies and plans, documents could be made easily accessible and also provided a lot of detail on the context of the case. The purpose of collecting data from documents is often to gather data from sources that were not intended to serve the study and therefore, are not subject to as many limitations as other methods such as interviews or observation (Merriam, 1988). While documents may suggest written materials, data can be utilised from any range of physical sources that are not interviews or observation (Merriam, 1988). Additionally, documents may not be produced for research purposes, they can provide rich data in conjunction with other methods (Merriam, 1988). Documents can often be easily accessible and provide detailed data about the case context (Merriam, 1988). One example of a document used in case studies in schools includes the school improvement plan as they can give insight into the school's perception of their practice (Stake, 1998). While many of the documents that the researcher hoped to review were developed prior to this study such as policies and the school improvement plan, the researcher also planned to ask all students to complete a student pack which included three projective techniques (see section 4.11.1 for specific details of this pack). Projective techniques are beneficial in assisting to answer complex research questions and allow participants to express their thoughts through an alternative format (Van der Vaart et al., 2018). As there has been a focus on research with children over the past few years due to the amendment in Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

(1989) which highlighted the need to listen and understand the child's perspective on matters that concerned them (UNCRC, 1989). Projective techniques is a form of creative research which can be useful to engage children in reflective practice based on particular concepts such as school connectedness (Leigh, 2020). Projective techniques such as drawings are useful in research to allow participants an alternative method to express their thoughts rather than verbal discussion (Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019). However, projective techniques such as drawings should not be used alone due to the need for deep insight into the case to avoid misinterpretation (Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019). Utilising participatory methods in research such as drawings is known as a 'mosaic' approach which allows researchers to utilise these creative methods to form a full picture of the child's perspective (Clark, 2005). The researcher provided the school with some options for a creative projective technique. The school then chose what they believed would be most appropriate and worthwhile for these students. Creative research is context specific and its use depends on the knowledge, skills, preferences and abilities of the participants in their specific context (Van Der Vaart et al., 2018). Therefore, the researcher is aware that the school are best positioned to choose this exercise as they interact with these students daily.

4.9 Recruitment Process

As discussed, this is an instrumental case study and therefore, a school was picked based on its mainstream nature and ability to present a likely picture of school connectedness across many schools in Ireland. This school was studied based on one of the research supervisor's connection with the school and therefore, their willingness to participate. An information email was sent to the principal followed by a follow-up phone call (see appendix D). A pack was then sent to students and their parents which contained separate information sheets for parents (see appendix E) and students (see

appendix F). Student assent forms (see appendix G) and parental consent forms (see appendix H) were also sent. Student also received a child friendly "get to know the researcher" sheet (see appendix I). School personnel also received an information sheet (see appendix J) and consent form (see appendix K). All willing students then completed the projective technique exercises (see appendix L). All students were also provided with several statements related to school connectedness that could be rated on a Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). These statements were provided to aid student understanding of the concept of school connectedness due to the phenomenon being complex. This was decided after the pilot study as it was evident that the concept of school connectedness was challenging to understand. These statements were adapted from School Connectedness Scale (Lohmeier & Lee, 2011), Perceived School Experiences Scale (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2012), and the Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (Renshaw et al., 2015). However, these statements were not used for data gathering and therefore, they were not analysed. They were merely to support student understanding. See appendix M for full statement list. From these students, ten students were chosen at random to participate in the focus group and semi-structured interviews. All willing school personnel were welcome to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Non-probability convenience sampling was utilised when selecting a school for this case study. Convenience sampling was necessary to be able to access a school setting that were willing to engage in the research (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002) However, once the school was chosen and accessible, non-probability purposive sampling was applied to this study when choosing specifically sixth class students and the school personnel that work with them. Purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting a specific

bounded system as it can purposefully inform an understanding of the concept of school connectedness (Creswell, 2013).

4.10 Recruited Participants

The first cohort of participants in this study included sixth class students from a mixed-gender primary school in Ireland. These students are typically between the ages of 11 and 12. The first phase of the research which involved projective techniques included 25 students which was all students in the sixth class who agreed to participate. This consisted of 13 girls and 12 boys. 10 of these students participated in a focus group. These students were chosen at random and consisted of 6 girls and 4 boys. There was a range of diversity amongst the students in this cohort. Each of these students engaged in an individual semi-structured interview. The details of these students are outlined in table 7.

Table 7

Student Participant Information

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Details
1. Kate	Female
2. Luke	Male
3. Molly	Female
4. Emily	Female
5. Mark	Male
6. Sophie	Female

7. Sam	Male
8. Lucy	Female
9. Joe	Male
10. Jill	Female

The second cohort of participants in this study include school personnel that have regular contact with the sixth class students in this study. The first participant included the sixth class teacher. The second participant was the fifth class teacher and female camogie and Gaelic football coach. This participant had this group of students in her class the year before and also still coaches them in Gaelic football. The third participant was the fourth class teacher and male hurling and Gaelic football coach who similarly still coaches these students. The fourth participant was the deputy principal of the school and one of the special education teachers. He is in regular contact with these students in his role as deputy principal, and he also has more regular contact with those of them who receive special education support. Each of these participants engaged in an individual semi-structured interview. School personnel participant details are presented in table 8.

Table 8

School Personnel Participant Information

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Details
1. Tom	Deputy Principal Supports newly qualified teachers

	Special Education Teacher for senior students Main caseload includes students with ASD and dyslexia and developmental coordination disorder 13 years teaching experience (3 years in special education)
2. Peter	4th Class Teacher Male Gaelic Football and Hurling (GAA) coach for senior students 2 years teaching in this school (always 4th class- has thought 6th class in another school)
3. Anne	5th Class Teacher Female Gaelic Football and Camogie (GAA) coach for senior students 5 years teaching (always 5th class in this school)
4. John	6th Class Teacher 11 years teaching (3 years in 3rd class, 8 years in sixth class).

4.11 Data Gathering

The methods used in this study included projective techniques, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews. The methods used in this study are from a Stake (1998) perspective in that they were flexible. This study abided by Stake's (1998)

belief that the course of the study cannot be entirely chartered in advance. This was seen in this study as the projective techniques influenced the discussion in the focus group and consequently the focus group influenced the semi-structured interviews.

The audio data gathered amounted to 470 minutes (7 hours and 50 minutes) of which 249 minutes of school personnel audio data and 221 minutes of student audio data (80 minutes of focus group and 141 minutes of semi structured interviews). All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and were transcribed verbatim.

4.11.1 Student Data Gathering

Student data gathering included 1) projective techniques 2) focus group 3) semi-structured interviews 4) observation.

Students were provided with a 'student pack'. The first section of this pack contained a series of Likert style questions based on school connectedness. These questions were not intended for use during analysis and rather to give students a brief background and understanding of school connectedness. In the second section of the student pack, students were asked to draw what makes them feel like they are connected or belong to the school. Drawing was chosen by the school principal. This method gave students another technique to express their thoughts. Lastly, students were asked to identify three things that make them feel connected to their school, three things that make them feel they do not connect to their school, and three activities that were affected by how connected they felt to their school. These responses were then utilised in the student focus group. This stage of the research was open to all sixth class students who consented to participate. These responses were kept anonymous and then used for the student focus group. 25 student packs were completed. Student

drawings will be used to present findings throughout this thesis, however, further drawings that are not used within the thesis can be found in appendix N.

In this study, an online focus group was facilitated with 10 sixth class students. Due to Covid-19 restrictions in Ireland at the time of this study, this focus group had to take place online. This group took place on Microsoft Teams. It involved 10 students and two researchers. There was also one teacher from the school present based on safety protocol. The students were together in school and both researchers were on separate computers in different locations. While an in-person focus group was originally the preferred method, this could not happen due to Covid-19. With clear group rules, this group ran smoothly. As technology had been trialled prior to the group, there was no technical difficulties. However, it was difficult to encourage quieter students to participate as they were more likely not to place themselves in centre view of the camera. This warranted further reason for individual semi-structured interviews following the focus group. The focus group entailed an introduction whereby everyone got to introduce themselves and say what they missed about being in school the most during school closure (as they had just returned). The idea of school connectedness was first explored and what it meant to these students. The answers from the entire class group from section two of the student pack were then used. All the answers were placed on the table and the students in the focus group were asked to explain them, categorise and order them. This was carried out for all three groups (what made students feel like they connect; what makes students feel like they do not connect; what activities are affected by students sense of connectedness). See appendix B for full student focus group plan.

All students who participated in the focus group then participated in individual interviews. Therefore, ten student interviews took place. Each student interview

averaged between 20-30 minutes. These interviews took place over two days. Microsoft Teams was used to conduct the interview. This was a semi-structured interview and so the researcher had a list of topics to explore throughout the interview. This interview asked students about their drawings, their understanding of school connectedness, what promotes and hinders their connectedness, and their experience of school closure. See appendix C for full interview guide.

Ongoing observation occurred throughout the research gathering in interviews and the focus group. Observation particularly occurred in the focus group when students conducted the categorisation task. Observation was required to explore their interactions with one another to decide the categorisation during the poster task. The researcher observed students form a team to complete a task which highlighted their level of connectedness amongst them.

4.11.2 School Personnel Data Gathering

School personnel data gathering included; semi-structured interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews took place on Microsoft Teams. Four school personnel participated in an interview. School personnel interviews varied from 45 minutes to 120 minutes. These interviews covered a range of topics including their understanding of school connectedness, techniques used to promote connectedness, influences on connectedness, the effect of school closure, and staff connectedness. See appendix D for full school personnel interview guide.

4.12 Data Analysis

Data analysis must be conducted systematically to ensure that the reader can understand the study's transferability to another setting (Malterud, 2001). It is vital to incorporate a detailed description of the data analysis process and rationale for

decisions to allow the reader to evaluate the study's trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis was utilised in this study. Thematic analysis is a highly flexible approach that can provide rich, detailed and complex data (Nowell et al.., 2017). Thematic analysis enables the research to understand similarities, differences, and unexpected findings amongst the dataset (Nowell et al., 2017). The aim of analysis in case study research is to develop assertions (also known as propositions [Yin, 2009]) whereby a research highlights their summary and claims about the case study (Stake, 1995). In single case study research, analysis can be embedded or holistic (Yin, 2009). Embedded means that the single case study involves more than one unit of analysis within the one case (Yin, 2009). However, a holistic analysis involves analysing the entire case as one unit of analysis. In this single case study, although different population groups were examined, it was analysed holistically.

The data analysis procedure developed by Creswell (2013) was followed in this case study. While Creswell's procedure was utilised, other works were also incorporated such as Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995). However, while this is outlined as a procedure, Creswell (2013) emphasises that it is not a linear process, and data gathering, analysis and reporting writing are not distinct steps in the research process.

The following steps were followed (Creswell, 2013):

Step 1: Organizing the Data

To begin, data needs to be organised (Creswell, 2013). It is often the case that data needs to be converted from audio tape to written text (Creswell, 2013). The transcription service through Microsoft Stream was utilised. However, due to large inconsistencies, the researcher then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. This

aided the initial process of data analysis. Merriam (1988) explained that all data must be gathered and organized either chronologically or topically. This is then known as the case record.

Step 2: Reading and Memoing

All the data should then be read while the researcher makes notes and comments. It is also useful for the researcher to keep a list of striking ideas throughout reading the data. The notes taken throughout should organise, integrate, abstract, and synthesize to be the first order of data (Merriam, 1988). The researcher should also use their field notes throughout this process (Creswell, 2013). This should search for patterns and regularities in the data to form categories.

Step 3: Coding Process

The next step is to develop codes (also known as categories) (Creswell, 2013). This is a key step in qualitative research and is accompanied by rich description of the setting particularly in case study research (Creswell, 2013). Coding involves aggregating the data into various categories by labelling various components (Creswell, 2013). In case studies, direct interpretation and categorical aggregation must be used in data analysis (Stake, 1995). Direct interpretation involves "drawing key meanings from even single instances" (Stake, 1995). It involves looking at a single instance and drawing meaning from it (Creswell, 2013). Categorical aggregation however, involves "sums or distribution of coded data" (Stake, 1995). It entails exploring a collection of instances to emerge relevant topics from the data (Creswell, 2013). Particularly in instrumental case studies, as the aim is to understand phenomenon and relationships, there is a greater need to focus on categorical

aggregation to understand the complexity of the case. Both categorical aggregation and direct interpretation rely on the search for patterns.

Step 4: Theming

Once codes were developed, data was then synthesised to form themes (Creswell, 2013). This includes grouping codes together to form a few themes. The various themes are analysed specific to the context of the case. This involves elaborating on codes, exploring subthemes within themes, labels themes, exploring relationships between themes, and justification of themes (Bryman, 2016b). These themes are specific to the research focus, and provides the basis of theoretical understanding of the dataset. These themes were reviewed by the research supervisors.

Step 5: Interpreting the Data

Interpreting the data involves "making sense of the data" (Creswell, 2013). It entails expanding beyond the codes and themes to understand the data. This also involves linking the data to existing literature (Creswell, 2013).

It is essential for researchers to understand naturalistic generalisations in case study research when interpreting data. Naturalistic generalisations are "interpretations based largely on experience" (Stake, 1995). These generalisations made by the researcher need to be understood by the readers. There is various techniques a researcher can use to validate naturalistic generalisations. These include, providing sufficient raw data, describing the case in detail, and explaining the methods used with the case (Stake, 1995). With sufficient context and description given, readers can decide whether to apply this to further cases (Creswell, 2013). This study will give a thick description of the case context in the findings.

4.12.1 Data Storage

Following a meeting with data management personnel in University College Cork, the correct procedure was taken to storing data. A Microsoft team that is only accessible to the research and two research supervisors contained the primary data. Back-up secondary data was then stored on a Google Drive that was also only accessible by the researcher and research supervisors. As advised data was stored in four categories;

- Raw data
- Transcribed data
- Analysed Data
- Metadata- all additional data such as information letters, emails etc.

4.13 Trustworthiness

Case studies are appropriate to address complex research questions such as the development of further understanding in practice (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Harrison et al., 2017). For example, the development of school connectedness in school-based occupational therapy practice. However, the main criticism of case study research is generalisability and therefore, the ability of the study to be able to be generalised across other settings due to its research methods and small sample sizes (Crowe et al., 2011; Hercegovac et al 2020; Yin, 2009). Additionally, while Yin (2009) spoke of generalisability as he comes from a positivistic perspective, it has been argued that in qualitative research, transferability is often the goal rather than generalisability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness refers to the degree of which the findings of the study are an accurate representation of the participants experiences of the concept under study (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). This research agrees with Yin's (2009)

perspective of the vital need for a detailed focus on the rigour of a case study. However, due to Yin's positivist views, he focuses on validity and reliability. However, as this is a qualitative study from an interpretivist paradigm, the emphasis will be on credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These areas can be addressed through close attention to trustworthiness, precise research practices and write up used to allow professionals to determine the transferability of the particular case to their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Firstly, the credibility of this study was considered. Credibility refers to the accuracy of the participants views and the researcher's interpretation and representation of these views (Cope, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). This study achieved credibility through the use of member checking which involves clarifying interpretations of findings with participants to ensure accuracy (Nowell et al., 2017; Taylor, 2017). This study also strived for credibility through the use of data gathering triangulation whereby using enough methods to gather all the necessary data, as well as participant triangulation whereby the researcher studied the area of interest from as many relevant perspectives to include the students and their school personnel (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Taylor, 2017). As outlined, this study used a range of data gathering methods to ensure credibility. This study also gathered the perspectives of the students that this study concerned and the school personnel closest to them. Furthermore, this study aimed for credibility through a pilot study of the data gathering methods. Additionally, credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the case to ensure accuracy of findings (Creswell, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). This was ensured by the researcher spending sufficient time with the participants to ensure saturation of findings which is when the researcher reaches a stage that they are no longer collecting new information (Taylor, 2017). The researcher spent enough time gathering data in

the school to ensure triangulation was achieved. Credibility was also achieved by ensuring the researcher's reflexivity through the use of a reflexive journal which is a self-critical account of the research process, rationale for any decisions made, personal reflections, and daily operations of the research (Creswell, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). This is vitally important in a qualitative study given that the researcher is the main data gathering method known as the human instrument (Nowell et al, 2017; Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, the researcher is an active participant in the study and consequently must be aware that they have a significant effect on the engagement of participants (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). Finally, credibility was also achieved through peer debriefing which ensures another perspective on the data analysis and reviews perceived interpretations to ensure adequacy of findings (Nowell et al., 2017). This can allow for review of conflicting data and identify a need for further necessary data gathering (Taylor, 2017). The researcher supervisors reviewed the data analysis of this study throughout the research process.

Secondly, the dependability of the study was examined. Dependability in qualitative research refers to how stable the data are (Houghton et al., 2013) and therefore, the ability of an external source to follow the research as it is logical, traceable and well document (Cope, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). An audit trail was conducted in this study to ensure dependability to include records of the data, field notes, transcripts, and the mentioned reflexive journal. This ensured that there was evidence of the researcher's rationale for decisions and choices made to address any issues throughout the study (Nowell et al., 2017). Dependability was also achieved through the use of participant and method triangulation, mentioned above.

Thirdly, transferability of the study was analysed. Transferability is concerned with whether the findings of this study can be applied to another setting, in this case,

another school (Cope, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). This study will provide a rich a detailed explanation of the case studied to allow readers to make their own judgement on if the findings are transferable to their own setting (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Nowell et al., 2017). This research explicitly identified the case and its boundaries under study to allow the reader to compare its similarity with other settings (Creswell, 2013). Transferability was also achieved in this study through purposive sampling whereby the case chosen aimed to be a general case whereby many readers could relate. Single case study design has been frequently critiqued for its lack of generalisability given that is specific to one case and the effect context can have in every case. However, although it may not be able to be said that it is generalisable, through a detailed description of the context and rationale for conclusions, the findings can be transferable (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Due to the focus on one specific setting, it enables the researcher to explore a specific complex phenomenon (such as school connectedness from an occupational perspective) in detail rather than trying to understand it from a variety of perspectives (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

Lastly, confirmability was also emphasised after each of the other areas of trustworthiness. Confirmability was achieved when credibility, dependability, and transferability were established (Cope, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability relates to how the researcher's findings are consistent with the data and therefore, represents the participant's responses and not the researcher's views and therefore, a researcher from a similar viewpoint would gather similar findings from the same context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). This was established in this study through the use of direct quotes from the participants when presenting the findings, an audit trail and reflexivity (Houghton et al., 2013).

4.14 Ethics

A researcher must examine ethical considerations in relation to each aspect of the research process prior to and during the study (Creswell, 2013). Ethical approval was received for this study through the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in University College Cork (see appendix O).There were no unsolvable ethical concerns for this study. However, the following were considered.

The following ethical concerns were examined in relation to student participants; 1) power imbalance 2) incentives 3) safety 4) comprehension of the study 5) potential emotional distress.

4.14.1 Power Imbalance

The researcher acknowledges that students may have felt overwhelmed from discussing this matter with a person they have not met before. All efforts were made by the researcher to decrease this power imbalance by conducting the focus groups and interviews in an informal format. Researchers wore casual clothing to create an informal environment. Directions and questions used for all parts of the student data gathering were piloted with a student in fifth class from another school. Language and wording were changed accordingly to ensure it was appropriate to the level of understanding of this age group.

4.14.2 Incentives

The students who participated in this study received a certificate of appreciation following the study. However, this was not used as an incentive to participate in the study as students were not aware that they would receive it until the data gathering was complete.

4.14.3 Safety

The researcher is Garda Vetted by University College Cork. See appendix P for Garda Vetting approval. It was acknowledged that if at any point throughout the study, the researcher was concerned about the safety of a child, the designated liaison person for child protection in the school and the project supervisor would be informed.

4.14.4 A comprehension of the study

The researcher was aware that the concept of the study may have been difficult for children to understand. Each child was informed of the study through a child-friendly information sheet (see appendix F) and their parents were informed through a separate detailed information sheet (see appendix E). The researcher and the project supervisors provided their contact details should the participants or their parents have required further information about the study.

4.14.5 Potential emotional distress

The researcher understands the concept of school connectedness may have caused distress for students due to lack of understanding, or perhaps lack of a sense of connectedness. All efforts were made to reduce this by highlighting and normalising that many students do not feel a sense of connectedness to their school environment and that this is normal. Students were made aware that they could take a break or end their participation in the study at any stage.

The following ethical concern was examined in relation to school personnel participants; 1) potential lack of clarity.

4.14.6 Potential lack of clarity

The researcher acknowledged that this concept of connectedness to the school environment may have been difficult to understand. The participants were provided

with a detailed information sheet explaining the study and they could ask the researcher any questions they had.

4.15 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research process and design utilised in this study. Justification is detailed for the decisions made in relation to the research design of this study. The preparation of this research design was formed with consideration of Covid-19 pandemic guidelines at the time the research took place. Ethical considerations were made, and the researcher ensured trustworthiness of the study throughout its design. This research design was implemented, and findings were generated which is outlined in chapter 5.

Chapter 5 : Context of the Case

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the phenomenon of school connectedness to sixth class students and the effect it has on their school-based occupations. The research questions that informed this study include; (1) What is the understanding of connectedness to the school environment from the perspectives of the student, teacher and school? (2) What are the determinants of connectedness in a school environment? (3) In what ways does School Connectedness impact Occupation Participation? This study is a single instrumental case study which means that while this study gathers students and school personnel's perspectives, their perspectives will not be compared and rather these findings will be illustrated to create a holistic picture of this case to examine the issue of school connectedness. Therefore, in instrumental case studies, it is essential to give a thick description of the case. The instrumental case under examination is clarified in table 9.

Table 9

The Case Study Details

The Case	The case is the phenomenon of sixth class student's school connectedness.
The Context	The context is a sixth class group of students and their school personnel in a rural primary school in Ireland.
The Unit of Analysis	The unit of analysis is a sixth class group in a primary school in Ireland.

5.2. Specific School Context

This study is a single case study and therefore focused on one primary school in Ireland. This primary school of interest is located in a small rural town of Ireland. This town consists of a primary school, a church, a pub, a graveyard, and a GAA club. The population of this town is small and they have great pride in their community. The school is intrinsically linked to their community, GAA club and parish. For example, a teacher in the school who grew up in the town described it as *"So either your school community or your parish or whatever so in the school where in [Town Name] I suppose it's all the kids that come into the school are all in relation to GAA they all play for the same club. There's no other clubs come in so you know. There's no kind of sense of diluting, like that sounds a bit bad, but there's no sense of pulling from different areas everyone is a [Town Name] person and there there's definitely a strong links to community".* It was also described that many of the teachers also are from the local community.

The primary school serves 233 students. The school has approximately 18 school staff. This consists of one principal, deputy principal, nine class teachers, three special education teachers (SET), a few special needs assistants (SNAs), secretarial staff and caretaker. The school consists of a junior infants, senior infants, and first to sixth class with each class consisting of approximately 30 students each. This schools' main vision is to ensure a safe and happy learning environment to enable flourishment of all students. The school is of a Catholic ethos however, they welcome students of all backgrounds and cultures. This school promotes religion through the celebration of the holy communion and confirmation. The school also attends a "First Friday Mass" which takes place on the first Friday of each month and is organised by members of the parish in the community. A sixth class mass also takes place every

year as a graduating ceremony for the sixth class students in the local church. According to teachers, this graduating ceremony is shaped by religion. This school takes a family-centred approach in that they ensure the inclusion and involvement of the entire family in the student's school experience through various school open days, relaying of information regularly, Grandparents day, and parental meetings.

