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Work Experience in Transition Year: A Mixed Methods Study of Subject and Career Choices.

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Abstract

Transition Year (TY) has been a feature of the Irish Education landscape for 39 years. Work experience (WE) has become a key component of TY. WE is defined as a module of between five and fifteen days duration where students engage in a work placement in the broader community. It places a major emphasis on building relationships between schools and their external communities and concomitantly between students and their potential future employers. Yet, the idea that participation in a TY work experience programme could facilitate an increased awareness of potential careers has drawn little attention from the research community. This research examines the influence WE has on the subsequent subjects choices made by students along with the effects of that experience on the students' identities and emerging vocational identities. Socio-cultural Learning Theory and Occupational Choice Theory frame the overall study. A mixed methods approach to data collection was adopted through the administration of 323 quantitative questionnaires and 32 individual semi-structured interviews in three secondary schools. The analysis of the data was conducted using a grounded theory approach. The findings from the research show that WE makes a significant contribution to the students' sense of agency in their own lives. It facilitates the otherwise complex process of subject choice, motivates students to work harder in their senior cycle, introduces them to the concepts of active, experience-based and self-directed learning, while boosting their self-confidence and nurturing the emergence of their personal and vocational identities. This research is a gateway to further study in this field. It also has wide reaching implications for students, teachers, school authorities, parents and policy makers regarding teaching and learning in our schools and the value of learning beyond the walls of the classroom.

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Declaration

I, Joseph A. Moynihan, Student No. 78013577, declare that this thesis is entirely my own work. I have read and understand the University College Cork policy dealing with plagiarism and I am fully aware of the procedures and penalties for plagiarism at the university.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Table of Contents

Abstract……..1

Acknowledgements……..2

Declaration……3

Table of Contents……..4

List of Figures……10

List of Boxes…… 11

List of Tables……..11

List of Acronyms……..13

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction 16

1.2 Background to the study.....16

1.3 Research topic.....19

1.4 Conceptual Framework.....20

1.5 Research parameters 23

1.6 Previous research 23

1.7 Aims of the study 25

1.8 Outline of the chapters 26

1.9 Conclusion.....28

Chapter 2: Work Experience and Irish Education

2.1 Introduction 30

2.2 The Irish Education System 31

2.2.1 Historical background 32

2.2.2 Curriculum Development Policy 35

2.2.3 Second level education in Ireland 39

2.2.4 Junior Cycle 42

2.2.5 Senior Cycle 45

2.2.6 The Transition Year Programme 51

2.2.7 Work experience programmes 64

2.2.8 Work experience policy: A fit with learning and curriculum theory 65

2.3 Sociocultural Learning Theory 78

2.4 Conclusion 84

Chapter 3: Work Experience: An International Perspective

3.1 Introduction 86

3.2 United Kingdom 87

3.2.1 History 87

3.2.2 Is work experience working in the UK? 90

3.2.3 The future of work experience in the UK 92

3.3 Australia 94

3.3.1 History 95

3.3.2 Victoria as a model for work experience in Australia 97

3.3.3 The future of work experience in Australia 100

3.4 Canada 101

3.4.1 History 101
3.4.2 Work experience today 102
3.4.3 Examples from across Canada 105
3.4.4 The future of work experience in Canada 106
3.5 United States of America 107
3.5.1 History 108
3.5.2 Work based learning 109
3.5.3 The future of work experience in the USA 110
3.6 Russia 111
3.7 Lessons from other countries 113
3.8 Conclusion 116

Chapter 4: Key Concepts Relating to Work Experience

4.1 Introduction 117
4.2 Career development theory 118
4.3 Identity 128
4.4 Vocational Identity 133
4.5 Key concepts relating to subject choice 137
4.5.1 Gender 138
4.5.2 Social background 139
4.5.3 School subject provision 140
4.6 Conclusion 141