As mandated by the Department of Education, the school day is from, 9AM to 3PM. Most students get the school bus each morning. There are two breaktimes during the school day which is unstructured and students are free to participate in a range of activities if they wish. These activities are not organised by the teachers and students have a choice in what they would like to do, however, there is always two supervising teachers. Throughout the school week students engage in a range of subjects including Maths, English, Irish, Geography, History, Religion, SPHE, Art, Drama, Music, Physical Education, and Science which abide by the Department of Education curriculum. There is a big focus in this school that the sixth class students act as role models to the rest of the classes as they are oldest. For example, prior to Covid-19 restrictions, sixth class students would receive responsibilities around the school such as closing windows at the end of the school day to demonstrate to the school community that they are the responsible class. Sixth class students also prior to Covid-19 restrictions would engage in the Junior Entrepreneur Program which is an opportunity for students to invent a small product and advertise it within the school. Sixth and fifth class students also participate in a competition called Sciath na Scoil which is a GAA competition that allows students to play hurling and football matches against other schools.

Physically, this school has significantly large grounds of three acres. This consists of tarmacadamed space, grass space, and many built up tree spaces. While it

is identified that any physical accessibility accommodations can be made for any student's ability once sufficient notice is given, teachers have highlighted that the physical layout of the school can be difficult to navigate as it works in a square (with nothing in the middle of the square) with various extensions off to different sides. There is also a sensory room recently placed in the school. Aesthetically, the school is bright and creative however, it is up to teach individual teacher to make their individual classrooms a welcoming environment.

5.3 Wellbeing in this school

The Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme has been part of the primary school curriculum in Ireland since 1999. The purpose of SPHE is to promote personal development, health, and wellbeing of each student by fostering supportive relationships and integration into the community (DES & Inspectorate, 2009). This school believe the goal of SPHE is to promote the personal development, health, and wellbeing of each student and support them in creating relationships and becoming an active citizen of their society (School Document Review-SPHE). SPHE consists of three strands; 'Myself', 'Myself and Others', and "Myself and the Wider Community' (DES & Inspectorate, 2009). The components of the SPHE curriculum include self-identity, taking care of my body, growing and changing, safety and protection, making decisions, myself and my family, my friends and other people, relating to others, developing citizenship, and media education (DES & Inspectorate 2009). The SPHE curriculum is delivered by teachers in Irish primary schools and it typically takes place in the classroom (DES & Inspectorate, 2009). The program also expands into the community by drawing assistance from external speakers and parents (DES & Inspectorate, 2009). The SPHE program is essential to the HSE health promoting schools' approach (HSE, 2013). There has been the development of many

evidenced-based programmes to promote wellbeing and foster the delivery of the SPHE program in primary schools in Ireland. These programmes help to direct the focus of learning and assist the school in making particular objectives. It is up to the discretion of the school to choose which evidenced-based program(s) suit their school environment. In this school, the structured wellbeing programs utilised include 'Walk Tall' and 'Stay Safe'. 'Walk Tall' involves giving children confidence, skills, attitudes, and knowledge to make healthy decisions in their life (PDST, Walk Tall, SPHE Curriculum, Dublin, 2016). 'Walk Tall' is adjusted to each class group. 'Walk Tall' is also tailored to the Department of Education SPHE curriculum. In sixth class it includes concepts such as self-identity, taking care of one's body, growing and changing, feelings and emotions, safety and protection, making decisions, other people, citizenship, media, and looking to the future (PDST, Walk Tall, SPHE Curriculum, Dublin, 2016). This program is implemented through active learning, drama, role-play, cooperative games, circle and group work, and cross-curricular links (PDST, Walk Tall, SPHE Curriculum, Dublin, 2016). 'Stay Safe' is a program to prevent child abuse and bullying. It explores children's self-protective skills, bullying, friendships, inappropriate touch, secrets, telling and stranger danger (Child Abuse Protection Programme, 2016). This school also uses 'Get Up! Stand Up!' (NEPS, 2017) to ensure effective transitioning from primary to post-primary school with the aim to reduce the risk of social isolation. They also use the 'Weaving Wellbeing' program which is a programme for 8-12 year olds to enhance positive mental health through positive psychology (Forman & Ross, 2015). In sixth class, this programme focuses on empowering beliefs. This school also utilises the 'Friends for Life' program. This program was developed by Dr. Paula Barrett in Australia and supported by the World Health Organisation. It enables students to deal with worry, stress and

change (NEPS et al, 2015b). This program is delivered at whole school and small group levels (tier one and tier two). NEPS psychologists also train teachers to deliver this program. However, it is worth noting that while there are various programmes and initiatives outlined, there is only 30 minutes in the school week allocated to SPHE.

Other actions currently taken in this school to promote wellbeing include a continuous review of the SPHE program within the school, the facilitation of yoga lessons within the school, daily check-in circles whereby each student gets to discuss how they are doing, promotion of zones of regulation, anti-bullying policies, anti-bullying week, friendship week, mindfulness, and attending regular training on mental health and wellbeing. The training teachers in this school have attended include training on the 'Stay Safe' programme, training on the 'Walk Tall programme, and training in the "Friends for Life' programme. This school utilises restorative practice to address bullying whereby a proactive approach to bullying is taken which ensures repairing of relationships, taking responsibility and taking measures to repair. A wellbeing committee has been formed within the school that strives to achieve an amber flag which recognises that the school is a healthy, inclusive environment that supports mental wellbeing. To get this amber flag the school are placing various posters around the school, hosting a wellbeing week, participating in mindfulness, and having a friendship week. This school is also a health promoting school and therefore, is continuously striving to enhance the health of the student body. There is also an emphasis on wellbeing in their whole school improvement plan (SIP). In this schools 2020-2021 SIP are three focus areas which include Gaelige (Irish language), wellbeing, and science. Within wellbeing the school plans to continue with 'Active Schools' and 'Health Promoting' initiatives and they all applied for the Amber Flag for this year. They plan to address wellbeing at every monthly staff meeting.

Throughout these initiatives they aim to ensure student voice. They also hope to focus on the outdoor classroom and wellbeing throughout the school.

This school has also achieved an active flag which is provided by the Department of Education and Skills to award schools that promote physical education throughout the student body. The school has a strong link with the local GAA club and therefore, hurling/ camogie and Gaelic football are the main sports in this school. The school also participate in other sports such as basketball, soccer, athletics, rugby, dance, and pitch and putt. While these activities can be considered extra-curricular, this particular school ensures that they mostly occur within the school hours to ensure attendance and inclusion. This school typically does what is described by one teacher as "*bursts of activities*" whereby they do an eight week spell of one activity and then try another. The teachers of this school have highlighted that they are fortunate to be of a higher socio-economic status and consequently, these teachers recognise that this helps to facilitate a wider range of activities whereby extra resources or outsourcing coaches can be carried out. This school highlighted that they do not offer an opt-out of activities option unless there is an appropriate reason such as on medical terms or if it does not align with a student's cultural/ religious background. Otherwise, the school aims to promote students to try everything.

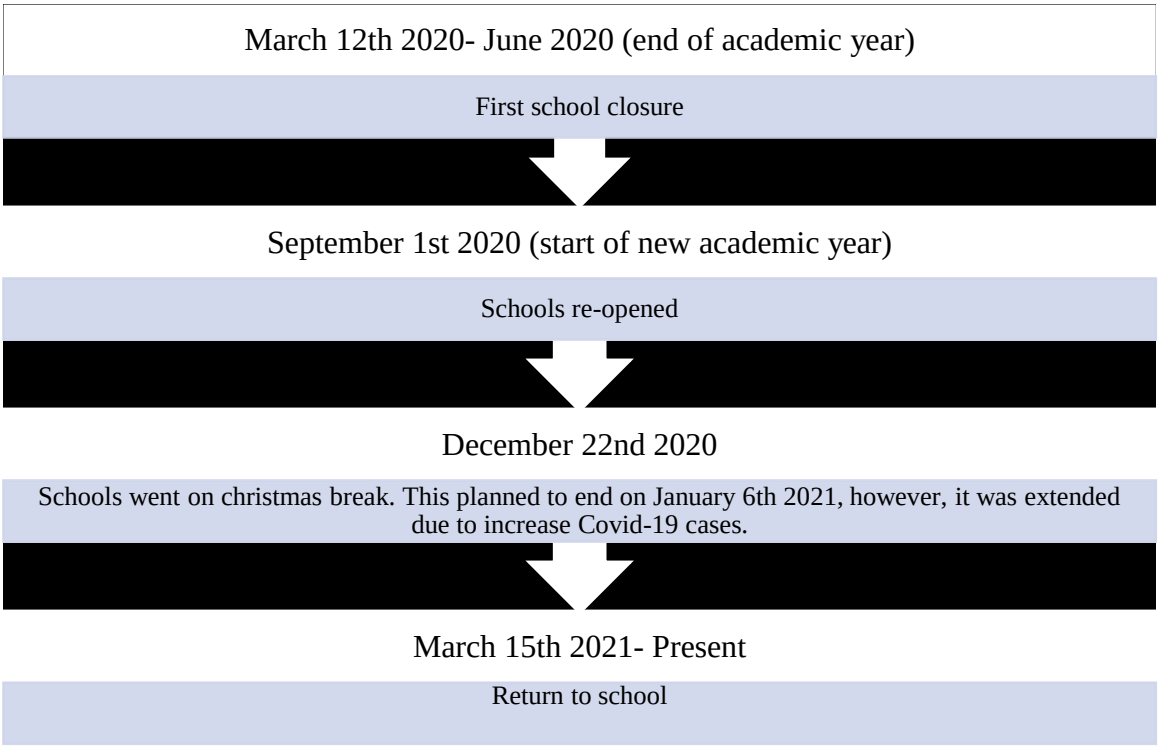
In terms of other activities, the school have a school choir which performs at various events and celebrations. They also participate in quizzes, debating, sewing, knitting, Irish traditional music and dance, and drama. The school also make use of their large grounds by developing a school garden that allows the students to learn to plant fruit and vegetables and environmental education.

5.4 The Impact of Covid-19 on this School and this Study

As with every mainstream school in Ireland, since the Covid-19 pandemic has hit, they have faced numerous school closures. These are outlined in figure 2. They are specific to sixth class dates as it was a phased return and therefore, dates changed slightly depending on class group. Figure 2 details the context of the school year when the data was gathered. The projective technique exercises were conducted throughout school closure from January to March 2021. The interviews and focus group took place the week beginning March 22nd 2021. The interviews and focus groups commenced a week in March after the schools final reopening and therefore, resulted in a lot of comparisons being made from being in school to being at home.

Figure 2

The Impact of Covid-19 on the School Year when the Data was Gathered



While the students had returned to school for the interviews and focus group, various health and safety measures were in place. These measures included being indoor "pods" of 2 to 4 students which limited each to student to only being in close

proximity of these children while indoors. Outdoor pods consisted of class groups which limited students from interacting with other class groups. While this school does a variety of activities as discussed, the majority of these activities were not able to take place due to Covid-19. These activities included sports for most of the year, school trips, religious ceremonies in the community, and competitions against other schools. The researcher also had to run these interviews and focus group online as external visitors could not visit the school due to Covid-19.

While working at home various measures were put in place to aim to remain connected to the student body. This included weekly online calls that consisted of fun activities such as treasure hunts and informal conversations. In sixth class, the teacher also would arrive five minutes late to academic online calls to allow students to avail of the opportunity to have conversations without the teacher present. This school also did online Irish dancing and online drama classes. However, most other extracurriculars were not able to take place. The school also made an active effort to ensure contact with students who did not have other siblings.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter was formed due to the necessity of thick description of the context in case study research. This description is required to provide readers with a detailed understanding of the context in which the findings are proposed. This chapter discusses the position of the school in the local community. This chapter also highlights the outline of the school curriculum, programs, and activities. The school's focus on wellbeing is also detailed. Furthermore, as this study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, the influence of this on school closure and data gathering is explained. This chapter sets a foundation for the findings (chapter 6) as it provides a context to the case that the findings were gathered.

Chapter 6 : Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of this study. This study aims to explore student and school personnel's perspectives of school connectedness and its relationship with student's occupations. A single instrumental case study was conducted to focus on the phenomenon of school connectedness in detail. Following thematic data analysis, four major themes were developed, each with three subthemes (see table 9). The first theme focus on the importance of the student's social context on school connectedness. The second theme outlines the occupational influence on school connectedness. The third theme explains the co-construction of an environment for school connectedness. The fourth theme discusses how community connectedness is reflected in the school. However, before explaining each theme, a general understanding of school connectedness from the data is outlined briefly. While chapter 5 gave an in-depth overview of the case, in line with case study research, this chapter will continue to use thick description in order to give a clear understanding of the case and its context. Drawings and activities completed by students are also used to provide further detail throughout the findings.

6.2 Overall Understanding of School Connectedness

Students understood school connectedness to have a range of meanings, including involvement in school activities, friendships, and belonging. For example, one student believed that connectedness in school is determined by *"how involved you are in stuff*" *(Kate- Student).* Students furthermore identified connectedness to be strongest when they are involved in an activity together: '*Like when everyone in the class is doing one thing and everyone enjoys it and were enjoying playing it, so we all*

feel connected" (Luke- Student). So, in this case, being involved was most valued when it was a shared social experience.

Friendships was a significant part of the meaning of connectedness, for example, one student described the importance of connecting with friends and having a role within your school as important: *"it is about connecting to your friends and being a character in your school" (Conor- Student- Focus Group).* Conor described the feeling of being recognised or being seen for who he is as a key issue for him. However, friendship was not just associated with peers but others also, as another student explained: *It's about friendship and connection with the teachers and learning new stuff" (Emily- Student).*

Connectedness was not considered a static thing but was associated with a changing sense of belonging. Students described that connectedness to their school had increased over time. For example, one student outlined that in their first few years of school they did feel like they belonged, as people did not know them and they did not know much about the school: *"Probably in one of our first years of school because you didn't really belong because nobody knew you and you didn't really know about the school" (Conor- Student).* So being known, being recognised for who you were, all add to the sense of belonging and consequently connectedness. Overall, as one student summarised, feeling a sense of connected is feeling like *"School is kind of a place for you and you are happy" (Lucy- Student).*

From a school staff perspective, the term connectedness was not commonly used: *"I suppose connectedness as an actual word isn't maybe something that would come up in conversation" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* However, when describing school connectedness one teacher defined it as: *"I would*

use the word I suppose kind of like a pride in their school" (John- Sixth Class Teacher). Here, although it seems to differ from what the children said, the teachers perspective reflects the possibility that children have a sense of pride when they feel like they belong to a place that makes them happy. Students and school personnel had some varying and some similar opinions on what determines school connectedness. Figure 3 outlines a Venn diagram which demonstrates the areas that were specifically mentioned by students, specifically mentioned by school personnel, and the areas mentioned by both participant cohorts. These findings were also analysed in a structure of the external school environment, broad school environment, classroom environment, and the core concepts that span across each environment (see figure 4).

Figure 3

Determinants of School Connectedness by all Participants

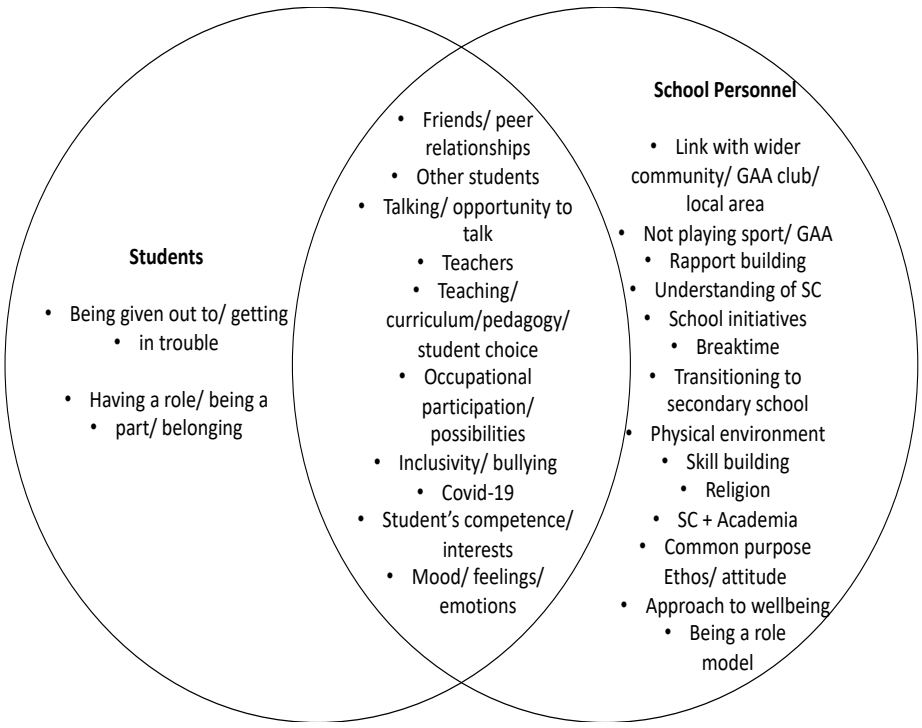
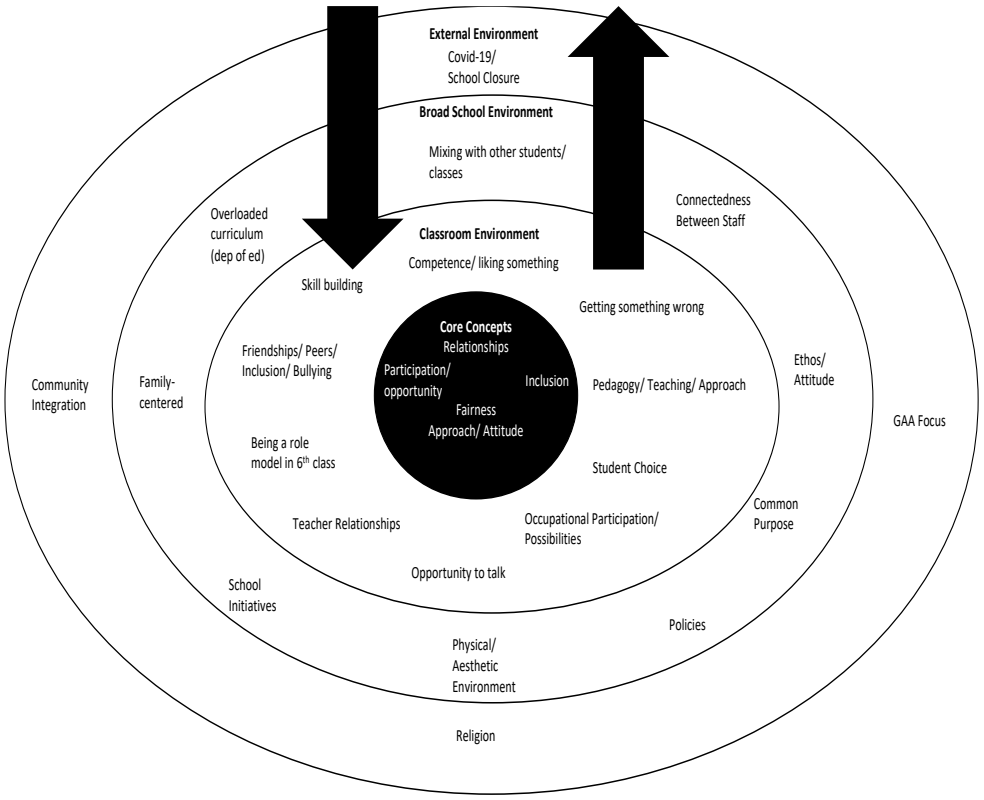


Figure 4

Initial Data Analysis across External, Broad, and Classroom Environments



This chapter consists of four themes and each theme has three subthemes. Thematic data analysis was completed to identify these themes. The structure of this chapter is presented in table 10.

Table 10

Organisation of Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	The Importance of the Student's Social Context on School Connectedness	Occupational Influence on School Connectedness	Co-constructing an Environment for School Connectedness	How Community Connectedness is Reflected in the School
Sub Themes	1. The Influence of Peers 2. Inclusion of Others 3. The Importance of Unstructured Moments	1. Influence of Different Types of Occupations on School Connectedness 2. Confidence to Participate in Occupations 3. Occupations that give Possibilities for School Connection	1. Recognising the Voice of the Child 2. Empowerment: Teachers and Children Working Together 3. Mutually Realising Connectedness	1. The Place of the School in Local Community 2. How the GAA influences School Connectedness 3. How the Local Parish influences School Connectedness

6.3 Theme 1: The Importance of the Student's Social Context on School Connectedness

The first theme highlights the importance of a student's social context on their sense of school connectedness. This theme consists of three subthemes. Subtheme one focused on the influence of peers from a student and school personnel perspective. Subtheme two focused on the inclusion of others which discussed the importance of feeling included by your peers and the negative effect on school connectedness if one is not included. Subtheme three highlights the importance of unstructured moments

which focused on the benefit of informal opportunities to enable students to connect to their school.

6.3.1 Subtheme 1: The Influence of Peers

Throughout the findings, the social context has been considered the most influential on a student's school connectedness from student and school personnel perspectives. For example, the students in the focus group highlighted the importance of the social perspective by developing a category called "peoples" when they were tasked to group the entire class responses to things that make them feel like they do connect to their school. In this category the students chose to include friends, classmates, and teachers. This group can be seen in the poster the students formed in figure 5.

Figure 5

"Things that Make you Feel that you Connect/ Belong in your School"- Categorisation of Entire Class Answers



Furthermore, when students were asked to draw what they believe connects them to their school, the majority of students drew a picture of them with their peers. This can be seen in figure 6.

Figure 6

Student Drawings of their Friends Helping them to Connect to their School









Moreover, the importance of friends was discussed by all participants: *"Like your friends, that's probably what makes school better I suppose" (Sophie-Student).* The benefits of having friends were understood by students: *"If I ever have a problem, I can always go to them because they are so good to talk to you" (Kate- Student).* Kate makes it clear that she relies on her friends for support. Furthermore, students reflected that their connectedness may not be as good if they did not have their friends: *"Your*

friends are one of the main things about how you connect to your school and you wouldn't be as connected to your school without your friends" (Conor- Student). Students explained the types of things their friends do to help them to connect to their school: *"They help with school by asking questions or if anything was wrong they would ask questions or even in class if you find something hard or even projects and stuff they encourage you to go up and talk" (Sam- Student).* Sam makes it evident that his peers enable him to participate in school. *"They always have your back and whenever you have a problem they are there for you" (Molly- Student- Focus Group).* Molly demonstrates that when a student has a problem, they benefit from connecting with others to support addressing the issue. This demonstrates that a student finds that a problem can be managed by having the support of someone else. This point was further supported by Jill who expressed *"if you're having troubles with something then your friends could help you by talking to you about it and make sure you're all okay" (Jill- Student).* One student appreciated the benefit of having a best friend: *"Yeah say all the other girls wanted to play some soccer or something during the break and I do not want to do that I know that I could hang out with *Sophie* anyway so"- (Lucy- Student).* Lucy demonstrates the importance of being with somebody at lunch time and that it is important for students to be with others at lunchtime. Essentially, friends were understood to be the most critical aspect of connectedness: *"No matter how much they like their school and like their teacher if they're not getting on with their peers, they're not going to be connected to the school" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).*

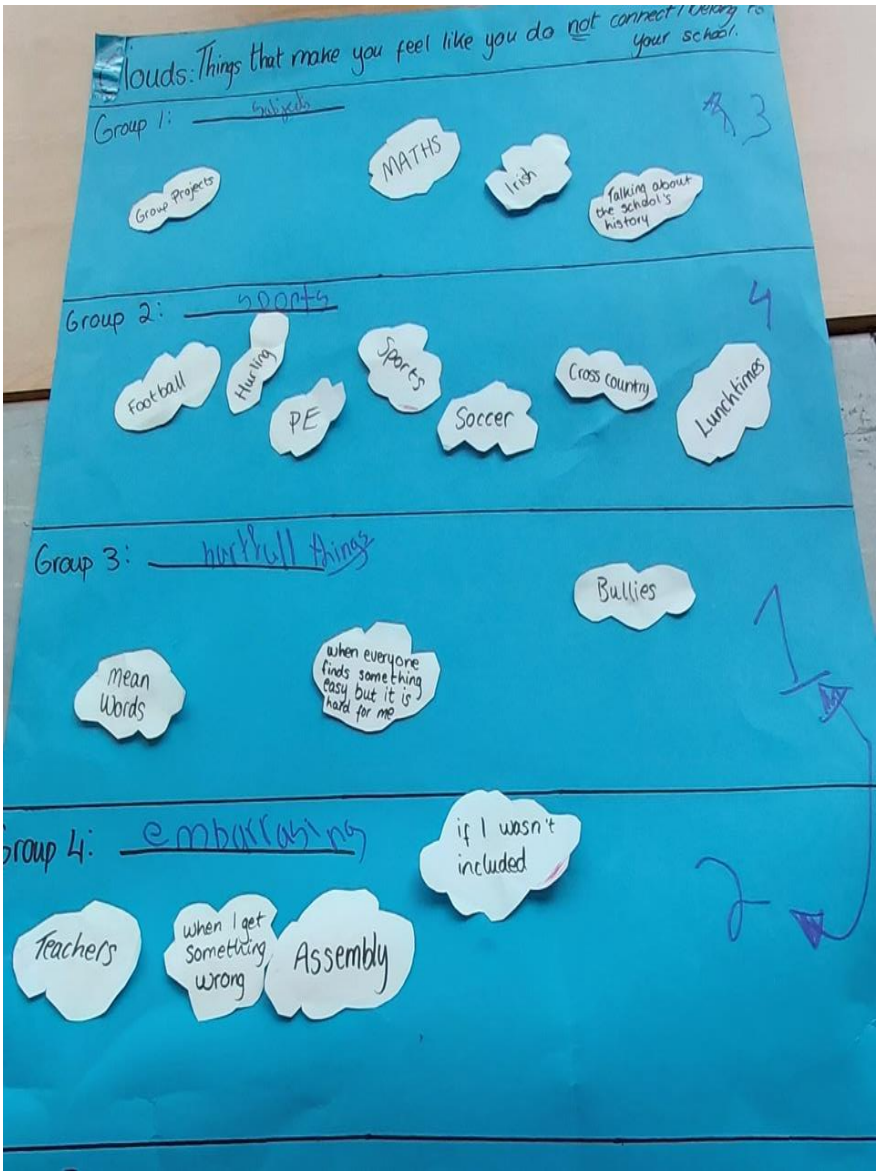
Furthermore, students described the influence of break on their performance in class: *"I think you be better at art if you feel like you know when you go out for break you are going to chat with your friends and have fun instead of sitting on your*

own. If you came in after a good break and you had loads of fun, I think you would have more fun art and do better at it" (Lucy- Student- Focus Group). As break is student's biggest socialisation period of the day and socialisation with peers has the most significant effect on school connectedness, it consequently impacts the rest of the student's school participation. The value students place on having peers to promote their connectedness to their school is evident. It is clear that students rely on friends for support and enjoyment.

Not only did participants consider the benefits to having their peers, they also considered the negative influence peers can have on their school connectedness. When students in the focus group were asked to categorise the responses of the entire class to things that make them feel like they do not connect to their school, students identified 'hurtful things' as having the biggest negative influence on their school connectedness. This group included mean words, bullies, and when everyone finds something easy but it is hard for me (shown in figure 7).

Figure 7

"Things that Make you Feel you do Not Connect/ Belong to your School" – Categorisation of Entire Class Answers



Student appreciated that while they will get along with their peers most of the time there may be *"the one or two tussles along the way" (Sam-Student).* Student considered that when they have difficulty with their friendships it can consequently decrease their sense of connectedness to their school: *"Well if I was being ignored, which has never happened but say like someone would just brush past you I'd feel unconnected and kind of hidden away in a corner" (Sam- Student)* . Furthermore, this

demonstrates the importance of other people to feel connected to their school. It is clear that if socialising with peers does not go well for a student it can lower their mood and overall happiness to be in the school environment: *"They want to feel like they belong, but also, they're going home feeling deflated, disappointed, you know, yeah, their yard time is their biggest socialization time of their day" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* Furthermore, this could mean that if a student is going home unhappy about their school day, they will not be looking forward to going to school the following day and consequently reduce their overall sense of connectedness to the school.

Uniquely, this study was conducted prior and during the return to school after school closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The timing of this study allowed for unique findings to be captured as students were removed from a significant proportion of their social environment. Throughout the data gathering, participants compared regular times to during school closure. For example, one student expressed *"You would probably feel more connected face to face in school" (Sam- Student).* As one would hypothesise, a sense of school connectedness was not as strong when students were doing school from their homes. For example, one student expressed: *"Connected I suppose not so much this year cause of Covid but before we would have always been quite connected" (Sophie- Student), "Doing school in school because the teacher is actually there in front of you and it just makes it more fun and they make it better and more enjoyable" (Jill- Student).* It became apparent during school closure how much students rely on the surroundings of others to perform in school. Furthermore, one student added to this by expressing that they rely on the support of others to do their school work. "*Definitely I didn't feel as connected because I was doing all the work by myself*" (Kate- Student). Students explained the difficulties with adhering to covid

pods regulations on their sense of connectedness. These pods mean that a student cannot come in close contact with between 2-4 set students indoors and they cannot socialise outside of their class group outside. Furthermore, students explained that due to these pods, they cannot do many activities that would have facilitated their school connectedness in other years. One student Sophie gave a thick description on the effect of Covid-19 on students ability to connect to others in their school: *"It is probably more difficult now because we all have to stay in our pods so we can't be outside our classroom or whatever but we can't do friendship week but that used help a lot but now I don't know there is not a lot we can do anymore because of covid there's definitely a lot of like even in the yard we all have staggered breaks times. And well obviously there is Sciath na Scoil and mini sevens and all that like even pitch and putt we can't do any of that and play against each other or play another team so we can't do that and then with the other classes we would have had book day and things like that they are all gone" (Sophie- Student).* Teachers added to this by discussing that whole school initiatives have been effected from Covid-19 due to the need to stay within social pods: *"when we came back in September our Pods or Bubbles or classes were in kind of units of isolation, like there was no real mixing or blending of classes or whole school like it was very, very strange to be in nine different classrooms, but to do a school assembly through Microsoft Teams was a new experience for us, whereas we would all troop down to the halla and do our 40 minutes school gathering once a month there whereas doing it online all sitting in classrooms looking at a screen and not really able to interact that was that was a new and uncharted thing for us" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* School closure due to Covid-19 gave students and school personnel further insight into the importance of their

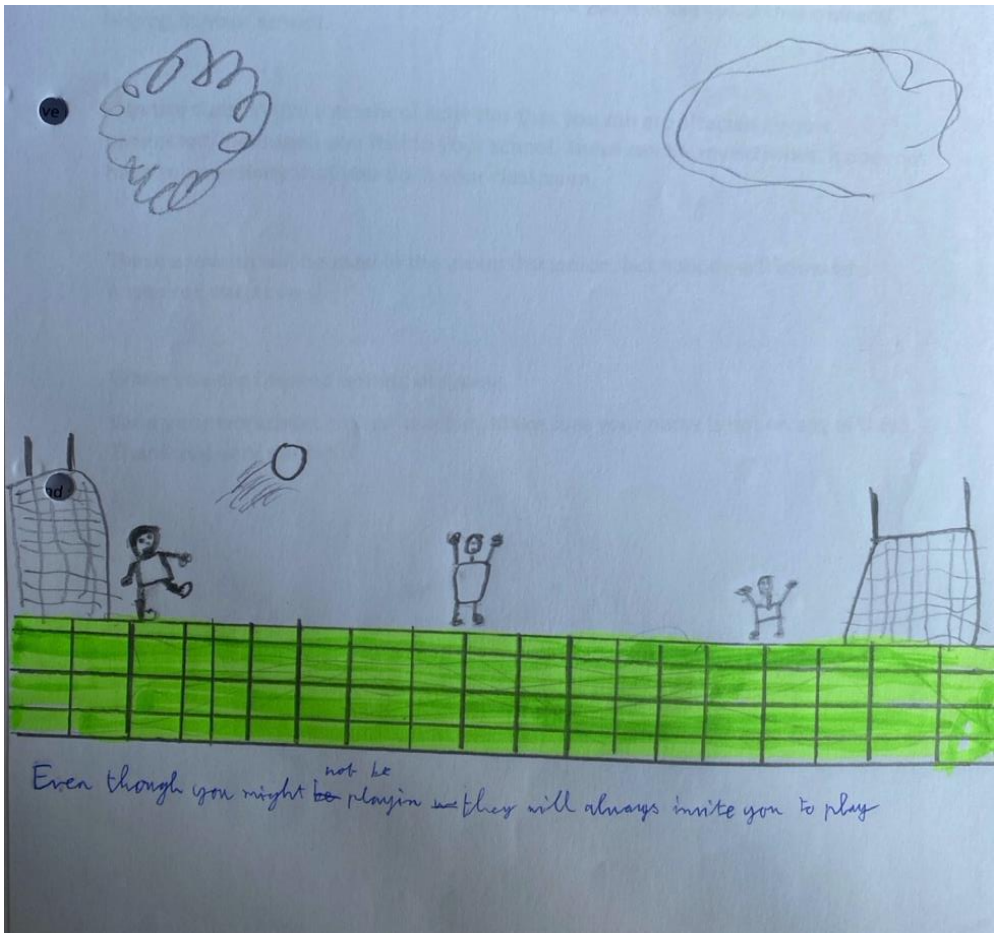
social context. Furthermore, students appreciate their social context more since returning to school.

6.3.2 Subtheme 2: Inclusion of Others

Throughout the data, students expressed the importance of inclusion to be connected to their school. Students explained that their friends ensure they are included. Students appreciated the effort their peers made to ensure they are included in activities: *"Well like they would include me in a game say if I was doing something inside and I was out late to break, they wouldn't like not let me play they would just tell me what we are doing and I would start playing"(Luke- Student).*Luke has highlighted that he appreciates his friends being inclusive at break time. Students demonstrated insight into inclusion of all students and they demonstrated awareness of how a student might feel if they are not included by their classmates: *"We are all outside at break like everyone's like hanging out together rather than like just one person left out and stuff" (Jill- Student- Focus Group).* The emphasis of unity of all students is made here. Additionally, when students were asked to draw what makes them connect to their school, one student drew a picture of students playing a game and they captioned it *"even though you might not be playing, they will always invite you to play".* This student shows confidence in other students making an effort to include them (see figure 8).

Figure 8

Student Drawing Representing Inclusion Between Students



School personnel discussed inclusion further to include various types of differences and importance of including all students to ensure their connectedness: *"We would work on connectedness by celebrating difference and raising awareness of differences. (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* School personnel highlighted acceptance of diversity of all students regardless of culture, interests and ability: *"We kind of seek to create a sense of connectedness or a sense of worth by ensuring that they are valued and that their opinions are valued that their cultures, if they are of different cultures and most importantly, their differences are valued as well" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* It is evident

that it is vital for all students to feel included in all aspects of school by their peers and school personnel.

The opposite dimension of inclusion could be seen as bullying. While discussing peer relationships, students brought up bullies without questioning or prompting. Bullying was considered to have a negative effect on a student's sense of connectedness: *"Bullies will hurt your feelings and make you feel like you do not belong in your school and that you shouldn't be there so they really don't make you feel connected in any way at all" (Kate- Student- Focus Group).* However, school personnel did flag the importance of preventing bullying by discussing their method of addressing it: *"I suppose just in the school we're in, I don't know, there just seems to be very little bullying and they have this restorative practice thing then so like rather than just saying give out to the person who was bullying that you know is the person who did it, trying to kind of you have like a set of questions basically trying to find out why it happened and why do they do that and you kind of involving both people". (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* It is clear from the data that bullying can make a student feel unconnected to their school and furthermore, school personnel are aware of this and consequently, put practises in place to address bullying.

6.3.3 Subtheme 3: The Importance of Unstructured Moments

Students emphasised the importance to them of spending time with one another "Yeah like you never saw your friends or got to chat or eat lunch or anything so" (Lucy- Student). Lucy was comparing her online school experience with her regular school experience. Many students discussed their experience doing school from home and how they missed the unstructured opportunities such as informal chatting to their friends. This was represented by Lucy who demonstrated the importance of

unstructured times such as eat lunch together. While many may think that eating lunch is simply the act of eating, however, for Lucy it was more than merely eating, it was about being together with her peers.

Students had similar thoughts to school personnel in that they highlighted while structured activities can happen online, students miss the informal conversations with their peers. For example, "it's not the school work, they're not missing that it's their social life they're not like they're still doing like their still doing their Irish dancing online, they're still doing their drama lessons online, yeah, but there's none of the informal chat that you get to have to develop that relationship" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach). One teacher discussed how he facilitated a fun activity through remote learning: "*So just ask them to find like a remote control, soap and, a banana and something else in their house and they all just leg it off and try and bring it back. So it's not really educational, but they definitely interact with it according to their parents*" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach). While this allowed the students to have some fun, they are missing the unstructured social interactions that typically accompany an activity of this kind in school. While students and school personnel expressed the importance of unstructured moments, school personnel also discussed that unstructured time can be a stressful time for some students. Students can often feel quite connected in the classroom as a teacher ensures inclusion, however, during break time students can be excluded by peers: "*I had a lot of emails from parents just saying oh you know they're looking forward to going back to the classroom, but they're not looking forward to going back to the yard time, you know, just because they, I suppose the classroom is very structured. I can very much control what's happening in the classroom where is once they step foot into the yard that unstructured time they have no control over that they have no control over who*

says what or what they're going to do or how the half an hour or 15 minutes is going to go" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach). The value of opportunities to connect in an informal manner is expressed. It is clear that students appreciate the moment where they can speak to their classmates rather than focusing on academic work.

6.4 Theme 2: Occupational Influence on School Connectedness

The second theme focuses on the occupational influence on social connectedness. This theme consists of three subthemes. Subtheme one focuses on the influence of different types of occupations on students sense of connectedness. Subtheme two highlights student's confidence to participate in occupations. Subtheme three discusses various occupations that give possibilities for school connection. This theme considers the perspectives of students and school personnel.

6.4.1 Subtheme 1: Influence of Different Types of Occupations on School Connectedness

One student described school connectedness to be based on "*taking part in activities in the school and being like a part of the school" (Lucy- Student- Focus Group).* Lucy emphasizes the importance of belonging in school by discussing having a part or a role in the school. There was various stances taken on the effect of participation in occupations on school connectedness. Students tended to have varying opinions on how connected they felt in each school activities, however, it typically depended on how much they enjoyed the activities or how competent they felt they were at it. The whole class were asked directly which activities affect their school connectedness. The students in the focus group were then asked to group these and the rank the groups in order of importance. The most important group developed was

outside activities which included basketball, sports, PE, soccer, running, rounders, outside, and the end of year blitz. The second most important category was fun activities which included lunch, out of school activities, games, art, school plays, walks, friendship week, and rugby. The third most important group was committees which included the amber flag committee and active school committee. The fourth most important group was boring activities which included yoga and projects. See figure 9 for a photograph of the student's categorisation poster.

Figure 9

"School Activities that are Affected by how Connected/ Belonged you Feel" - Categorisation of Entire Class Answers



There were various opinions on different occupations and how they effected students sense of connectedness. For example, some students described PE (Physical Education) as an activity that gave them an opportunity to connect with their peers: *"Definitely I feel like doing PE cause I get to talk to people, cause I feel like everybody's together we are all doing it and we are all having fun" (Kate- Student).* Students explained that when they all do activities such as school tours they are all connected together: *"Probably during some school tours like we went canoeing and we were all connected together" (Conor- Student).* Conor shows here that feeling a sense of unity during an activity promotes his connectedness. Students also appreciated the benefits of trying new activities: *"It won't just be the same thing over and like you could find out that you actually love doing something that you didn't know you love doing and then make a friend while doing that you thought you had nothing in common" (Lucy- Student).* It is evident here that Lucy believes engaging in a variety of occupations gives students a platform to form new connections with students.

Students discussed participating in a host of new occupations during the school day. Teachers elaborated upon this by discussing a further point which emphasised the environmental influence on this opportunity to engage in various occupations. Teachers highlighted that while students can engage in a range of new occupations, they are fortunate to be able have the resources to do this due to their socio-economic status: *"It's probably reflects our socio-economic status. We can put on a little charge like for example the yoga is quite an expensive activity, whereas if we were in a community that was very cash strapped, we probably wouldn't be able to do it, so I suppose it's just availing of, you know the resources that are there and people's willingness to engage with them. You kind of offer it on that basis, but it probably wouldn't be replicated across all schools or anything like that"(Tom-Deputy Principal*

and Special Education Teacher). It is clear in this subtheme while students appreciate the benefit of participating in a range of occupations to increase their sense of school connection and connectedness to others, they are fortunate to have this opportunity to have the resources to engage in so many occupations. It can be considered that more resources can create more opportunity for engagement in occupations and therefore more opportunity for connectedness.

6.4.2 Subtheme 2: Confidence to Participate in Occupations

It is evident that student's perception of their ability in various activities in school effects their connectedness. Consequently, when students do make mistakes during school this can have a negative effect on their sense of school connectedness: *"If you make a big massive mistake or like something really wrong and then there seems to be like a big dark cloud over you" (Sam- Student- Focus Group).* One student also demonstrated that there is a correlation between how competent you feel you are at something and your sense of connectedness: *"Like in sports, if I was kind of I don't know I think I'd be better at it if I thought that I was better at it you know" (Lucy- Student).* Lucy makes it clear that depends on the child's own perception of their competency. Another student added to this point by highlighting: *"Some people might feel that they are bad at maths and that they feel down if they get a good score cause they think that it is a terrible score" (Emily- Student- Focus Group).*

Some students also explained that the more competent they feel at an activity the more they feel like they connect: *"Some sports I am not that good at so if we were playing it outside I might feel that I am not connected because I might not be the best at it out of everyone so I do not really feel like I connect the most" (Kate- Student).* It is clear here that Kate is emphasising activities that she participates in around her peers. This point was further highlighted when students discussed making a mistake:

"Maybe in drama one time like a big mistake happened where I was called up in front of the class to do something. I did shocking in it I felt like I did not do well enough" (Sam- Student). Sam emphasised the importance of how bad this was for him because it happened on front of his peers. Another student also strengthened this point by discussing correcting their work in class: *"Were correcting our work together and you just can tell by everyone's face and the noise that goes around the class that you have got it wrong"(Joe-Student).* Further to this, Joe described how he finds it difficult when he is the only person in the class who got a question wrong due to his peers reaction: *"I'm not as good as some other people are just cause I'm not that good at Irish and if I get a question wrong or something I feel like everyone else got it right or something cause everyone else kind of tells you that have got it wrong and I feel like I'm the only person who actually got it wrong" (Joe- Student).* Another student explained that it is a big issue for them if they come last in an activity: *"When everyone finds something easy but it is hard for me it is kind of embarrassing because everyone thinks it is easier but it is harder for you and it is harder for you to adjust and for cross country if you are not a fan of running then that is quite a problem and if you come last well then that is a bigger problem and embarrassing but at least you tried your best" (Molly- Student).* While teachers agreed with students that a student will feel more connected if they are good at the occupation taking place, they did highlight the need to create a culture where it is acceptable to make mistakes: *"But if we have kind of got this connectedness and this kind of idea that it's okay not to be okay, or it's okay to make a mistake in public, you know people are going to give it ago and come what may. I think that's the attitude that we need to start creating" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* It is evident from a student and school personnel perspective that the attitude of being worried to make a mistake on front of one's peers,

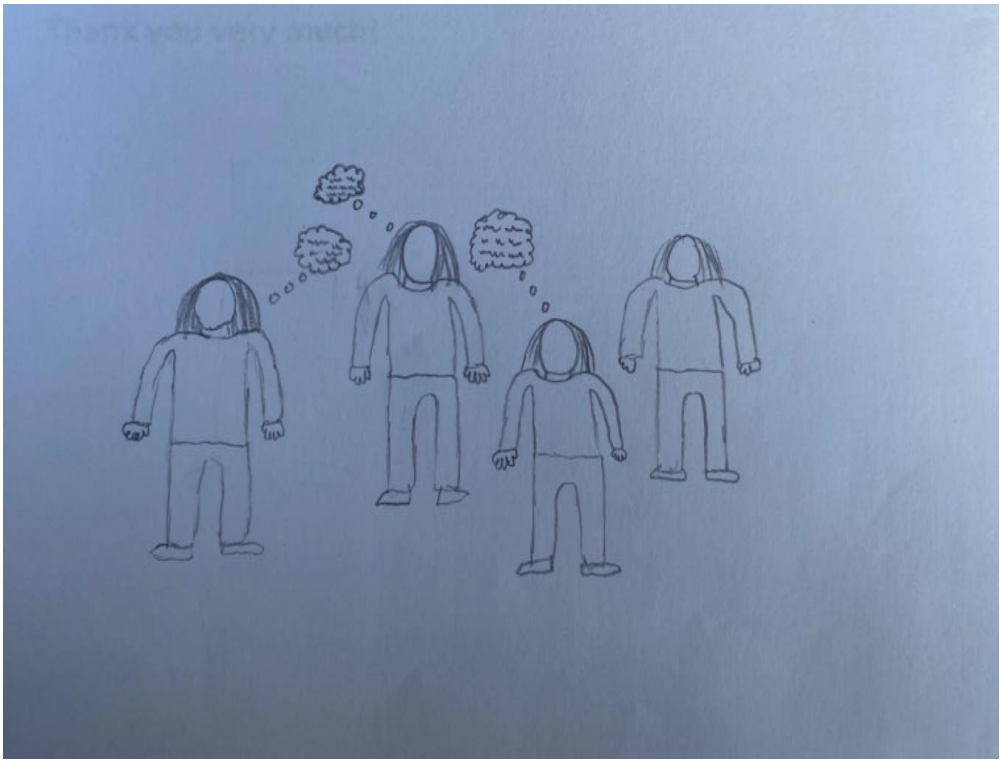
limits their ability to engage in occupations and consequently, limits the promotion of their connectedness to the school. Findings demonstrate that student's lack of confidence and embarrassment negatively relates with school connectedness. It is clear that if a student is feeling embarrassed during an activity in school they are not going to feel like they connect to their school.

6.4.3 Subtheme 3: Occupations that give Possibilities for School Connection

The importance of getting an opportunity to connect with classmates was clear throughout the data gathering process. It is evident that students believe they can connect in some activities more so than others. Evidently, peer relationships are very important to students. For example, when students were asked to draw what makes them connect to their school, one student drew peers chatting to one another (see figure 10)

Figure 10

Student Drawing of Peers Chatting

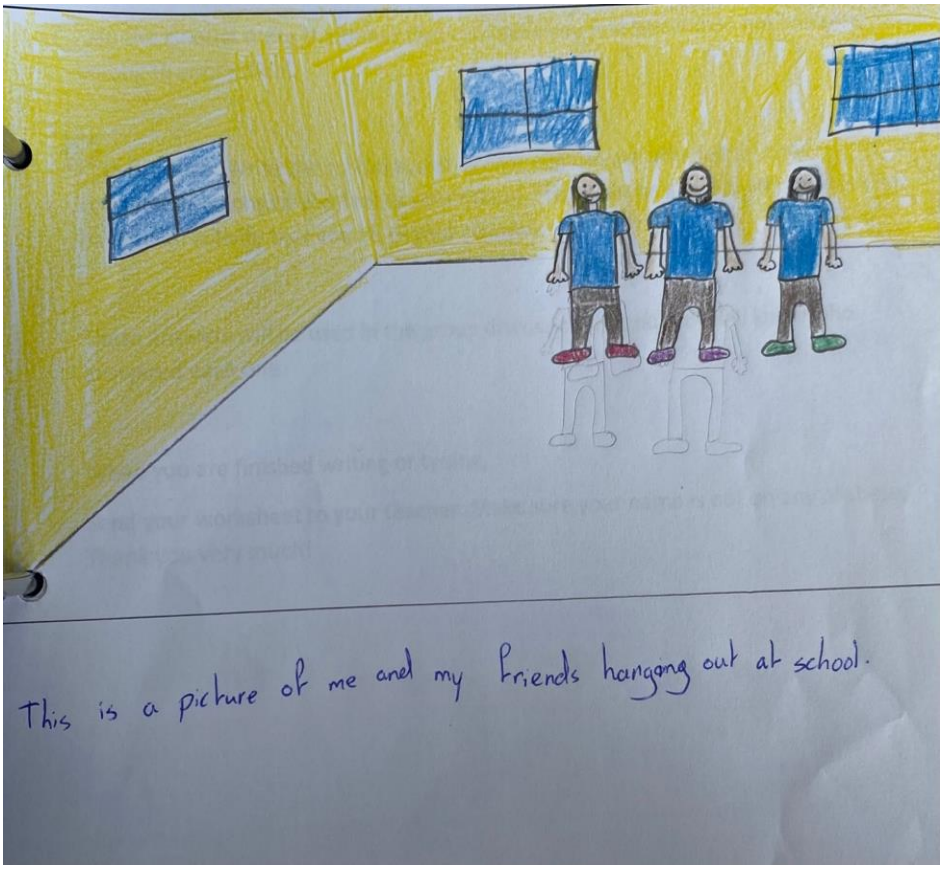


Students highlighted that they get the most opportunity to connect during their breaktimes: *"We would not connect as much if we were doing a lot of work like if we did not have break we would not be able to connect with our friends or anyone because we would not be allowed to talk to them" (Luke- Student).* Students explained that while they are all together in the classroom learning, they do not get to chat to one another: "Like in the classroom where we are all doing learning, of course we are all together but like were learning stuff so you cannot really be chatting with someone, but outside you definitely get to, you know, talk and connect with people" (Kate-Student). Furthermore, they believe they are able to seek these opportunities during outdoor activities. This demonstrates that it is not directly the location of outside that makes them connect but more so the typical activities that take place their such as time and PE: "It's not outside for us it more so the stuff that happens outside like the rugby, soccer, hurling, camogie whatever" (Student-Sophie). Students described that when they are outside they have lots of freedom to participate in a variety of activities: "Playing outside with everyone so then you have lots of freedom" (Jill-Student). When a student is indoors they are obliged to participate in the activity set by their teacher, however, when they are on breaktime they can decide which activity they choose in and therefore, they have choice over their breaktime. Students explained that when they are doing an occupation that they are not actively participating in during class time such as doing certain subjects and just listening to the teacher they do not feel as connected: "like in Irish sometimes when you are working in class you are not really connect you are just listening to the teacher and you would not be as connected to your friends as much as other activities in school" (Conor- Student). However, although students recognise that they connect with their friends more during outdoor activities, during the student focus group, students appreciated the benefit of having their friends

present while they do their school work even if they are not talking. This was compared to doing their school work alone at home during school closure due to Covid-19: "*Well you are with your friends and you are not like you don't have to be talking to them all the time*" (Sophie- Student- Focus Group). Students appreciated the physical presence of their peers. For example, when tasked with drawing a picture that makes them feel connected to their school, one student drew a picture of him and his peers and captioned that it was "him and his friends hanging out"(See figure 11).

Figure 11

Student Drawing of him and his Peers



There was specific efforts made to by teachers to provide students with an opportunity to connect. One activity that was appreciated by both teachers and students was going for a walk each morning. Some teachers do this with their students to give them an opportunity to connect. This is particularly important when students play sport

for their breaktime and may not be taking opportunities to socialise with their peers: *"Well it is like a time where were out but like on break we would be playing soccer and you would not really get the chance to just stop and talk to a friend because you would be running around with the ball but we can just walk around with people and have a chat" (Sam- Student).* Teachers discussed the same reasoning for these walks and consequently demonstrate understanding of the importance for students to connect with one another: *"It's just this informal chat they can have that's not on the yard, that's not, you know it's not all we want to play soccer, we want to play this" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* Students also outlined that they do a check in at the start of each week whereby they get to discuss their news from over the weekend and rate their mood out of ten. This gives students a platform to talk: *"At the start of every week you rate yourself out of 10 what your weekend was like and you kind of explain to everyone what you did over the weekend who you met and stuff like that" (Joe- Student).* This also allows a student to share their feelings with the class and to look out for one another: *"The teacher always says look out for them at break if they are low or something " (Joe- Student).* Teachers also discussed doing these check ins: *"I do a check in every morning so they do their energy levels so they start like ten is your birthday, one is like your dog died, you know what I mean? So usually you're in and around the six and seven hopefully and like that gives them options to be like look and we say energy level rather than mood it's more energy level, so it's like my energy levels this morning is a seven you know. And if they don't want to say anything they can just be like I had, you know, chicken curry for dinner last night, but it also gives the children an opportunity to be like oh well actually this happened in this and it kind of strikes up or you know it does strike up a conversation" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* While teachers did not use the term 'school

connectedness' very often, they demonstrated understanding of its importance by putting in place measures such as doing a morning walk or check in. In this subtheme, both students and school personnel acknowledged the importance to get an opportunity to engage in occupations that enable them to connect and socialise with their peers.

6.5 Theme 3: Co-constructing an Environment for School Connectedness

The third theme focuses on co-constructing an environment to promote school connectedness for all students. This theme consists of three subthemes. Subtheme one focuses on the importance of recognising the voice of the child to promote connectedness. The second subtheme emphasises the importance of teachers and students working together to be able crate a culture of promoting school connectedness. The third subtheme focuses on the students and school personnel mutually realising connectedness together to create an environment that is specific to them.

6.5.1 Subtheme 1: Recognising the Voice of the Child

The inclusion of student voice in the day to day running of the school was highlighted as important to contributing to student's sense of school connectedness by students and school personnel. For example, student discussed that teachers ask their opinions on the activities they do in school: *"Yeah they would make you feel connected like they would involve you and do stuff that you would like or they would ask for your opinions for maybe PE and what your thoughts are on it and what would you like to include or do for PE or any subject" (Sam- Student).* Students discussed how it helps them to connect when they have a choice to do what they would like to do. For example, during breaktime *"you can like talk to you know you have that like bit of freedom and like it just makes you kind of connect when you can do whatever you*

want" (Jill- Student). Students appreciated when teachers allowed them to have input into their school activities.

Teachers and students spoke about the importance of focusing on students interest to ensure they connect with their school. Teachers and students felt that to ensure input of student's voice they had to learn about their students interests: *"I feel like you have to be connected with your teachers too because they have to know you to be able do the stuff that you want to do, let's say I like sports and some other people like art and he kind of mixes it up so everyone has fun" (Student- Conor).* Teachers discussed that they try to explore students interests during learning to facilitate connectedness. For example, one teacher explained *"Like some kids are really into at the moment in my class are into Minecraft and Fortnite. I don't have a clue. But you know even if you show and interests or, give them an opportunity. Like if we're doing English writing that they can write about that" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* However, one teacher also explained that it is hard to get to know every child's interests when they are all different. It is difficult to fit in such a variety of interests into the school day: *"You're kind of going okay, but how do I fit in the fellow who loves farming? How do I fit in the girl who loves singing?" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* Furthermore, the opportunity to offer student choice due to the array of resources this school has was discussed. *"I suppose the school, is very lucky that it has a huge grounds, so I would we'll say in my class there's 30 kids. There's ten kids have like ten ah there's more nearly half class are sporty and the other half aren't. but There's like a, uh, not really a forest, but there's like trees or an area with trees that's kind of off to the side so all the kids who aren't sporty kind of hang down there and they kind of have their own fun and like they be doing like whatever play fighting and all this crack, and I think they are happy enough that nobody can*

see what they they're getting. Not in a bad way like but you know they're kind of out of the way so they're free to be who they want to be, which is great like, yeah, and so I think it's definitely benefit to have a big school grounds that kids have their own areas to do what they want because you hear some schools Like with tiny yards and they like just have to stand around or do skipping you know they can't actually do whatever and I suppose if you're conscious of being in a crowd and everybody can see or more, you're less likely to kind of do whatever activity you wants to do at lunch" (Peter-Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach). Teachers make it clear that while they recognise the importance of incorporating student interests into their school activities, it can be difficult when there is so many students.

However, teachers explained that they do not let students opt out of activities unless for specific reasons. They believe students should attempt every activity: *"We generally don't afford people the opportunity to opt out and we would kind of encourage people to participate as well as you can or for as long as you can or you know, give it your best go" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* Teachers did not view this as lack of choice and rather encouragement to enhance participation. Students also expressed that they could get more of a voice in the school. For example, when asked what could enhance their connectedness more, one student answered: *"Like everybody kind of gets a say in the school like you know or everybody gets you know fairness. Kind of everybody gets to say stuff and everybody gets a chance to kind of do stuff" (Kate-Student).* While voice is included in students school activities, students are not always offered choice in their activities.

6.5.2 Subtheme 2: Empowerment: Teachers and Children Working Together

Throughout the data, it was evident that there is a mutual awareness of school connectedness between students and teachers. Although not formally discussed,

students believe teachers demonstrate they are aware of the need to form student connectedness as they make various efforts such as whole school initiatives. Furthermore, students and teachers explained the effect teachers can have on their sense of school connectedness.

Students explained that their teachers ensure that everybody is included in school by encouraging students and bringing students together: *"Teachers make you feel included and they kind of help you to include and they make sure that everybody is included in school and connected and they make sure that everybody feels like part of the school" (Kate- Student- Focus Group).* Students knew that their teachers will always ensure they are included: *"They wouldn't leave you out of anything if they were asking stuff they would not just ask like a few people and not anyone else" (Luke- Student).* Students also felt that a teacher can resolve any issues they are having*: "If you get something wrong they can help you fix the mistake you did" (Molly- Student).* Students also felt a feeling of safety around their teachers: *"The teachers will keep you safe" (Emily- Student).* Students added to this inclusion point by explaining that the teachers in their school treat every student equally regardless of their abilities: *"They treat me the same as everyone else" (Molly- Student).* Students described that they have trust in their teachers and they know that they can confide in them confidentially: *"The teachers here are actually really friendly they won't embarrass you or anything like that. Like if you want to go and talk to them they are fine with it and you know they won't say anything" (Joe- Student).*

Students added to this by discussing how they feel more connected to their school because they feel like their teachers are approachable and they can talk to them: *"Being able talk to the teachers" (Joe- Student).* Furthermore, this was teachers' goal to create an approachable environment: *"Let's do Irish you know I don't have time for*

that but it's so important to always have time for that because the day you take foot off the pedal is the day that child really really needs you" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach). Additionally, teachers are aware of the need for students to promote connectedness amongst one another. Consequently, not only do teachers look out for students, they also promote students looking out for other students: *"The teacher always says look out for them at break if they are low or something" (Joe- Student).* Students and teachers emphasise the teacher's role in supporting students and being there for them if they have any difficulties.

Students commented on the teachers approach to ensuring student connectedness. Students realised that teachers make efforts to ensure each students connectedness in a subtle manner that does not make it formalised or obvious to those around them. Students recognised that these efforts are made in realistic situations: *"They don't really like they do make us feel connected like but they do it subtly because sometimes if they are too obvious it doesn't seem realistic" (Sophie- Student).* One teacher emphasised the approach to school connectedness should be organic. This teacher explained that school connectedness should not be stated as the objective: *"You know, it can happen more organically or it happens more pleasantly or less contrived way then actually stating the objective kind of almost dulls it or ruins it in other ways (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* Teachers explained that they use a casual and informal approach to teaching in their school. One teacher explained that this makes students feel that they are more approachable and can come to them with any difficulties: *"I'm very casual in my style of teaching. I suppose that makes sense, and that really does stand you when there's issues down the line because they know that they can come and talk to you if they need to. And they also can say, look miss I'm having a crap day and you're going OK, that's totally okay*

we can just take it easy today" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach). Students and teachers focused on the importance of promoting school connectedness in an informal nature that does not feel formalised to the student.

Students discussed the relationships they have with their teachers: *"Teachers well they are alright most of the time to be honest they are we get along okay most of the time" (Sophie- Student- Focus Group).* However, students described that with some teachers they feel they do not forget when students get into trouble with them :*"And you know sometimes some teachers most teachers when they give out to you like its fine ten minutes later they forget about it but some of them can remember it for a long time and it is like you have done it again and again when you might only have done it once" (Sophie- Student- Focus Group).* Students also related good teaching to their sense of connectedness. However, students also explained that while they like their teachers there is other components of school such as sports that they prefer and make them feel more connected: *"We have a lot of really nice teacher and so we kind of like all our teachers, but you know we prefer soccer and PE and stuff" (Lucy- Student- Focus Group).* This subtheme highlights the importance of teacher's efforts to promote school connectedness.

6.5.3 Subtheme 3 : Mutually Realising Connectedness

While the Department of Education set out various initiatives for all schools to participate in such as friendship week, it is up to each school to tailor these initiatives to their school and their students which make them meaningful and promote their wellbeing. The school have a host of initiatives including friendship week, active schools week, and the amber flag. Students and school personnel frequently discussed various whole school initiatives throughout the data gathering. Students recognised that the school's aim in these initiatives: *"Well kind of in the school day they want to*

bring everyone together or you would be partnered up with someone, well not so much this year, but before there was friendship week and active schools week and you would be partnered with a class to do activities with them or you might have a little sports day" (Sam- Student). Students discussed some of the various things they do during these initiatives, for example, *"So usually you pair up with someone in a different class. If it's a younger class you would be helping them read and playing games with them" (Conor- Student).* Conor's example demonstrates that the school value the importance of connecting various school students. Another initiative this school has to promote friendship is a friendship bench. If you do not have someone to play with you can sit on the bench. The older students such as sixth class students then aim to include this student: *"They have a friendship bench that like if you have no one to play with, you can sit on the bench and like it's kind of the responsibility of the older kids to try and see if there's people on the bench and try and get them involved with something or playing so I suppose that's kind of how I read connectedness" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* While this initiative is not set out by the Department of Education, the school warranted the need and benefit of this. It is evident that these initiatives have a systemic effect on the entire school body. Teachers and students must collaborate to implement these initiatives together. The focus is not entirely on the individual initiative, but rather, the collaboration between students and school personnel which can create a longer term sustained connectedness within the school.

The frequency of these initiatives and consequently, the overall rollout of the intentions of these initiatives was questioned by students and school personnel. Students explained that they find these initiative weeks help them to connect to their school. However, they highlighted that while it is helpful it only happens for one week

of the year. Students expressed that they would benefit from this happening more often: *"I think we could do it a bit more it is only one week a year that do that sort of thing" (Lucy- Student).* Teachers were of a similar mindset while discussing various initiatives such as wellbeing week, anti-bullying week, health promoting schools week, and friendship week, teachers highlighted that while these are useful initiatives, they are only a week long rather than promoting these initiatives throughout the school year: *"The one thing with them is that I will probably see a downfall with is it is that it's like a blast for like a month or a week. Yeah, or and I'm kind of going OK, but how do we do this long term? Instead of going OK, we know now April is active schools' week" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* It is clear that school personnel feel that it is difficult to have long term outcomes from initiatives that are only undertaken for a week out of the year. School personnel outline that while the initiatives are beneficial, the principles behind them need to be enforced throughout the school year.

Teachers understood the importance of promoting connectedness and the goals of the Department of Education. However, they also explained the challenges of focusing on wellbeing and connectedness of students in school. For example, one teacher explained: *"We are bombarded with eleven different curriculums, so trying to cover all that work that is probably what hindering this well being approached that ideally in an ideal world it should be the avenue we're going down" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* This teacher also highlighted the volume of material that belongs under wellbeing: *"Wellbeing could be a standalone subject which it should be because there's so much there's so much work on there" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* However, wellbeing is integrated into SPHE alongside various other topics with tight time constraints to cover all these topics:

*"You have you have relationships and sexual education. You have socialization. You have stay safe. And all of that is only one 1/2 hour in the week you're supposed to cover that and you're kind of going. Yeah, 1/2 hour out of the whole week and you're going okay, but then I have five hours for English over the week. It doesn't match up." (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).*Teachers expressed concerns as they feel there is inconsistencies in the expectations of the Department of Education: *"I just think something needs to give to let this wellbeing come in like even with this return to school focus their like wellbeing, wellbeing, wellbeing, wellbeing you know focus on wellbeing but hey, we're still going to do the standardized test after Easter and you're kind of going" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* One teacher added to this by highlighting: *"It's just there's no universal approach to this. It's all very segregated and everyone is kind of eh no one is singing off the same hymn sheet, and I think that's a huge hindrance in any children to feel belonging because they're going what we're doing this now we're doing this now" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* This teacher explains that there is a need for a re-evaluation of the service delivery to include wellbeing across all components of school. The Department of Education's approach was further critiqued by rationalising that they believe the overall carryover and effectiveness of structured wellbeing programs in the classroom is low: *"Now I was using the weaving wellbeing program to do like a lesson from that. Still, it's a lovely like there's 10 lessons that are on it and the 5th class one is focusing on positive relationships, but like today was on no snap judgements so it was like trying not to be judgmental or critical of people. Yeah, I did it just before big break, but sure I can guarantee you once they set foot outside the door you know, over their heads" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* This subtheme highlights that while standardised programs are put into place by the

Department of Education, it is up to the students and school personnel to connect together to implement these into their school.

6.6 Theme 4: How Community Connectedness is Reflected in the School

The final theme focused on how the community connectedness is reflected throughout the school. This school was described as a dimension of the local community: *"an arm of the GAA club and the community"* (*John- Sixth Class Teacher).* This theme consists of three subthemes. The first subtheme expressed the importance of the school's place within their local community. The second subtheme highlighted the influence of the GAA club on student's school connectedness. The third theme reviewed how the local parish influences student's school connectedness.

6.6.1 Subtheme 1: The Place of the School in Local Community

This school was considered a branch of the local community rather than a stand-alone environment: *"The community, the school, and the GAA club they're all very interconnected" (John- Sixth Class Teacher).* This school is situated in a small rural town which involves the school, church, and GAA club being within very close proximity. Due to this closeness, resources and facilities are shared and there is continuous liaising between each group. Most students are involved in the local parish and local GAA club as well as living in the local area: *"So like the kids here, most of them would play for the local GAA club. Most of them would be from the parish or the catchment area" (John- Sixth Class Teacher).* While the sense of connectedness was considered to be strong amongst students that do partake in all of these areas, it is clear that if a student is not part of the local external institutions they can quickly feel disconnected. Throughout the data gathering, all participants emphasised that the school is a part of the local community. Teachers understood that students have a sense

of pride in their community "*I would say at least 90% of the kids would say they're very happy to live where they do" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* School personnel highlighted that it is an important factor for their school to be integrated within the community it is situated. It is uncommon for students or staff to be from a different geographical area: *"There is no sense of pulling from different areas everyone is a *town* person and there there's definitely a strong links to community" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach);"The principal, she's from *town*, there's three or four teachers, I'm from *town*, there's three or four teachers and a couple of SNA's that are actual from *town*" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* This can lead to not only a connection between the students but between families as well. The school strive for students to feel a sense of connectedness to the entire local area rather than solely the school building: *"They're not just bused into a building that are actually bused into a community as well" (Tom- Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* While the school may not specifically outline that their efforts to integrate students into the community is to achieve school connectedness, it is clear that they see benefit in students feeling they are a part of a wider community. This sense of cohesiveness amongst the school and the local community can ensure that a student feels that school is more than a place to focus on academics.

Furthermore, it was clear from teachers and students that they believed their relationship with their local community to be unique to them and not something that every school is fortunate to have. They felt that the reason for this bond with the local community was due to them being from a small and rural town: *"Like let's just say, for example, an inner city school, which is probably a DEIS school that it is just getting them in the door and feeding them as a priority don't mind the connectedness" (John-*

Sixth Class Teacher). Here John makes it clear that as their school is fortunate to have many resources to be able prioritise connectedness. Therefore, implying that for a school not as well funded and supported, connectedness would not be an important factor.

6.6.2 Subtheme 2: How the GAA influences School Connectedness

The values and ethos of the local GAA club evidently influence the student connectedness of the school. In this local area and beside the school is a GAA club. There is a strong connection between this GAA club and this school: *"So I suppose the kids then see it as a natural link between where they are from their school, their education, their GAA team" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* As mentioned, many of the students play GAA with the local club: *"I suppose it's all the kids that come into the school are all in relation to GAA they all play for the same club." (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* One student explained that talking about sports such as the matches at the weekend helps them to get along with their friends. As many students play with the local GAA club this means they spend time together at training and matches outside of school hours. This can allow further friendships to be formed and strengthened: *"I like to talk about your weekend and watching all the matches and get on with your friends and stuff talking about them" (Joe- Student).* Joe demonstrates that while GAA gives them a common interest to discuss, he also implies that to engage in these discussions, participating in the local GAA club is necessary and therefore, students that do not participate may feel disconnected. Previously, students outlined that their friendships are formed based on their interests. Furthermore, if a student does not enjoy GAA in this school when many of the students do, this could be isolating. While other students outlined that they did not enjoy GAA and they wished that everyone was not as interested in it: *"Em hurling*

everybody is so obsessed with sports here and I like running around and having fun but I hate hurling like I cannot stand it. It is just sort of like I could never get the sliotar (ball) to just do what I want. I found it so impossible, but yeah everyone else seems to be able to do it, but nah not me" (Lucy- Student). It is clear that there is mixed opinions on the focus on GAA in the school by both students and school personnel.

Furthermore, it was understood that playing GAA with the local club allows students to continue their friendships when they leave school: *"It just goes to show like that nearly all the kids play GAA, all the kids continue to play into adulthood, there is not many dropouts, you know it's almost like the heartbeat and the school is an extension of that" (John- Sixth Class Teacher).* While John demonstrated how a student can continue their sense of connectedness to their school and peers by continuing with GAA after school, he also makes it evident how a student who does not play for the local club can feel isolated within the school by describing GAA as the "heartbeat" of the school. To add to this, the same teacher also explained that he believes if a student does not play GAA they are more likely not to connect to their school: *"You know where you would see that the child isn't as part of the group or part of the community as the rest because of the fact that they are not involved with the club or so on that has been" (John- Sixth Class Teacher).*

As highlighted before, school can be understood as a social institution. One teacher concluded that it is not just because a student may not play GAA but it is also because they miss social opportunities outside of school: *"If you're not a member of the GAA Club, say if you were not in to GAA. I think that could have an impact. Definitely. Because you might not play football or hurling, so you might not be at the matches you know you might be as close to the others then as a result if you know what I mean, you might feel that little bit oh I'm a bit different and you do get it very rarely*

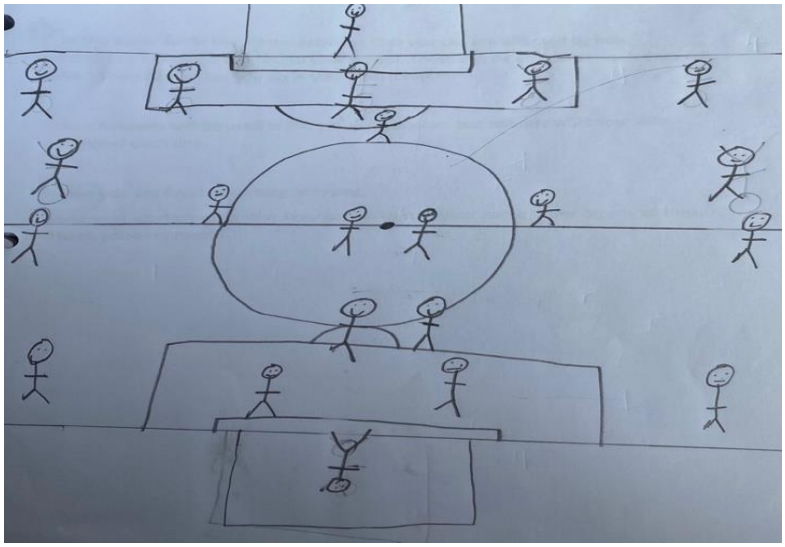
now, but you do get some children, just have no interest in playing for the club you have no interest and you know they do not have the jersey. Doing stuff like that and it is rare but there is cases of it and that would be might be a little bit of problem with connectedness" (John- Sixth Class Teacher). Another strengthened this point by explaining: *"If you don't play sport, yeah it will be tough to not fit in, but like if you were very involved with the GAA Club or the local soccer club you know life is pretty easy" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* Anne makes it clear that the student who is more connected is more likely to find things easier in school than the child who does not feel like they belong. In the case of this school this would mean being integrated to the school through GAA: *"If you're not involved in sport thing, you can really see there is a bit of a divide you know, and the kids that are happier playing sport they do just seem to settling that be better I suppose" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* Teachers did understand that the promotion of GAA in the school can make some students feel quite disconnected.

Another teacher had further insight into the focus of the GAA club in the school: *"I, we have reservations about overly celebrating kind of, you know, the success of the local GAA team cause you're almost super imposing the beliefs of a team or of you know people who are that level of interest on the whole school community" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* Tom demonstrates knowledge that while GAA can make students feel very connected to the school, they can also make a student disconnect. Furthermore, while some students do not play GAA, they do have other talents. This teacher also went on to discuss that he feels there is little emphasis on other students' successes: *"So like for example, we have a number of guys that are particularly into scouts or into chess. But there's no big celebration of their achievements or of their interest, whereas you know that*

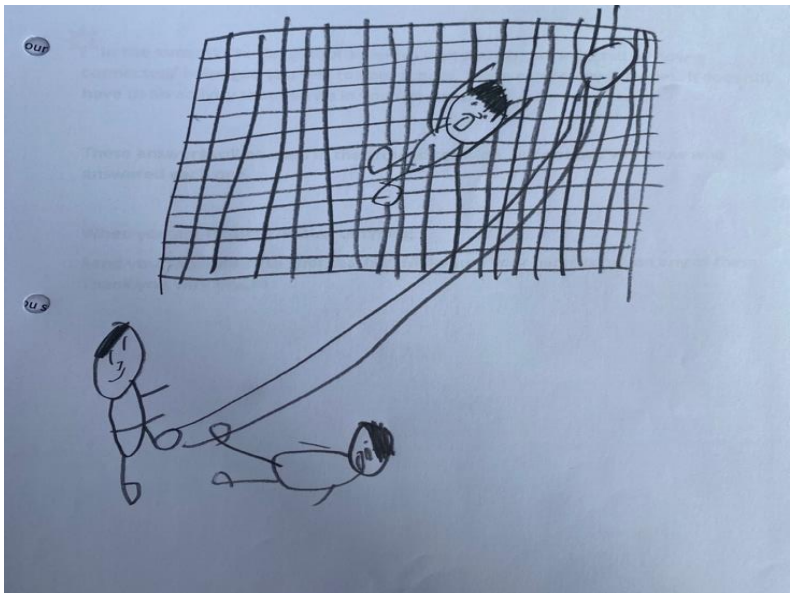
because there is a significant majority of people who are interested in GAA" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher). This teacher was also concerned about the segregation of certain groups of people this could cause: *"I suppose it's a logical that you would link it to local GAA club and their successes, but like if you keep going, if you keep doing that and you keep doing that, you eventually to my mind start alienating a significant cohort of children and their families for whom rocking up to a GAA pitch on a Sunday evening will never happen, so I think that we would have to be very judicious in what we celebrate when it when it has its origins outside of the direct school community" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* To summarise, the local GAA club gives students an opportunity to connect to peers and their school. However, by imposing a core focus on GAA in the school it excludes those that do not have an interest and consequently, they are likely to not feel like they belong to their school. Additionally, when students were asked to draw what makes them feel connected to their school, many students drew pictures of them playing GAA (see figure 12).

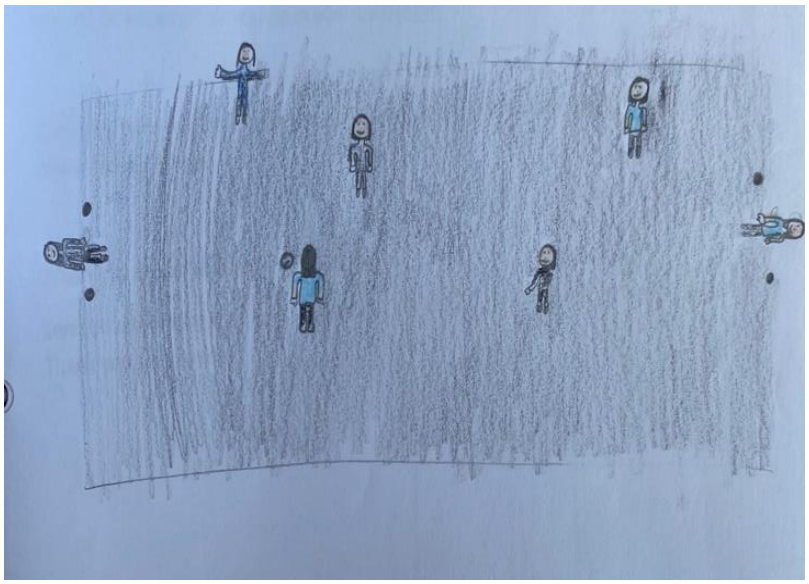
Figure 12

Student Drawings of them Playing GAA

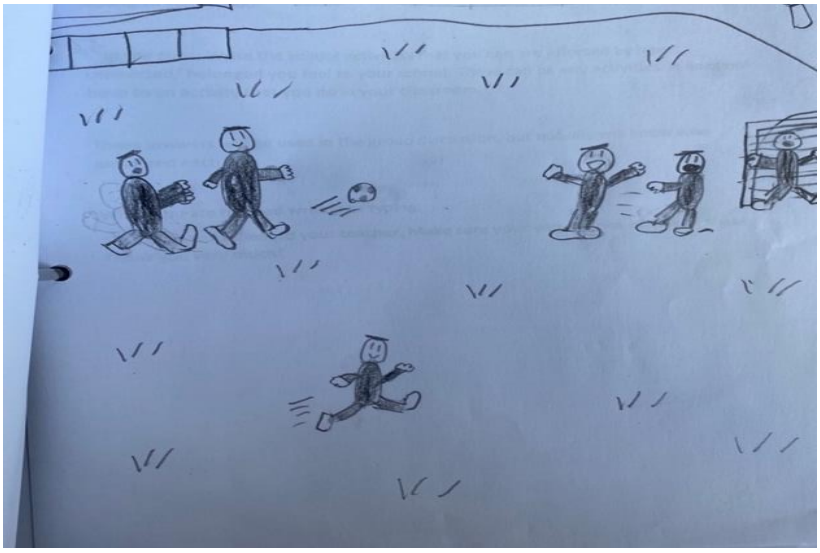












6.6.3 Subtheme 3: How the Local Parish influences School Connectedness

This school is of a Catholic ethos. It is also named after a previous local Bishop. This school strive towards preparing children for catholic sacraments and instilling Christian values. However, the school makes it clear that while they promote and teach Catholicism, they welcome students from all backgrounds and cultures to join their student body. Throughout the school you see expressions of the local parish which represents the wider community within the school. School personnel did see the benefit in embracing the Catholic ethos in to the school. This school frequently connect with the local church for example, there is a mass on the first Friday of every

month for the school which is organised and attended by people in the community: *"So every for every first Friday there is like Mass in the church during school at 12:00 o'clock. so like there will be I suppose mostly retired people and stuff Who would be actually at the mass, but then from second class who are making their communion from second class to sixth class they all go to down to mass on the first Friday of every month. It hasn't gone on now this year because of Covid but previously. So I suppose that kind of creates a sense of that you belong to this church parish community as well. So there's kind of from a few different angles. There's a chance for the kids to kind of feel connected to the area that they are from" (Peter- Fourth Class Teacher & Male GAA Coach).* Peter believes that this monthly mass offers students a chance to feel like they belong to their local parish. However, while religion is valued in this school's ethos, there is varying opinions from school personnel. Firstly, some school personnel believed the school's catholic ethos does not have an effect on student's connectedness in most years. This teacher explained that it might do during the year they make their Holy Communion and Confirmation: *"I don't really think it affects the connectedness now, maybe you could say different for say 2nd class and the confirmation year. Yeah, you know. Now we do well pre covid we would we used to confirmation every second year. So like 5th and 6th would make it together, yeah? Maybe those years. So like I've actually thought confirmation, and not confirmation year cause I've always had 5th class, so the years I've had confirmation year it does take up a lot of time, so I suppose the ethos then only because the children are immersed in that environment because the confirmation is on. But the years I don't have confirmation and I still have fifth class, it plays no impact into their life, so I suppose it really is what they are immersed in" (Anne- Fifth Class Teacher & Female GAA Coach).* This teacher makes it clear

that she believes religion only effects student's connectedness when they are preparing for an event that is based on religion.

Alternatively, one teacher expressed that while there are differing opinions on the use of a catholic ethos within their school, he believes that this ethos gives them a framework to develop connectedness in the school: *"Our school is Catholic ethos and now whether there's always going to be an element of discourse about separating church and state, and whatever your opinions are on that is kind of every man for himself, but I have never seen it as being a bad thing, or I've never seen as being a load. It is actually kind of given us a framework for different things and different ways to enable our school community to have that level of connectedness So for example, we've communions and confirmations, and now it might only affect one class, but other people children from classes are invited to join the choir" (Tom-Deputy Principal and Special Education Teacher).* It is clear there is differing opinions on the use of a catholic ethos in the school. Furthermore, it is evident that school personnel query how much the catholic ethos impacts a student's sense of school connectedness. However, while there is varying opinion from school personnel, it is worth noting that throughout the projective techniques, focus group, and semi- structured interviews, students did not mention a religious celebration or ethos directly. It is further worth considering, that while school personnel believed the catholic ethos may affect connectedness during the years that students make their First Communion and Confirmation, these students were in their Confirmation year and they did not identify any aspect of this as important to their sense of school connectedness. However, this is not to say that these student's do not incorporate the values of the catholic ethos.

6.7 Conclusion

The themes and subthemes presented in this chapter outlines the perspectives of students and school personnel on school connectedness in their school environment. This chapter outlined the participants emphasis on the influence of the social context on school connectedness. Furthermore, while the structured programs and lessons are highlighted, the importance of unstructured informal moments between peers is considered highly valuable to school connectedness. This chapter also explained the influence of various occupations on school connectedness. While the various occupations that take place were discussed, participants also highlighted the impact of confidence levels to participate and opportunity within the school to engage in occupations. This chapter also detailed the environment that is appropriate to foster school connectedness. Participants emphasised the importance of student voice and school personnel and students working as a team to achieve the same common goal of school connectedness. Furthermore, this chapter outlined the position of the community in relation to school connectedness. This considered the local sports club and the influence of religion on this particular school. These findings come together to create an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of school connectedness in this school. These findings are then analysed in relation to current literature in the discussion (chapter 7).

Chapter 7 : Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand a student's school connectedness and the relationship of this with student's occupations. This study gathered student and school personnel perspectives through a case study methodology.

The research aimed to address the following questions:

Research Question 1: What is the understanding of connectedness to the school environment from the perspectives of the student, teacher and school?

Research Question 2: What are the determinants of connectedness in a school environment?

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between occupational participation and school connectedness?

Data were gathered from sixth class students to ensure student voice and understanding of their sense of school connectedness. Data were also gathered from school personnel to explore the perceptions of adults who work closest with these students. All participants were from the same rural school in Ireland to align with a single case study methodology. In this study, participants discussed their understanding of school connectedness, what promotes connectedness, what hinders connectedness, and how connectedness is facilitated or not facilitated. Themes which emerged were similar amongst both students and school personnel. As previously discussed, this is an instrumental single case study and therefore the aim is to examine the phenomenon of school connectedness and its relationship with occupation. While the findings contained thick description, the aim of the discussion is to synthesise this

content. For the context of this study, school occupations entail any occupation a student participates in during school time, these typically include, play, socialising, learning, writing, and various sports (this is not an exhaustive list). This discussion begins by exploring the understanding of school connectedness. This discussion identifying a range of themes based on the participants perceptions of school connectedness including how involved they are in stuff, every student in their class is doing the one thing, and the school being a component of their local GAA club and community. This discussion then identifies the participants determinants of their sense of school connectedness to include social connectedness, wellbeing, school as an embedded experience, and connectedness through doing occupations. This discussion is then linked to current school-based occupational therapy practice in Ireland.

7.2 Understanding of School Connectedness

The term "school connectedness" was not greatly known amongst students and school personnel. However, school personnel acknowledged that while they do not frequently utilise the term, they do promote it throughout their practice. While they did not often use the term, many participants were able to assume an understanding of what it may be. Similar to the literature (Allen & Bowles, 2012), many participants in this study referred to school connectedness as "school belonging" and they often used these terms interchangeably. This is similar to various studies which also used these terms interchangeably (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Lim et al., 2021). There was several ways of explaining school connectedness which included "how involved you are in stuff", "everyone in the class is doing one thing", and "an arm of the GAA club and the community".

7.2.1 "How Involved You are in Stuff"

Participation in the school was highlighted by students and school personnel as essential to school connectedness. It was the understanding of students that the more involved in occupations throughout the school, the more connected you will be. Students described various occupations that they enjoy participating in at school and how these make them feel connected to their school. They expressed that their competence in an occupation correlates with their connectedness. Participants discussed that a student may not want to participate in an activity if they do not believe they are good at it as they run the risk of making a mistake on front of their peers.

Not only did students want to be involved in various activities in the school to be connected, they also want to be involved in the development of their daily school work. It was considered important for students to have their voices heard in their school day. The importance of student's voices being heard to promote school connectedness was also evidenced in the literature. For example, one study discussed that by including the student's voices in decision making their sense of connectedness improves (Vaz et al., 2015). Students highlight the need for their voice to be heard and acted upon in this study. This aligns with Professor Laura Lundy's model of child participation whereby children must be given space to convey their thoughts, expression of their voice must be facilitated, they must be heard and importantly, their view must be acted upon (Lundy, 2007). This model is included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020 (DCYA, 2015). In this research, school connectedness can be considered to be firmly rooted the efficacy and implementation of this model and consequently, how well student's voices are heard impacts students sense of school connectedness. Participation is understood as essential to school connectedness, and therefore,

students must be able to express which occupations they want to participate in. Due to the importance of student participation in occupations, it is the school's responsibility to offer opportunities to engage in occupations.

7.2.2 "Everyone in the Class is Doing the One Thing"

Students and school personnel emphasised the importance of students engaging in occupations together. Students explained that by doing occupations together they can avail of informal moments to connect with their peers. Students elaborated that these are the moments of togetherness is where they really connect, rather than sitting in the classroom listening to their teacher. Participants discussed how students must always feel included to enhance their sense of school connectedness. Students explained that socialising with their peers allows them to connect to one another and consequently, connect to their school. This aligns with one study which examined peer relationships for student engagement in a rural school in the United Kingdom. This study found that students describe their school experience as almost solely a social activity (Gristy, 2012). It was evident from participants that the doing of the occupation was not the most important part but rather the doing the occupation together and creating unity with their peers. Throughout discussion with participants, there was a lot of emphasis on the social component of occupations and it appeared to have the most bearing on how people felt connected to their school. Literature has already examined how doing with others shapes the experience of the occupation (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017; Ramugondo & Kronenberg, 2015). Collective occupations has been defined as "occupations that are engaged in by groups, communities and/or populations in everyday contexts, and may reflect a need for belonging" (Ramugondo & Kronenberg). There is an emphasis on the belonging

to a social group in this definition. One study outlined that collective occupation develops connectedness amongst people which creates a shared identity (Adams, 2014). The same study also added that collective occupation must take place in an enabling environment whereby there is a supportive community that fosters and promotes collective occupation (Adams, 2014). In this case, the school aims to promote an enabling environment for its students to engage in collective occupation. Consequently, findings in this work has highlighted a rich tapestry of collective occupations for children and adults and school environments that is reflective of and influenced by the people, culture, and place within the school and community.

7.2.3 "An Arm of the GAA Club and the Community"

In Ireland, GAA is the national sport that is played throughout the country. Many GAA clubs are located in many towns. Particularly in rural Ireland (as seen in this study), the GAA club is an integral part of a local town that brings many communities together. The GAA in Ireland has outlined its various values to include community identity where they outline that "everything we do helps to enrich the communities we serve" and supporting the wellbeing of those in their community (GAA, 2022). The GAA in Ireland has also outlined inclusiveness, respect and teamwork as their main values (GAA, 2022). For many people in Ireland, the Catholic church continues to be an important part of their local community. Integration into the community was emphasised as essential to student's school connectedness in this research. Many participants considered the school as a dimension of their local community which encompassed the school, the local GAA club, and the local parish. This meant that participants deemed it important to connect to the other dimensions of the community. For example, students and school personnel explained that you are

more connected to the school if you play for the local GAA club. While the increase in connectedness for members of the local community was evident, the negative impact on student's school connectedness if they are not from this community was also highlighted. This is the first study to consider the importance of the school's position in the local community and its relationship with student's sense of school connectedness. The importance of collective occupations was previously mentioned. It is clear that while collective occupations promote connectedness, exclusion from a collective occupation can reduce a student's sense of connectedness. While collective occupations have great value, the importance of inclusion for all must be considered. The collective nature of the occupations is evident in schools however, this also extends beyond the school and is reflective of the structures and institutions in the community such as the GAA. This finding may be a uniquely Irish experience however, it would be interesting to see if community institutions in other contexts might also bring a similar influence on collective occupations of children in schools. While this is the first study to consider the relationship between the local community and school connectedness specifically, it is not the first study to understand and recognise the importance of community integration for people's wellbeing. Studies have discussed the need to understand the dynamic and complex nature of different communities in order to conduct client-centred practice (Hyett et al., 2016; Wilcock 2006). The school in this study appreciates the importance of community integration and connectedness by accessing the various institutions in the community to integrate students. Hyett et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of community centred occupation that includes partnership and collaboration within communities whereby co-occupation/ collective occupation creates a mutual purpose amongst members of

the community. It can be seen in this school that engaging in GAA has a mutual purpose for many students and school personnel.

7.3 Determinants of School Connectedness

The determinants of school connectedness is largely discussed throughout the literature (CDC, 2009; Gowing, 2019; McNeely et al., 2002; Shochet et al., 2007; Vaz et al., 2015). While various determinants were identified the general emphasis was that it involved participation in the school, the social influence of those around them, and the placement of the school within the broader community. While various determinants of school connectedness were established in the data and throughout the literature some were emphasised more by participants than others. The importance of connecting to other local institutions was not found in any other studies as a determinant of school connectedness and is therefore, it is unique to this study.

7.3.1 Social Connectedness

The social environment is evident in this study and other studies to have the a significant effect on student's sense of school connectedness (Gowing, 2019; Gristy, 2012; Yuen et al., 2012). Students and school personnel made it clear that it is important to have support from peers and to feel included by other students. Strong friendships was identified as key to school connectedness with many explaining that they would not be connected to their school without their friends. The data showed that if a student has not developed strong peer relationships they may have difficulty connecting to their school. This is similar to several other studies which highlighted the need for strong peer relationships to create a strong sense of connectedness to the school (Gowing, 2019; Gristy, 2012; Yuen et al., 2012). Furthermore, as previously discussed, the most known definition for school connectedness "the belief held by

students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as them as individuals" (CDC, 2009) emphasises how students care about what those around them think of them.

Students also highlighted the importance of unstructured moments whereby they get an informal opportunity to connect with their peers. These are the unplanned moments that typically can happen during breaktime or during a structured activity that has a different objective such as waiting for the ball during PE. Literature has outlined the necessity of unstructured moments with peers to facilitate social emotional development, providing time for peer interaction and relationship building, and developing problem solving (Burriss & Burriss, 2011; Parrott & Cohen, 2020). However, while the importance of unstructured moments was identified as one of the most valuable opportunities to promote school connectedness in this study, other studies have not highlighted this importance with a direct relationship with school connectedness. Furthermore, as previously outlined many aspects of wellbeing including school connectedness are aimed to be addressed through structured wellbeing initiatives and therefore, highlighting a lack of acknowledgement of the importance of unstructured moments between students to create a sense of school connectedness.

7.3.2 Wellbeing

From participants in this study and other studies school connectedness is situated as a protective factor of student's wellbeing. Most efforts to promote school connectedness occur within the context of wellbeing programmes such as "Walk Tall" and initiatives such as "Friendship Week". These wellbeing programmes align with the structure of the DES, however, students feel that their school connectedness is actually promoted during the informal times that they get to chat to peers. Therefore,

the efficacy of structured programs as the only approach to promoting school connectedness is an area of concern. Furthermore, teachers added to this point by explaining that they use structured programs outlining in the SPHE curriculum during class, however, they feel that once a student leaves the classroom this information is not carried over to breaktime or outside the classroom. Teachers also expressed difficulty putting time into these programs due to other demands requested by the DES. Additionally, teachers believed that wellbeing should be a universal approach whereby it is promoted in every subject rather than solely for 30 minutes a week during SPHE time. The promotion of school connectedness through wellbeing initiatives is based on the decisions of policy makers outside of this school that are not aware of the context of this school in its community. These initiatives have not considered the importance of collective occupations amongst this community. It is evident that school connectedness goes beyond solely the school and is interdependent with the community. School connectedness must be addressed not only in policy but it must also be embedded in the people (community members such as school, staff, parents, other professionals), culture, and institutions (GAA, church etc) to reflect the extended nature of the factors that influence connectedness.

7.3.3 School Connectedness as an Embedded Experience

It is evident that school connectedness is influenced by a variety of cultural factors. As introduced above, the place of the school in the local community was a significant determinant of many students sense of school connectedness. As discussed, this school is located in a small community and is considered a branch of the local GAA club and local parish. While the benefits of this were highlighted by many participants, it can also be seen by other participants that this focus on the local GAA club and/ or local parish can also cause a student to feel disconnected to their school.

Students who did not play GAA discussed that they wish the school would not focus on it as much. This strong connection between the GAA club and the school can give further social opportunities, promote team work, and promote the retention of friendships after school. However, it can make those who do not enjoy GAA feel excluded and that they do not belong in the school. Furthermore, these students often have other successes which do not get as much praise as the success of those on the local GAA team. It is clear that the GAA club has significant power in this community and therefore, its successes are greatly celebrated. However, in order to ensure inclusion of all students, the successes of other activities should be appreciated. Additionally, there is a catholic ethos within this school, and although students who are not a part of the catholic religion can attend the school, it does mean they have to sit out of many events that are based on religion. These events such as communion or confirmation often take a year to plan for and require several preparation moments. While a student may not be disconnected if they do not engage in the religious component, they may miss many parts where the class is joined together and creates a connectedness between them such as the planning, practise and the event itself. While there has to be appreciation for the cohesiveness of this community through all institutions in the locality (Koukounaras Liagkis, 2016), the effect of this relationship on those that are not directly apart of those external institutions should be considered. While the CDC (2009) outline that connecting with the community is a strategy to promote school connectedness, examples given by the CDC included bringing local healthcare services into the school to advise students of their services. The CDC (2009) did not discuss the integration of students into external institutions in their local community. While no known studies focused on the specific effect of the integration of students into community on school connectedness, Wilcock (2006) did specify that

belonging in general included connecting to people, places, cultures, communities and times. Therefore, Wilcock (2006) did acknowledge the importance of connecting to one's community. School connectedness is clearly embedded in more than solely the school and therefore, expands outside of the school into the community. Further consideration about how to facilitate community integration is important because of the effect it can have on student's sense of connectedness.

7.3.4 Connectedness as Experienced Through Doing: Occupation

Engagement in different types of occupation during school was also considered a determinant of school connectedness. Firstly, students felt more connected while participating in occupations that they enjoy. The occupation was different for many students based on preference. Secondly, students felt more connected during occupations that provided them with an opportunity to socialise with their peers such as Physical Education. Thirdly, participants emphasised the importance of feeling like they are competent at an activity in order to feel like they connect to their school during it. Participants expressed that they would worry that they would make a mistake around their peers and the embarrassment associated with this. Students explained that they do not want to take part in activities that they do not feel confident at. There is a culture created amongst students in this school that mistakes should not be made. Students expressed how terrible it is when they make mistakes around their peers and that they find it challenging to forget about. While students do not feel comfortable participating in occupations they are not confident at, students are not offered a choice to opt out of activities in this school. It is worth considering whether a culture that mistakes are socially acceptable amongst peers could be created.

The relationship between doing an occupation and connectedness has been considered before. For example, Wilcock (2006) proposed that the doing of occupations provides a platform for social connectedness. Furthermore, another study focused on belonging in relation to student's wellbeing, discussed that belonging promotes the doing of occupations and also makes these occupations meaningful for the student (Marczuk et al., 2014). However, studies have not considered the other factors that may make a student feel disconnected during occupational participation such as low confidence in their ability and worry of making a mistake around their peers.

7.4 What Do All These Determinants Mean?

In this study and many other studies there is a host of different determinants of school connectedness that have been identified. This study aimed to explore how school connectedness impacts occupational participation. It is evident from the data in this study that students are greatly influenced by the external influences around them. It is clear that student's ability to engage in many occupations is determined by external factors. It is therefore necessary for contemporary occupational therapy practice to recognise the collective nature of occupations and the fact that these are embedded across institutions and communities. It can be argued that approach to current paediatric occupational therapy practise in Ireland often takes an individualistic approach which ignores the strong influence other people/ cultures have on students. As previously discussed current occupational therapy practice in Ireland is based on a referral system whereby children get referred to occupational therapy individually to address individual difficulties they are experiencing (Lynch et al., 2020). Currently occupational therapy practice is structured and influenced by a

medical model that informs service delivery thus increasing the risk that occupational therapists will overlook the collective nature of occupations in schools and reduce their ability to examine or create interventions that reflect the influence of schools and communities. This is similar to occupational therapy practise across many contexts which focuses on enabling independence rather than appreciating and promoting interdependence (Hammell, 2009). It has been argued that occupational therapy practice does not view interdependence as a valuable outcome (Gerlach et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2002). Further, while occupational therapy literature emphasises the importance of the social environment, it continues to discuss the importance of autonomy and independence (Bonikowsky et al., 2012). As discussed in the literature review, a focus on individualism risks missing a consideration of the wider social structures that influence student's occupational choices and participation (Gerlach et al., 2018). Some of the expressions of collective and co-occupations in this current study can be seen as reflective of some of those outlined in an extensive ethnography of occupations in a Greek town which highlight the need to further examine the collective or cooperative nature of occupations in their own context (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017). This ethnographic study also highlights how the contextual nature is an important factor in how practice at a local level might be improved/ advanced (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2018). The term co-occupation/ collective occupation was developed in the early days of occupational science (Pierce, 2009). While the aim is for occupational science to underpin occupational therapy practice, through the logistics and organisation of current practices in Ireland, collective occupation has not been a focus and instead, students are seeing outside of their natural environment (frequently in a clinic) and therefore, the social structure that influences them is removed.

Findings in this study demonstrate the effect of other student's opinions and relationships with peers and teachers on student's performance in occupations in school through concern to make a mistake and importance of successfully engaging in every occupation. Findings in this study illustrate the significant influence of external institutions such as the local GAA club and the local parish on a student's sense of connectedness to their school. As these determinants effect a student's sense of connectedness so greatly, these findings highlight that many of the student's decisions are not independent due to the social structures surrounding them. These social structures influence their choices and participation. For example, students are likely to participate in GAA as it is so greatly embedded in the school culture or students are unlikely to participate in an occupation they are not confident at as they fear making a mistake around their peers. The ability for a student to make independent choices can be queried due to the boundaries set in place within the school community. In this study, students and school personnel frequently discussed students feeling that they cannot engage in an activity they do not believe they are competent at on front of their peers due to the risk of failure. Students can find it difficult to choose which occupations to engage in as they may choose to engage in an occupation that increases their likelihood to fit in with their peers such as GAA in this school. While this can create unity and common interest, it can also demonstrate lack of independent choice in participating in this occupation.

7.4.1 Is There an Alternative Desirable Outcome?

In occupational therapy, the goal is often to promote and enable independence however, it is worth considering reviewing this goal in school given the significant influences on a student and the importance of collective occupation for many students.

While it is valuable to be independent in certain occupations, interdependence should not be devalued as an undesirable goal (Hammell, 2009). Furthermore, as outlined in the literature review belonging is a fundamental part of occupational science (Wilcock, 2009). Belonging is understood to encompass building social relationships while engaging in occupation (Ekelman et al., 2013). Belonging incorporates a person's connection to people and places (Hammell, 2004). Additionally, Goodenow (1993) explains that school belongingness is neither purely intrapersonal nor exclusively contextual. School connectedness is evidently affected by a range of external determinants including peers, teachers, school culture, perceptions of others, pedagogy, ethos, school initiatives, GAA focus, religion, and Covid-19. However, current paediatric occupational therapy practice in Ireland does not consider many of these determinants when engaging in 1:1 therapy practice in a clinic. This 1:1 clinic based model takes the student into a setting where they are aimed to be independent in various occupations although removed from their natural environment. In occupational therapy it has been said that the more capable a person is to make decisions without the influence of others the more independent they are (Bonikowsky et al., 2012). However, students are surrounded by various influences and social structures that can make decision making independently not a realistic or valuable goal. Furthermore, by focusing on one individual student as current paediatric practice does, collective occupation is not considered and therefore, the student's individual occupations are at the core focus. This study has outlined the valuable importance of collective occupations to students and therefore highlights that current paediatric occupational therapy is not addressing these valuable collective occupations.

7.5 Implications for School-Based Occupational Therapy Practice

There is little research on the promotion of school connectedness in practice (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Across the literature, school connectedness has been found to promote student's wellbeing. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, current best practice in schools is based on a tiered model. Evidence has demonstrated that a whole school approach to school connectedness is most effective given the range of determinants on this protective factor and effect it can have on all student's participation (Rowe & Stewart, 2009; Waters et al., 2009). The findings of this study can further highlight the need for intervention on a whole school or class basis which considers the varying factors involved in each student's occupational engagement.

It has been established that a student's school connectedness is interdependent on a range of determinants. It was also clear that a student's sense of connectedness impacts their occupational engagement and performance. Therefore, an occupational therapist could be well positioned to work collaboratively with all members of the school community to promote student connectedness. However, as occupational therapists in Ireland are not directly placed in a specific school and either work between many schools or attend a school on referral for a specific student's needs, they are not well placed in the Irish system to promote school connectedness. While an occupational therapists' expertise could work from a whole school approach to promote student's sense of school connectedness, this is not possible when they do not spend enough time in a school to implement such a promotion. As discussed, the large variety of determinants on school connectedness including a student's social context, school pedagogy, choice of occupations available to the student, and the school's place within the local community impact a student's sense of school connectedness. It is

evident throughout the findings, that the culture formed in each school is unique and dependent on the community in which it is placed. This study has largely shown the importance of the community that the school is situated in. It is evident that the community shapes student's choice of occupations, sense of connectedness, and greatly effects relationships amongst people in the school body. It is evident that the school is not a stand-alone institution and rather, it is influenced by a variety of factors in their local surroundings. Furthermore, it also plays a significant contribution to external institutions that it has relationships with such as the local parish or GAA club. For an occupational therapist to implement the promotion of school connectedness in the school they have to understand the cultural and communal dynamic of the school. To fully embrace the ethos of the school, one must be situated in the running of the school. An occupational therapist cannot come into a school and aim to promote student's sense of school connectedness without having a rich understanding of the student's context. Essentially, an occupational therapist cannot aim to promote school connectedness if they do not connect to the school themselves.

Lastly, throughout this thesis the importance and value of school connectedness has been outlined. Due to the various benefits school connectedness has for a student's wellbeing, school connectedness must be a worthy outcome in its own right. School connectedness should not solely be an added bonus of other interventions in practice. School connectedness should be understood as a concept that needs to be facilitated and might not always naturally occur. In this study it was clear that school connectedness was a phenomenon that was not heard of/ thought of frequently. Practitioners must understand the concept and the benefits of promoting school connectedness in practice.

7.6 Study Limitations and Future Research

7.6.1 Study Limitations

The aim of this study was to understand student and school personnel's perspectives of school connectedness and its relationship with student's occupations. This qualitative study utilised a single case study design. The following limitations of this study exist;

7.6.1.1 Sample size

Covid-19 pandemic: As mentioned, this study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that the researcher had to complete all data gathering online over video calls. The researcher found online video calls challenging as it was difficult to understand the participant's body language and emotion. An online focus group was particularly challenging as it was complicated to see the dynamic and interaction between group members as well as hindered their ability to engage in team work during tasks. It also made it more challenging for students to express their views when there are many people speaking.

7.6.1.2 Research Design

Single case study: This was a single case study design research study. As mentioned, this gives the researcher the opportunity to gather a lot of data on one specific case to explore the phenomenon of school connectedness in detail. As highlighted while generalisability is not achieved, it is up to each reader to decide if the information is transferable.

7.6.1.3 Scope of research

This study was with sixth class students and therefore, the focus was on their school connectedness. While they did reflect on previous years, participants from

other classes were not included. The reason for this choice was due to the difficulty with understanding the concept of school connectedness. Additionally, it was believed that sixth class students would have the best insight into school connectedness as they had spent the most time in the school.

7.6.1.4 Temporal consideration

This study was completed in the time frame of a research masters and therefore, it is a specific time frame that may not be reflective of a longer course of data. However, as discussed, it is important to appreciate the uniqueness of this data as it was gathered during a rare time of school closure.

7.6.2 Future Research

Further samples (more schools, participant numbers, and ages): This study gave an in-depth detailed understanding of school connectedness from one school. Due to the single case nature of this study it allowed the research to provide detail into the student's school connectedness on a holistic level. Further research could include more case studies. These could be single case studies that build on the knowledge of this study or they could be multi-case studies that compare the school connectedness of many schools. Through further case studies or a multi-case study this may give readers further information to decide on the transferability of findings to their setting. Furthermore, further research could include greater number of participants if the resources of the study allow i.e. time. Additionally, further research could include more age/ class groups to get further insight into all students school connectedness.

7.6.2.1 Longitudinal research:

Research on school connectedness over a longer time frame may provide further detail and information than this study. This time would also allow for

participants to gather a greater understanding of the phenomenon of school connectedness. This would allow the researcher and participants to explore the topic further to closely examine what effects their sense of school connectedness. Conducting this study over a longer time frame would also allow the research to see how school connectedness changes and which factors impact these changes. It would also allow the research to examine school connectedness in relation to other wellbeing factors such as children and adolescent mental health.

7.6.2.2 Further steps in development of intervention:

This study meets the descriptors of basic research in that it is focused on the theory of school connectedness and occupational science. Applied research focuses on a particular theory to apply to specific practice, and therefore it could be argued that this study aims to apply school connectedness to school-based occupational therapy practice. It is evident this study shares components of basic and applied research and it was established that it also holds a place in translational research. Translational research is defined as the conversion of scientific knowledge into clinical applications (Sainburg et al., 2017). There is a need and a call for further translational research which ensures that occupational science informs the development of evidenced-based practices in occupational therapy (Sainburg et al., 2017). This study plays a role in this translational process with an aim to commence the establishment of an intervention in schools to promote school connectedness. Within intervention development there is four phases these include development, piloting, evaluation, and implementation (Craig et al., 2008). However, within each phase there is complex planning that must take place. This study focuses on the development phase of intervention planning (O'Cathain et al., 2019). Within the development phase this study targets the following areas as outlined by O'Cathain et al., 2019; 1) involving stakeholders in development

2) review published evidence 3) draw on existing theories 4) understand the context 5) undertake primary data collection. To complete the development phase of intervention planning the following areas must be worked on; 1) bringing a team together 2) designing the specific program and intervention.

7.7 Conclusion

To conclude this discussion, it is evident the variety of determinants that effect a student's occupations in school. While independence is a goal in many occupational therapy settings, it is justified throughout this discussion that independence is not always a realistic and student-centred goal in school-based occupational therapy. Students are influenced from their peers, school personnel, and wider social structures. These influences determine the ability for students to choose the occupations they engage in. These factors also effect how competent a student feels in an occupation and thus, willingness to participate. Furthermore, the benefit of collective occupations whereby the occupation is shared with other people and students benefit from other people's engagement in this occupation with them. Students continuously emphasise the importance of connectedness of their classmates while engaging in occupations. Following the justification of the importance of connectedness to students and it's consequential effect on student's occupations, it was considered how this could be addressed by occupational therapists in schools. Following examination of current school-based models of practice, it was determined that school connectedness must be promoted throughout the school body and it is evidently essential for all students rather than a select few. Furthermore, a whole school promotion approach should be taken to increase school connectedness and therefore, engagement in meaningful occupations in school. However, while this study has highlighted that a whole school approach is the best way to address school connectedness by occupational therapists,

it is also considered that with the current model of practice of school based occupational therapy in Ireland, this approach would not be possible. This study further justifies the need for occupational therapists to be based directly in schools in Ireland.

Chapter 8 : Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to further understand student and school personnel's understanding of school connectedness and its relationship with student's school-based occupations. This study is a single case study that took place in a primary school in Ireland with sixth class students and their school personnel. This study took place during a unique time where schools were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This provided a unique perspective on school connectedness with participants frequently comparing when they were in school to when they are not.

It is understood that there are a range of determinants of school connectedness (CDC, 2009; Gowing, 2019; McNeely et al., 2002; Shochet et al., 2007; Vaz et al., 2015). This study commenced by identifying the range of determinants that effect the student in this study's sense of school connectedness. These determinants were considered from multiple levels from an individual level to a wider community level. Furthermore, this study identified that students feel more connected to their school if they are participating in an occupation that they believe they are competent at. Students in this study believed that making a mistake was a big issue and negatively affected their sense of connectedness. Furthermore, participants also expressed that when students participate in co-occupations/ collective occupations, whereby they get to engage in an activity together, promoted their sense of school connectedness. So far school-based occupational therapy literature, has not focused on co-occupation/ collective occupation. This study began to address this gap. Additionally, participants in this study outlined that being a part of institutions in their local community fostered their sense of connectedness to the school.

On review of the literature, it was evident that while many determinants of school connectedness have been identified, little studies have considered how it can be promoted in practice. This thesis took the construct of school connectedness and examined its place in occupational science and occupational therapy. School connectedness has been recognised in other disciplines such as psychology (Niehaus et al., 2012; Rawatial & Petersen, 2012; Waters et al. 2010) however, it has not been greatly appreciated from an occupation perspective. While belonging has been considered particularly in occupational science (Hammell, 2009; Wilcock, 2007), there has been little consideration of this within specific occupational therapy settings such as a school. School-based occupational therapy is an emerging area (O'Donoghue et al., 2021) and therefore, there is a need to examine occupational participation in the school environments and associated factors such as school connectedness. School connectedness has not been considered in relation to school-based occupational therapy before. This study began to address this gap in the evidence and practice. This study sets a foundation for the development of intervention to promote school connectedness in schools.

Most of current school-based occupational therapy practice in Ireland involves occupational therapists coming to a school following referral for a specific student. The practice then involves 1:1 therapy work for this student. It frequently utilises a pull-out from the classroom approach. This means that as the occupational therapist goes to many schools, they do not have an insight into the culture and relationships within the school. Therefore, as established throughout this thesis, school connectedness has many determinants and should be promoted through a whole school approach, this is not possible to be promoted through occupational therapists' current approach to practice. However, in Ireland, there is currently an undergoing study

which aims to establish school-based practice whereby the therapist is based within the school working from a tiered approach (NCSE, 2017). This thesis adds to the evidence of the need for this approach to practice in Ireland by identifying that it is with this approach that school connectedness can be fostered.

Previous studies have focused on independence as an outcome for children (Onwumere et al., 2021; Wahyuni et al., 2022; Rogers, 1982). However, this study values interdependence as a valuable outcome for children to ensure their positive wellbeing in the school environment. This will challenge existing paediatric occupational therapy practices in Ireland as constructs such as interdependence do not seem to factor within typical intervention. This study accepts that it is interdependence amongst people that creates connectedness. Little school-based occupational therapy research has considered the value of co-occupations/ collective occupations amongst students and also the significant impact of social structures such as the community have on students school connectedness. There is ongoing debate around the place of interdependence in occupational therapy with some literature suggesting that the promotion of independence in occupational therapy devalues interdependence as a goal (Hammell, 2009). This study has outlined the valuable place of interdependence in schools due to the significant social influences that exist. This study views interdependence as a worthy outcome in practice. This study outlines that therapists should not always strive for students to be independent in their occupations. However, in agreement with Pierce (2009), while this study greatly values interdependence, this study does not devalue the place of independence and rather builds upon it to establish a place of interdependence in practice also.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Student Semi-structured Interview Guide

These questions were discussed with a ten year old girl to ensure understanding. Questions that are highlighted are alternatives to the question if a student requires clarification. These alternatives are written by the ten year old student.

Thank you so much for taking part. So just so you know you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer and you can end the chat whenever you like.

1. If you had to explain what school connectedness/ belonging was to somebody, what would you say?
2. Would you like to tell me a bit more about your drawing? Hold up their drawing.
3. What kind of things make you feel connected to your school?
4. Are those things the same as it was when you were in seniors, third… etc/ do you think it's different for the senior infants or third class?
5. Would you be able to describe a time when you felt really connected to your school?
   "I felt connected when the teacher's in my school asked me about what should go in our new school" – can you tell me about anything like this that happened to you in your school?
6. What kind of things make you feel like you do not connect to your school?
7. Would you be able describe a time when you did not feel very connected to your school?
   "I don't like it when teacher's and kids pick favourites" – can you tell me about anything like this that happened to you that didn't leave you feeling connected?
8. Do you think your school connectedness effects your school activities?
9. What do you like doing most in school, how does it make you feel connected in your school?
10. How do your friends help you feel connected to the school?
11. Does your teacher effect how connected you feel to your school? How? Does this change when your teacher changes?
    "I like it when the teachers come over to talk to you instead of making you embarrassed with your class" – how do YOUR teachers help you feel connected in school?
12. What do you think could be done in your school to make you feel like you connect more?
13. Have you anything else to tell me that you think is important to my project?

Appendix B: School Personnel Semi-structured Interview Guide

This is a brief guide as further areas for discussion will be based on the focus group.

1. What do you think school connectedness/ belonging is?
2. What do you think helps students experience school connectedness?
3. What do you think can hinder students experiencing school connectedness?
4. On an individual level, what are the main things you do to promote school connectedness?
5. On a school level, what are the main things you do to promote school connectedness?
6. What do you think the best way of supporting a child who you think is not connecting with the school environment?
7. From your experience, do you believe school connectedness impacts children's participation in activities? If so, how and why? Would you have any examples.
8. From a broad perspective, do you think more can be done in Ireland to promote school connectedness?
9. Have you anything else to add that you feel is relevant to this study/ additional comments.

Appendix C: Student Focus Group Guide

Time	Activity	Explanation
5 minutes	Introduction	START RECORDING Hello everyone! Thank you all so much for coming to take part in my group and thank you all so much for doing my worksheet too you did a great job, and I loved all the pictures you drew. My name is Jenny, and I am doing a project for college that is about school connectedness and belonging of sixth class students. So, because this project is about you, you are the most important people for me to chat to! So today Bryan is also joining me, Bryan if you would like to introduce yourself. *Bryan introduces himself* Now we will go around the room if you all would like to tell me your names and tell us one thing you are happiest about being back at school. Now just briefly to make sure we all know some group rules that I am sure you all know already. We must make sure to listen to one another when we are speaking, we must make sure to have respect for one another and just so you know you may leave the group if you would like to.
10 minutes	What is school connectedness/ belonging	So to get started we are going to go around the room and if each person would like to say what they think school connectedness or school belonging is.

		Go around the group
30 minutes 10 each	Pile sorting/ theming Discuss Grouping Ranking	You should have three big blue sheets, blu tack, markers, and a bag with stars, a bag with clouds, and a bag with suns. Are they all there? So firstly I would like you to take the big blue sheet that says stars-things that make you feel like you connect or belong to your school, and the bag with the stars in it. If you take the stars out of the bag and you will see they all say different things on them. I would like first of all to have a chat about what we mean by each of the things on the stars. You can put the blank stars to the side. AFTER CHAT: Now I would like for you to put these stars into groups. So you can decide together which groups you think they fit in and then give each group a name that describes all the stars in it. So if you see on the big blue sheet it says group 1 and then a space for a title. So I want you to write a title or a name of a group that you have made up together and then underneath this, stick some blu tack to each of the stars and put the stars under the title you think is best. You can chat away amongst yourselves to decide which groups you think would be best.

		AFTER GROUPING: Now I would like you to hold up your poster to the camera if possible and if you could take turns telling me the groups you chose and why you chose them. RANKING: Now next to each group I would like you to number each group in order of importance. So number 1 will be the group you think is most important to making you feel like you belong in your school. Write a big number 1 in marker next to this group. And then decide which is second most important, then the third most important and so on… Now I am wondering while these things help you feel like you connect or belong is there any ways they also might make you feel like you do not connect or belong. Then do same with clouds- things that make you feel like you do not connect/ belong to your school. Then do same with stars- activities that are affected by how connected/ belonged you feel.
5-10 minutes	Group discussion Go around the room.	So I would just like to go around the room and if each person could tell me what they thing could be done in or would help them feel a greater sense of connectedness or belonging to your school.

		Would anyone like to add anything else on that or anything we covered today that could be important to my project?
2 minutes	Wrap-up/ Thank you	That is great thank you all so much for participating you have all been so excellent and my project would not be possible without you so thank you so much. So as I think you know, you will be taking part in individual chats with me tomorrow on zoom as well if that is okay. So I will chat to you then.

Appendix D: School Information Sheet and Email

Dear Principal,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Jennifer O'Leary, and I am a masters research occupational therapy student in the University College Cork. My masters research involves exploring student's school connectedness and its impact on the occupational performance of primary school children according to the students and school personnel. In other words, I am interested in investigating how students sense of belonging/ connectedness to their school impacts their daily school activities such as academics, play, socialisation etc. This is a qualitative research study and therefore, would involve gathering an understanding of student and school personnel's experiences. By school personnel, I mean any school staff member that interacts with these sixth class students regularly. This may include, their teacher, SNAs, SETs, principal, secretary, caretaker etc.

The reason for conducting this study is based on the identification of the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) of "connectedness" as an indicator of child wellbeing in schools. The NCCA have highlighted that connectedness is essential to the "health promoting school" framework of the World Health Organisation.

Currently in Ireland, school-based occupational therapy is becoming established. It is evident across the world that school-based occupational therapy can provide students with a timely service to address various accessibility needs they may have that impact on their school performance. I hope that this study will gather an understanding of how connectedness to the school environment does impact a child's

activities and therefore, help to expand school-based occupational therapy further in Ireland by adding to the Irish evidence.

Firstly, I am interested in the student's perspectives to ensure a child's voice perspective throughout this study. Secondly, as school personnel play a significant role in enabling a student's sense of connectedness, their perspective is also very important to this study. This study would involve sixth class children as it requires an ability to comprehend connectedness and an ability to read. Additionally, I believe sixth class children would be most appropriate as they have the most experience of the primary school context.

The students that wish to participate would complete a short written questionnaire and a creative exercise (see both attached). This part of the study would be open to as many sixth class students that wish to participate. Following the questionnaire and the creative exercise, I would use the themes from them, to hold an online focus group with 10 children. Following the focus group, I would then hope to engage in a short online interview with the 10 children from the focus group. Prior to involvement in the study, all students will receive a child-friendly information sheet, a get to know the researcher sheet for the students, a parent information sheet, a child assent form, a parental consent form, the short questionnaire, and the creative exercise (see all attached). If all forms could then be returned to me electronically prior to study participation. I would hope to conduct individual online interviews with 4 school personnel. They would also receive an information sheet and a consent form to be returned electronically prior to the study (see all attached).

Participation in this study would be completely voluntary and a participant may leave the study without giving any reason at any stage.

This data collection process could take place at any time that is convenient to you and your school between January-March 2021.

I would hope to arrange a meeting with you if possible to discuss this research further. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information at my email address 116375751@umail.ucc.ie or either of my supervisors- Dr. Bryan Boyle (email: bryan.boyle@ucc.ie) and Dr. Helen Lynch (email: h.lynch@ucc.ie).

Thank you very much for taking the time to gather an understanding of the study. I hope that this study would be something you would be willing for your school to participate in and add to the growing body of school-based occupational therapy literature. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Jennifer O'Leary

Appendix E: Parent Information Sheet



Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is Jennifer O'Leary, and I am a masters research occupational therapy student in the University College Cork. Occupational therapy aims to enable people to be able participate in their daily activities to the best of their ability.

What is this study?

- I am interested in investigating how students' sense of belonging/ connectedness to their school impacts their daily school activities such as academics, play, socialisation etc.
- This study would involve gathering an understanding of student and school personnel experiences.
- Currently the World Health Organisation is implementing an initiative called "health promoting schools". The aim behind this is to ensure all children's participation in school regardless of ability or diagnosis. "Connectedness" has been identified as a main concept of a child's wellbeing in schools.
- The term "school connectedness" means the belief held by students that adults and peers in their school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals.
- I would like to investigate how does this sense of school connectedness for students impact their daily activities.

What would study entail for your child?

- This study for your child (the student) would firstly involve completing a short questionnaire and a creative exercise.
- From this, 10 children will be chosen to participate in an online focus group (this a group discussion with the 10 students where they are free to discuss their opinions on school connectedness) and an individual interview.
- By consenting to this study, you are consenting for your child to participate in all aspects. However, it may be the case where they will only need to conduct the questionnaire and creative exercise.

What should you know?

- Participation in this study would be voluntary and the student may leave the study without giving a reason before, during or two weeks after data collection.

- There is no obligation to participate, and should your child choose to do so they can refuse to answer specific questions.
- The information provided will be kept confidential and anonymous. The only exception is if information is disclosed which indicates that there is a serious risk to your child or to others. Please be aware, however, that while we can guarantee that we will maintain confidentiality, we cannot guarantee that group members will do the same.
- The focus groups and interviewed will be recorded. Once the data collection is completed, the recording will be transferred to an encrypted laptop and wiped from the recording device. It will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on the University College Cork OneDrive system and subsequently on the UCC server.
- The data will be stored for 10 years and then it will be destroyed by the supervisor of this project, Dr. Bryan Boyle.
- The findings of this study would be written in a final report and may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations
- This data collection process would take place at some time January-February 2021, depending on what works best for participants and the school.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information at my email address 116375751@umail.ucc.ie or either of my supervisors- Dr. Bryan Boyle (email: bryan.boyle@ucc.ie) and Dr. Helen Lynch (email: h.lynch@ucc.ie).

Thank you very much for taking the time to gather an understanding of the study. I hope that this study is something you and your child would be willing to contribute to as their perspective is so important to add to the growing body of school-based literature in Ireland. If you are happy and your child is happy to participate please sign the parental consent form, have your child sign the child assent form and complete the student questionnaire and creative exercise. Thank you very much.

Kind regards,

Jennifer O'Leary

Student Researcher

Appendix F: Student Information Sheet

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

In my project, I want to find out what "school connectedness" (how much you feel like you belong in your school) is like for sixth class students. I want to find out how your school, your friends and your teachers help you belong.

- It is normal that your feeling of connectedness to your school can change.

- Now you're in sixth class, you know a lot about how belonged you feel and have felt over your time in primary school.

- I would love to hear what your thoughts are on school connectedness.

- This project involves answering a question sheet and completing a drawing. Following this, 10 students will take part in an online group chat and a chat with the researcher by themselves about school connectedness.

- In the write up of this project, your real names will not be used so nobody will know that you took part or what you said.

- You do not have to take part in this study. It is completely your choice if you would like to.

- You must have your parent(s)/ guardian(s) permission to take part.

- If you would like to take part please complete the child assent form, student question sheet and drawing exercise. Please also give the parent/guardian information sheet, and parent/ guardian consent form to your parent/ guardian.

- Thank you very much!



Appendix G: Student Assent Form



I, _____ (Student's full name) would like to take part in Jennifer O'Leary masters occupational therapy research study.

I have read and understood the information sheet about this project.

I am willing to take part in each part of this project to include, the question sheet, creative exercise, focus group, and interview.

It is my choice to take part in this project.

I have had enough time to think about the project.

I have talked to my parent(s)/guardian about this project.

I have been able to ask any questions about this project.

I understand that the information collected for this study is private and my name will not be used.

I understand that this research study may be published in a special book where people find out about things like belonging and connectedness, without the use of our names.

I understand that if I agree to take part in this project, I can stop taking part at any time that I want.

I understand that I can ask any questions I want about the study as it is happening.

I understand that if I sign my name on this form, it means I agree to take part in the project.

If you would like to take part, please sign below:

_____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Parent Consent Form



I, _____ (Parent/ Guardian) give permission for _____ (Child's full name) to participate in Jennifer O'Leary masters occupational therapy research study which will include a questionnaire and a creative exercise and possibly a focus group and an interview.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing. My child is participating voluntarily.

I have been given an opportunity to ask any further questions I may have regarding my child's participation in this study.

I understand that any point throughout the study, I can ask any further questions I may have.

I give permission for my child to be recorded during focus groups and interviews.

I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data up until completion of the focus group.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that all information collected will be kept on a SharePoint and Google Drive and will be deleted after 10 years.

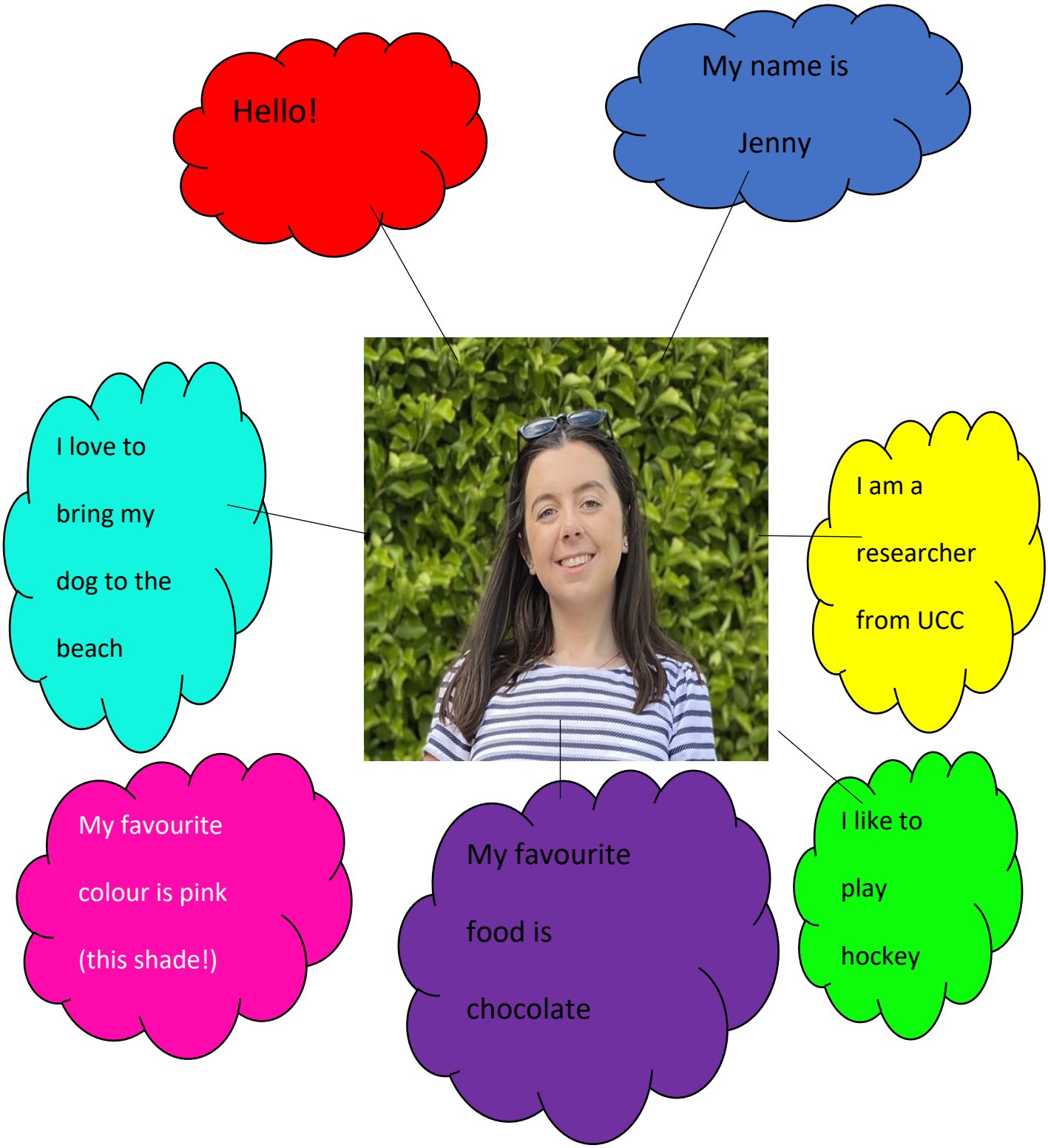
I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that this research will be written in a final report/ thesis and that the researcher may publish the findings of the study in a professional format and/ or present the information at conferences and seminars while withholding anonymity of all participants at all times.

Signed: …….. Date: ……..

PRINT NAME: ……

Appendix I: A Get to Know the Researcher



Appendix J: School Personnel Information Sheet

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Dear School Personnel,

My name is Jennifer O'Leary, and I am a masters research occupational therapy student in the University College Cork.

What is the study and why am I doing it?

- I am interested in investigating how students' sense of belonging/ connectedness to their school impacts their daily school activities such as academics, play, socialisation etc.
- This is a qualitative research study and would involve gathering an understanding of student and school personnel experiences.
- This study is based on the identification of the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) of "connectedness" as an indicator of child wellbeing in schools. The NCCA have highlighted that connectedness is essential to the "health promoting school" framework of the World Health Organisation.

What would this study entail for you?

- As you spend such a significant amount of time with the student, whether that be in a formal or informal manner, your perspective is vitally important.
- This study would involve an individual online interview with 4 school personnel.
- The interview would explore how you interpret school connectedness, and what you believe contributes to school connectedness in your school either formally or informally

What would this study entail for your students?

- I am interested in the student's perspectives to ensure a child's voice perspective.
- This study would involve sixth class students.
- The students would complete a short questionnaire and a creative exercise. This part of the study would be open to as many sixth-class students that wish to participate.

- I would then use the themes from them, to hold an online focus group and individual interviews with 10 students.

What should all participants know?

- Participation in this study is voluntary and you may leave the study without giving a reason before, during or two weeks after data collection.
- There is no obligation to participate, and should you choose to do so you can refuse to answer specific questions.
- All of the information provided will be kept confidential and anonymous. Please be aware, however, that while we can guarantee that we will maintain confidentiality, we cannot guarantee that group members will do the same.
- The focus groups and interviews will be recorded. Once the data collection is completed, the recording will be transferred to an encrypted laptop and wiped from the recording device. It will then be transcribed by the researcher, and all identifying information will be removed. Once this is done, the recording will also be deleted and only the anonymized transcript will remain. This will be stored on the University College Cork OneDrive system and subsequently on the UCC server.
- The data will be stored for 10 years and then it will be destroyed by the supervisor of this project Dr. Bryan Boyle.
- The information you provide may contribute to research publications and/or conference presentations
- This data collection process would take place between January-March 2021, depending on what works best for you and your school.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information at my email address 116375751@umail.ucc.ie or either of my supervisors- Dr. Bryan Boyle (email: bryan.boyle@ucc.ie) and Dr. Helen Lynch (email: h.lynch@ucc.ie).

Thank you very much for taking the time to gather an understanding of the study. I hope that this study is something you would be willing to contribute to as your perspective is so important. If you are willing to participate, could you please fill out the consent form and return it to me. Thank you very much.

Kind regards,

Jennifer O'Leary

Student Researcher

Appendix K: School Personnel Consent Form

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

I, _____ (School Personnel) consent to participate in Jennifer O'Leary masters occupational therapy research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I have been given an opportunity to ask any questions I may have.

I know that throughout my participation in this study I can continue to ask any questions that I may have.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I give my permission to be recorded.

I understand that all information collected will be kept in on a SharePoint and Google Drive that can only be accessed by the researchers. This data will be deleted after 10 years.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that this research will be written in a final report/ thesis and that the researcher may publish the findings of the study in a professional format and/ or present the information at conferences and seminars while withholding anonymity of all participants at all times.

Signed: ……. Date: ……..

PRINT NAME: …….

Appendix L: Projective Technique Exercise

The specific projective technique that will be used will be chosen based on the school's preference however, these are four of the options.

Projective Technique 1: Student Drawing Information

Hello! As you are now a sixth class student you have been in school for a long time so what you have to say about it is important!

Often there are different reasons that help students feel like they belong to their school or make them feel connected to their school. This can be different for everyone. These feelings often help us to feel happy in our school. These feelings often change and that is okay.

I am hoping you could draw a picture of what makes you feel a sense of belonging in your school. You can draw whatever you like. Could you please add some words to describe what you have drawn. If you could email this to your teacher when you are finished. Please do not put your name on this.

Thank you so much! 😊

Projective Technique 2

Creative Brainstorming Exercise

- This creative exercise is to prompt an understanding of school connectedness.
- In the student focus group, students will be divided into three groups (the stars, the clouds, and the suns).
- The stars group will receive the stars answers (same with suns and clouds). They will then group/ theme the answers from the entire class, explain why they chose these themes, and add any other answers they deem relevant. The student's themes will be used in the write up of this project.

Instructions for Students

 **In the stars:** Write the things in your school that make you feel like you connect/ belong to your school.

 **In the clouds:** Write the things that can make you feel like you do not connect/ belong to your school.

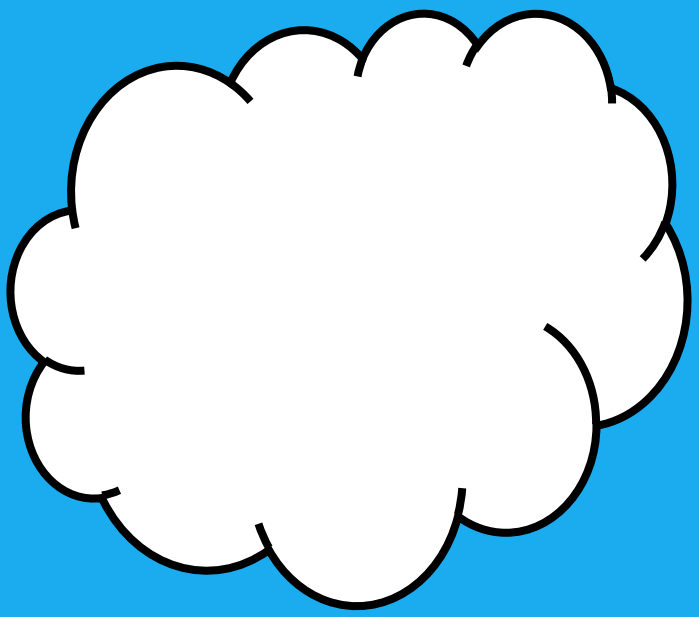
 **In the suns:** Write the school activities that you can are affected by how connected/ belonged you feel to your school. These can be any activities. It does not have to an activity that you do in your classroom.

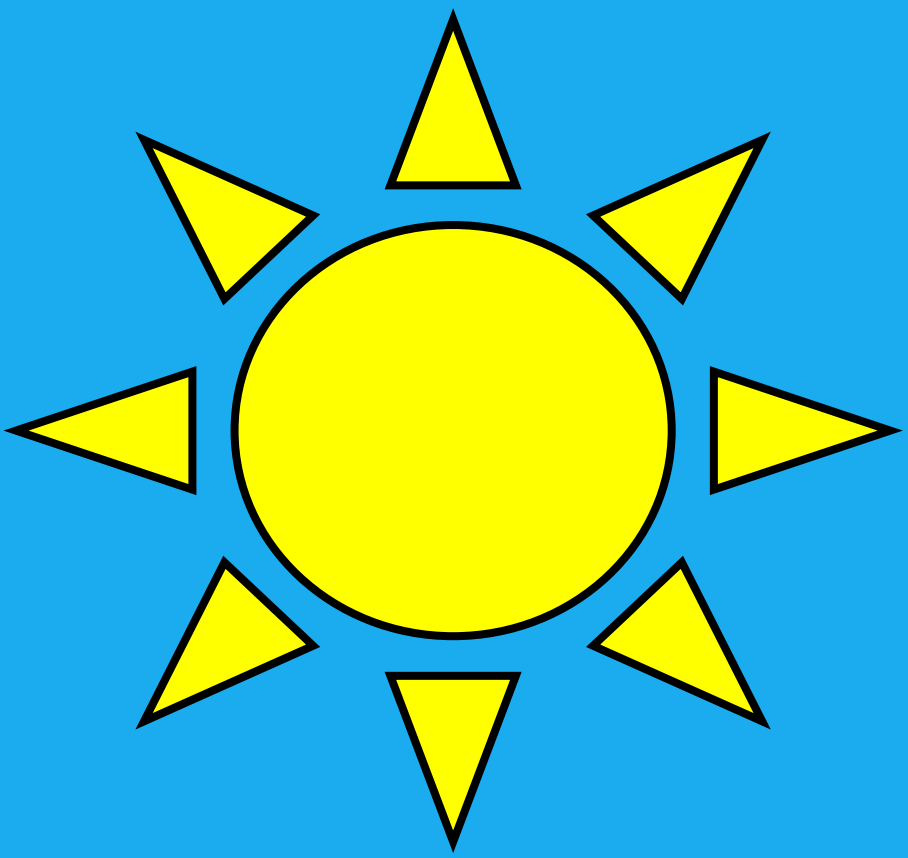
Do not put your name on any of your answers.

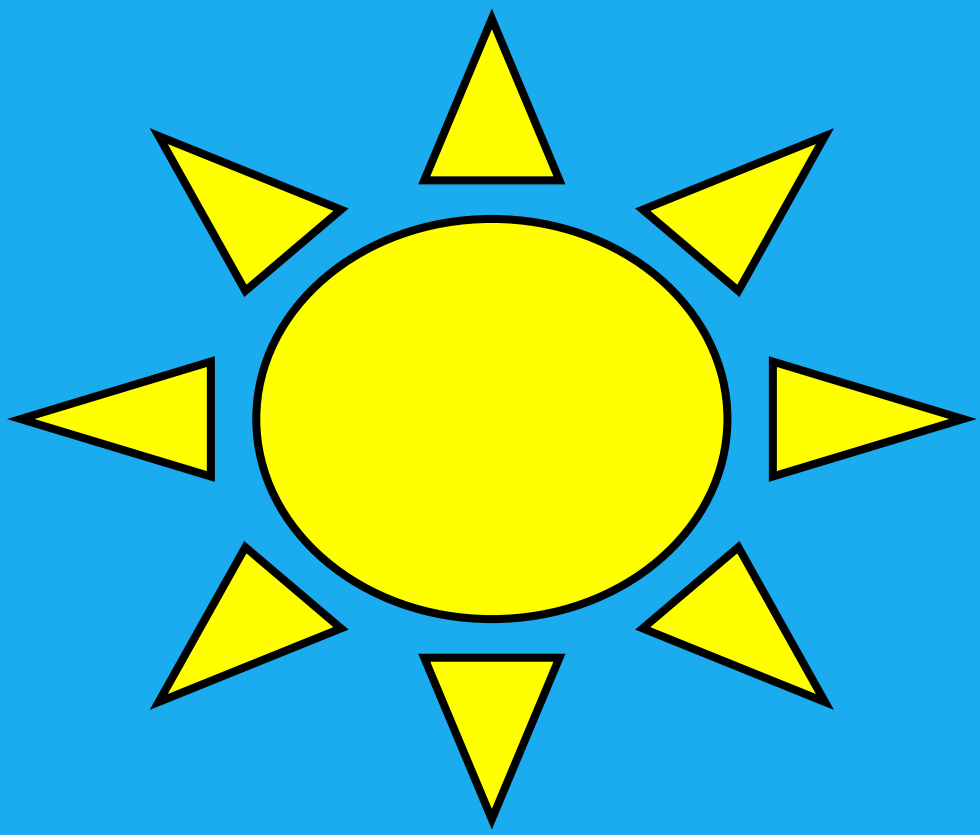
When you are finished writing or typing,

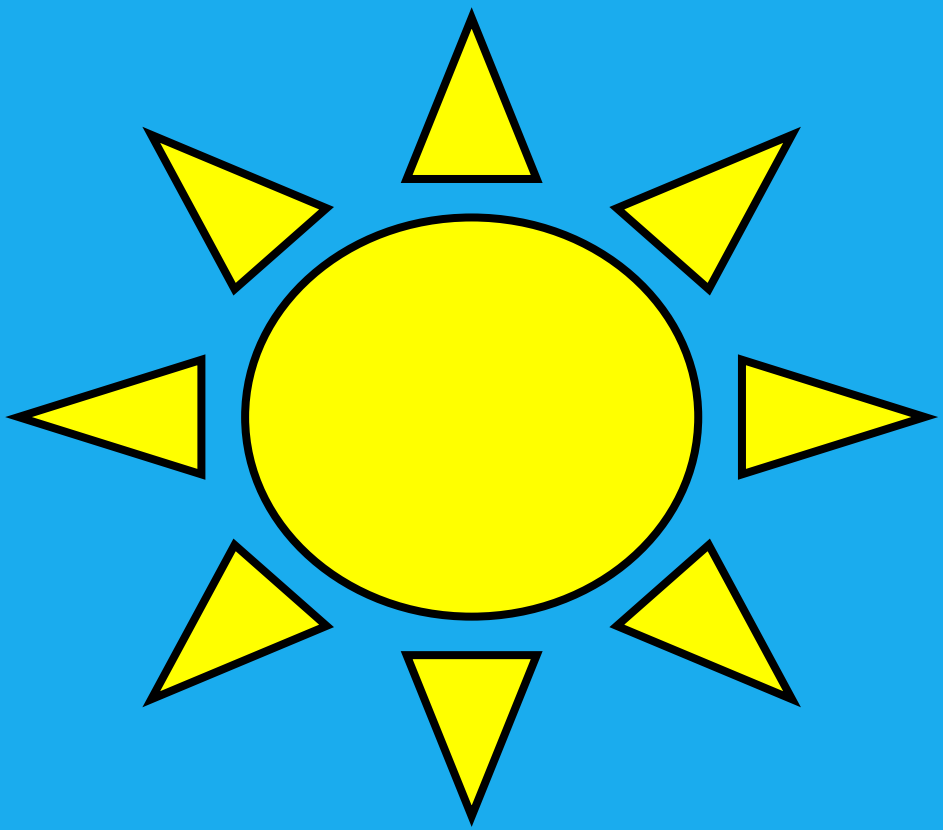
OPTION 1: Email your worksheet to your teacher along with your questionnaire. Make sure your name is not on any of these. Thank you very much!









Appendix M: School Connectedness Statements for Students



Adapted from School Connectedness Scale (Lohmeier & Lee, 2011),

Perceived School Experiences Scale (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2012), and the

Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (Renshaw, Long & Cook, 2014).

Directions for students:

- **Please do not put your name on this questionnaire.**
- **Please send this questionnaire to your teacher when you are finished.**

Answer in the box next to each statement using this scale:

Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1	2	3	4	5

Statements

Values/ Feelings

1. I feel like this school is the right place for me. ☐
2. I would feel comfortable asking most of my classmates for help with a problem. ☐
3. I like going to school events, like sports events and dances. ☐
4. I care what my classmates think of me. ☐
5. I think school is important. ☐
6. I care about my teachers' opinion of me. ☐
7. I always try to do my best at school. ☐
8. I think the things I learn at school are useless. ☐
9. I usually feel bored in class. ☐
10. I only go to school because I have to. ☐
11. I feel lonely at school. ☐
12. I would feel upset if someone said bad things about my school. ☐
13. I feel like I belong to my school. ☐

14. I do better in my school activities when I feel like I belong. ☐

15. I feel I have made the most of my school experience so far. ☐

16. I am proud to be a student at my school. ☐

17. I can really be myself at school. ☐

Environment

18. I feel like this school is the right place for me. ☐

19. I think my school is a safe place to be. ☐

20. My classmates ignore me. ☐

21. I am very involved in activities in my school. ☐

22. Students at my school bully each other. ☐

23. I would rather go to a different school. ☐

Relationships

24. Teachers at my school care about their students. ☐

25. Adults at school are interested in how students are doing. ☐

26. My teachers care about me. ☐

27. Adults at my school ask students how they are doing. ☐

28. My teachers give me extra help when I need it. ☐

29. Adults at my school are friendly to students. ☐

30. I like to make my teachers happy. ☐

31. When I have a problem, there is at least one adult at school I can trust. ☐

32. I feel like I fit in with the other students at my school. ☐

33. I feel comfortable around the other students at my school. ☐

34. I usually get along with the other students at my school. ☐

35. I like spending time with my classmates. ☐

36. I can always find a friend to sit with at lunch. ☐

37. When I have a problem, I ask my friends at school for help. ☐

38. I talk to my friends at school about how I am feeling. ☐

39. I try to make my teachers happy. ☐

40. I help my friends at school with their problems. ☐

41. I wish my teachers would leave me alone. ☐

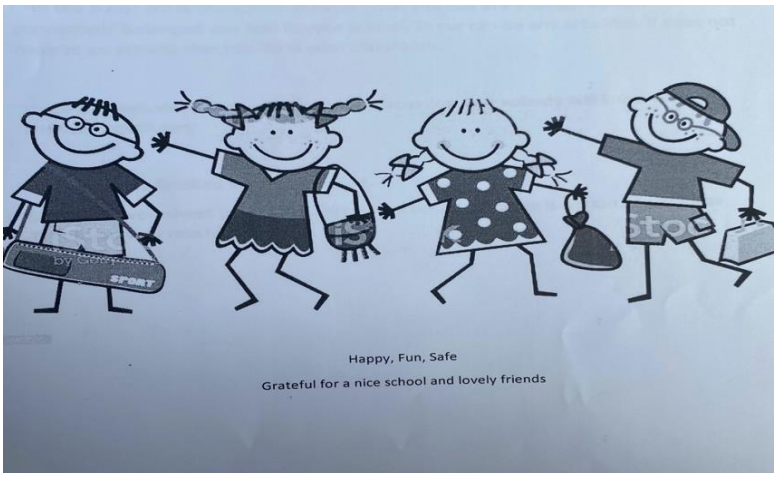
42. I wish my classmates would leave me alone. ☐

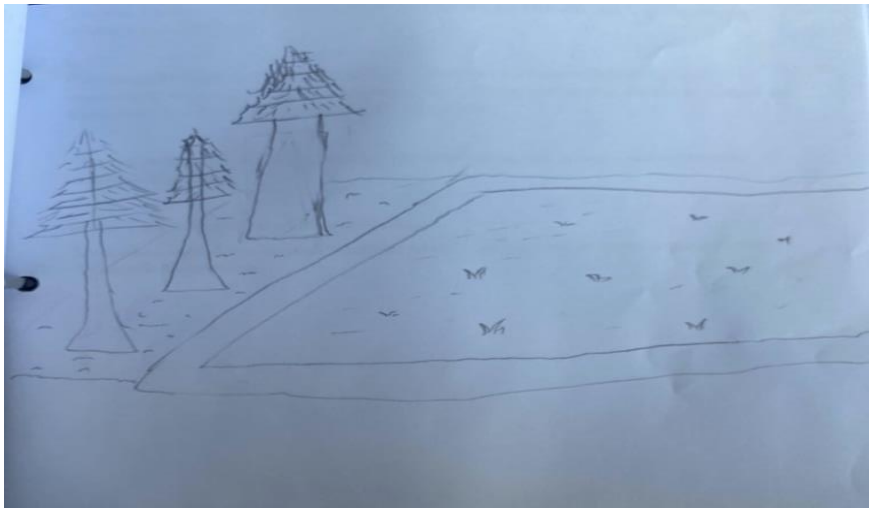
43. I fight with my classmates. ☐

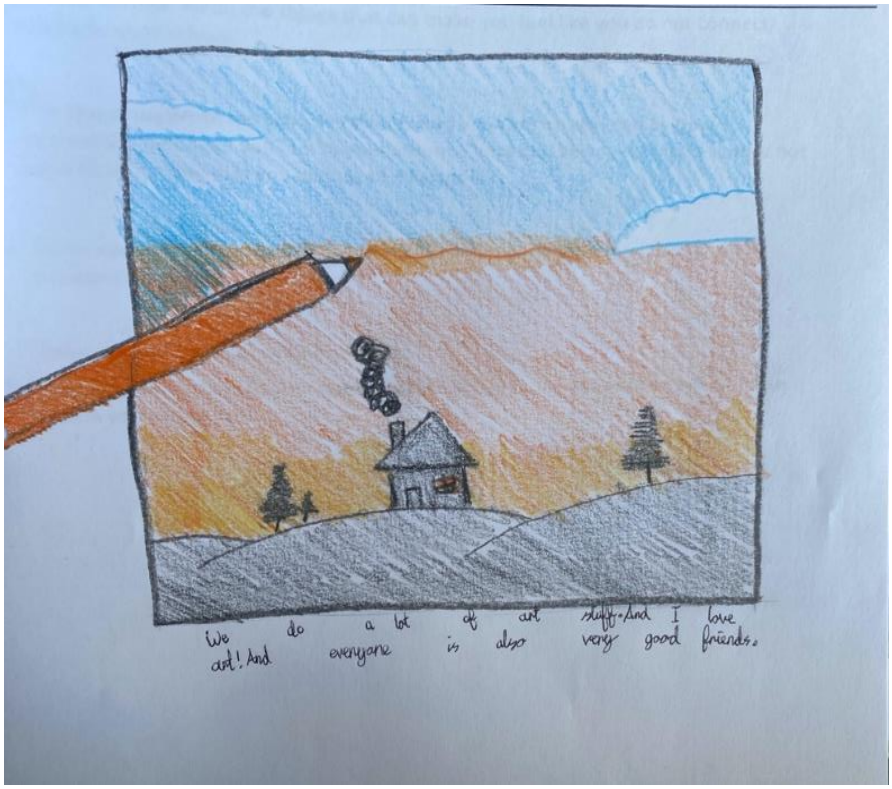
Appendix N: More Student Drawings

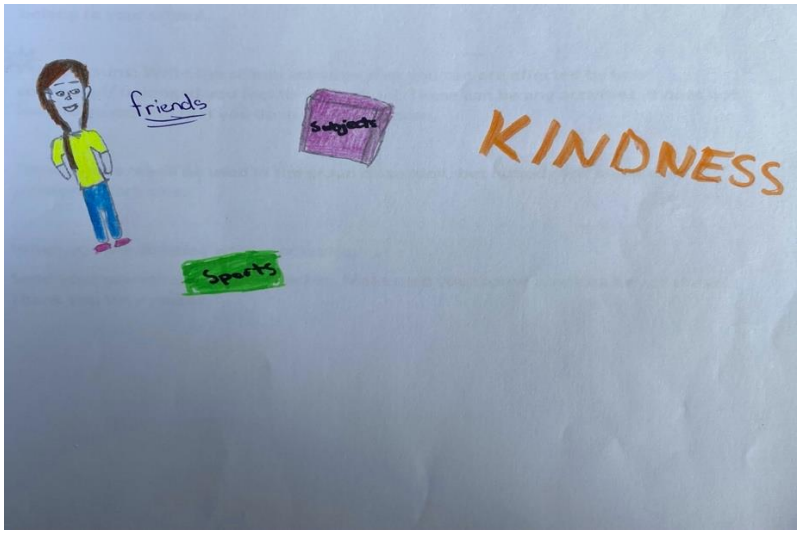




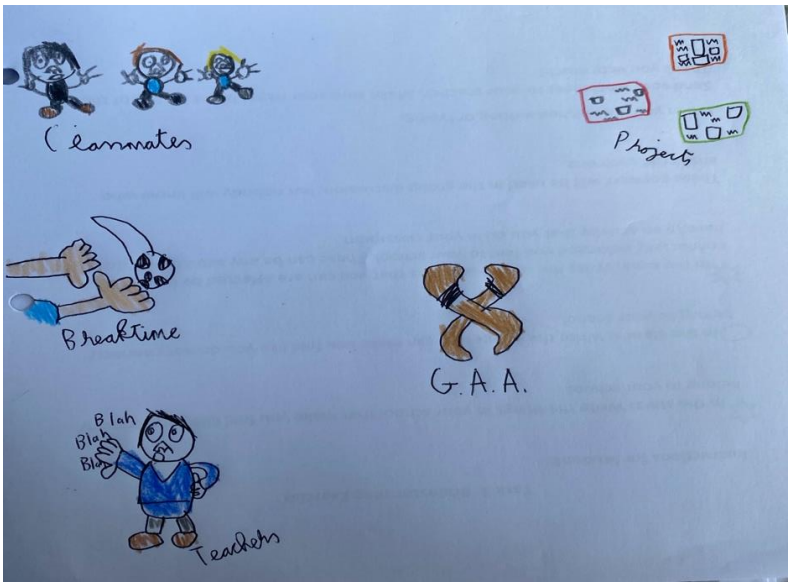


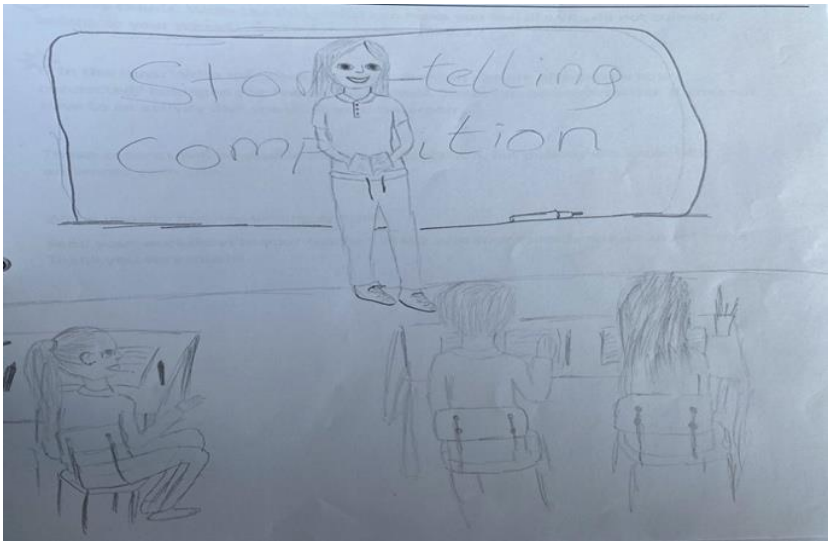


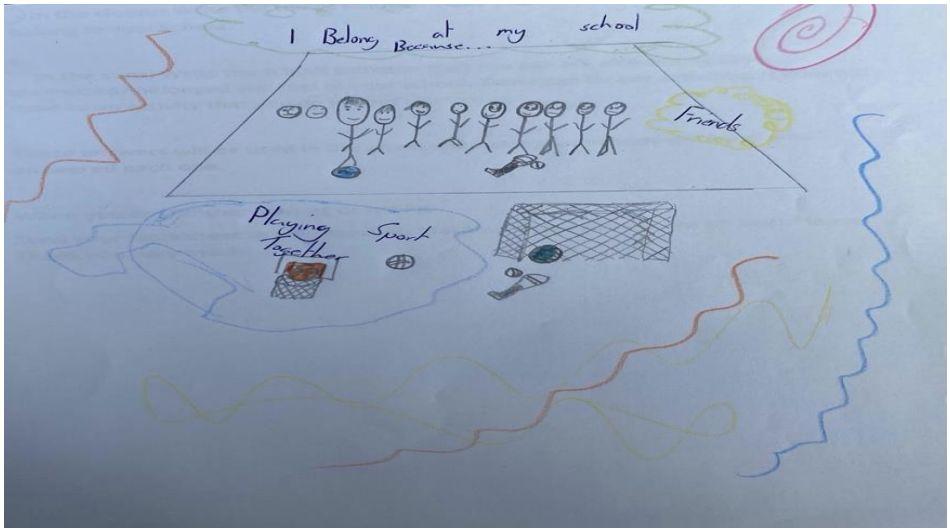

We do a lot of art stuff. And I love
art! And everyone is also very good friends.


friends
Subjects
KINDNESS
Sports

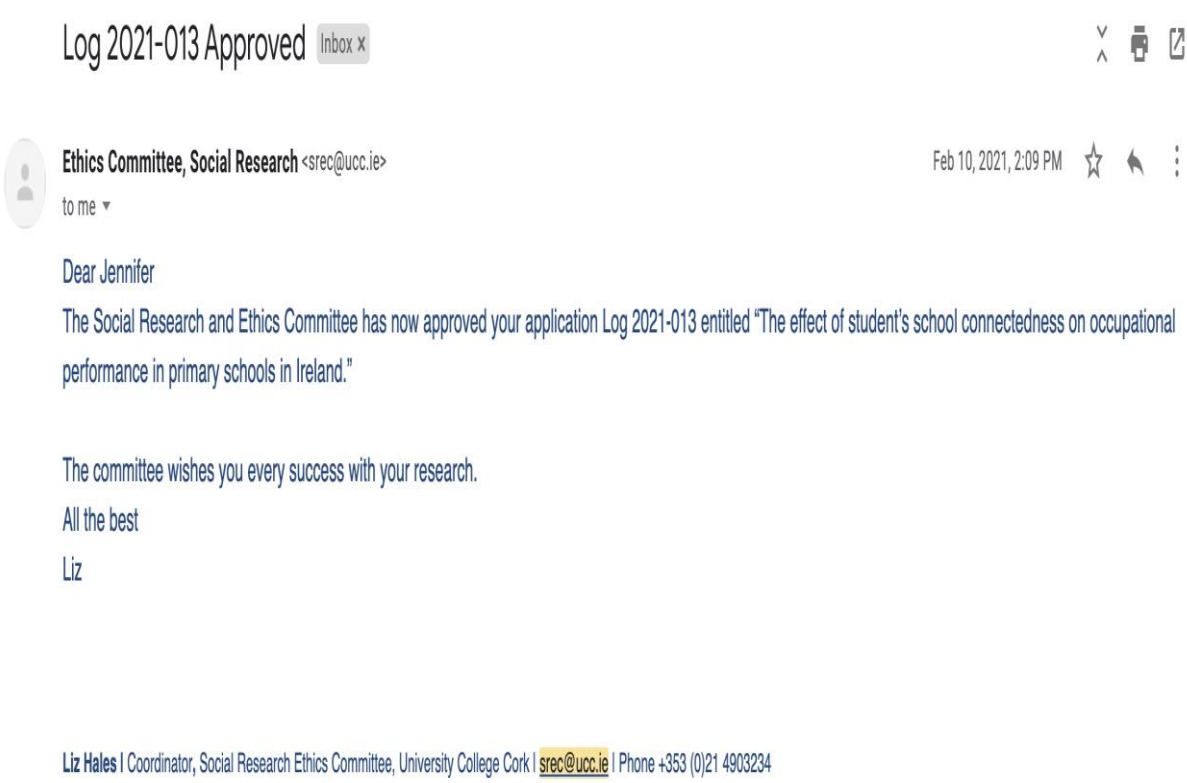

I like
and
creative
writing,
so it's
a book
I wrote
about
art
with pictures
I drew
inside.
The story
of
Art


Classmates
Projects
Breaktime
G.A.A.
Blah
Blah
Blah
Teachers


Story-telling
competition


I Belong at my school
Because...
Friends
Playing together
Sport

Appendix O: Social Research Ethics Committee Approval



Log 2021-013 Approved Inbox x

Ethics Committee, Social Research <srec@ucc.ie> Feb 10, 2021, 2:09 PM

to me

Dear Jennifer

The Social Research and Ethics Committee has now approved your application Log 2021-013 entitled "The effect of student's school connectedness on occupational performance in primary schools in Ireland."

The committee wishes you every success with your research.

All the best

Liz

Liz Hales I Coordinator, Social Research Ethics Committee, University College Cork I srec@ucc.ie I Phone +353 (0)21 4903234

Appendix P: Garda Vetting

An Garda Síochána

Biúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin,
Bóthar an Ráschúrsa,
Durlas,
Contae Thiobraid Árann,
E41 RD60.

Teileafón / Tel: (0504) 27300
Facs / Fax: (0504) 27373

Bí linn/Join us

National Vetting Bureau,
Racecourse Road,
Thurles,
Co. Tipperary,
E41 RD60.

Láitheán Gréasain/Web Site: www.garda.ie

Luaig an uimhir tagarta B.N.G. a leanas le do thoil /
Please quote the following N.V.B. Ref. No: **UCC002-20201027-00095**

Nochtadh Grinnfhiosrúcháin / Vetting Disclosure

Danielle Byrne
University College Cork Students

Maidir le / Re: Jennifer O Leary, 16/01/1998, Windward, Ballyfouloo, Monkstown, Cork

De bhun d'iarratais de réir fhorálacha Alt 13 de na hAchtanna um an mBiúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin (Leanaí agus Daoine Soghonta), 2012 go 2016 maidir leis an té atá ainmnithe thuas, eisítear an nochtadh grinnfhiosrúcháin leis seo duit de réir fhorálacha Alt 14 de na hAchtanna um an mBiúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin (Leanaí agus Daoine Soghonta), 2012 go 2016.

Pursuant to your application within the provisions of Section 13 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 in respect of the above named, the herewith vetting disclosure is issued to you within the provisions of Section 14 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016.

Rinneadh cuardaigh ar an / Searches were conducted on the **03/11/2020.**

Taifead Coiriúil / Criminal Record

Níl / Nil

Tabhair faoi deara: Má dhearbhaíonn an té atá ainmnithe thuas go bhfuil an taifead coiriúil seo míchruinn, ba cheart don Teagmhálaí Ainmnithe aghaidh a thabhairt ar an gceist i scríbhinn chuig an mBiúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin.
Please Note: If the above-named asserts that this criminal record is inaccurate, the Liaison Person should address the matter in writing to the National Vetting Bureau.

Faisnéis Shonraithe / Specified Information

Níl / Nil

Ceannfort / Superintendent
Biúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin / National Vetting Bureau