Chapter 5: Research Design

5.1 Introduction 142

5.2 Major Research Question: 142
5.3 Research Design 144
5.3.1 Methods 145
5.3.2 Sample 152
5.3.3 Selection of the schools 153
5.3.4 Quantitative Study Design 156
5.3.5 Questionnaire response rates 160
5.3.6 Qualitative Study Design 161
5.3.7 Sampling Design for the Qualitative Component 162
5.4 School profiles 163
St. Monica's School for Girls 163
Grattan Street College for Boys 168
St. Finnian's School 172
5.5 Measures 176
5.6 Data Collection Procedures 178
5.7 Pilot Testing 183
5.8 Data Analysis Procedures 184
5.8.1 Quantitative Data 185
5.8.2 Qualitative Data 186
5.9 Limitations of the study 193
5.10 Ethics in research 196
5.11 Research Problem 197
5.12 Conclusion 199

Chapter 6: Quantitative Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction 200
6.1.1 Research Questions 200

6.2 Data Analysis 201
6.2.1 Data Analysis Tools 201
6.3 Statistical Analysis: Preliminary and Inferential 203
6.3.1 Variables: 203
6.3.2 Some Initial Findings 203
6.3.3 Response and Explanatory Variables and Principal Component Analysis 204
6.4 Results 207
6.4.1 Graphical and Numerical Summary of Response Variables 207
6.4.2 Testing for the Effect of Explanatory Variables: Looking at Explanatory variables Individually. 224
6.3.3 Testing for the Effect of Explanatory variables: Looking at Explanatory Variables Multivariously 248
6.4 Discussion 262
6.5 Conclusion 269

Chapter 7: Qualitative Data Analysis

7.1 Introduction 271
7.2 Students being “put off” or confirming a particular career 272
7.2.1 Being “put off” a particular job or career 272
7.2.2 Career confirmed or being “switched on” to an alternative career 275
7.3 Career ideas dating back to childhood 277
7.4 Influence of work experience on subject choice 281
7.5 Effect of the work placement on subsequent study patterns 285
7.6 Personal identity and emerging vocational identity 288
7.7 Adult life and the world of work 293
7.8 Student learning about self 297
7.9 Student support for Transition Year and Work Experience 300

7.10 Discovering a career is “right” or “wrong” at age 15 302
7.11 Advice for younger students on workplace selection 306
7.12 Conclusion 308

Chapter 8: Perceptions and Reflections

8.1 Introduction 311
8.2 Quantitative and Qualitative comparison table 312
8.3 Discussion 313
8.4 Conclusion 318

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusions

9.1 Introduction 319
9.2 Background 319
9.3 Summary of the study 322
9.4 Results summary 323
9.5 Work experience and the key concepts 325
9.5.1 Work experience and learning 326
9.5.2 Work experience and subject choice 327
9.5.3 Work experience and vocational identity 329
9.5.4 Work experience and identity 330
9.6 Research questions 331
9.7 Limitations of the study 338
9.8 Recommendations for practice, policy and further research 340
9.9 Conclusion 347

9.10 A Brief Reflection 349

References.....351

Appendices.....366

List of Figures

Chapter 1

Figure 1-1 Conceptual Framework……... 22

Chapter 2

Figure 2-1 Kolb's Learning Cycle…… 70

Chapter 3

Figure 3-1 School/Work Interface, Coles (1980)……. 99

Chapter 4

Figure 4-1 Donald Super's Life Rainbow Model…… 128

Chapter 5

Figure 5-1 Triangulation design: Convergence Model…… 152

Chapter 6

Figure 6-1 Bar Chart of Responses to Future Focus……... 207

Figure 6-2 Bar Chart of Responses to Did Nothing for me……... 208

Figure 6-3 Bar Chart of Responses to More Careful Choice…….. 209

Figure 6-4 Bar Chart of Responses to Subject Importance……. 210

Figure 6-5 Bar Chart of Responses to Possible Career…… 211

Figure 6-6 Bar Chart of Responses to Subject Choices…….. 212

Figure 6-7 Bar Chart of Responses to Not For Me …… 213

Figure 6-8 Bar Chart of Responses to Placement Choice Expectations……. 214

Figure 6-9 Bar Chart of Responses to Highlight of TY…….. 215

Figure 6-10 Bar Chart of Responses to Waste of time…….. 216

Figure 6-11 Bar Chart of Responses to Reinforced Career…….. 217
Figure 6-12 Bar Chart of Responses to Did Nothing……... 218
Figure 6-13 Bar Chart of Students' Dream and Realistic Jobs……. 219
Figure 6-14 Students' Reasons for Difference between Dream and Realistic Careers 220
Figure 6-15 Bar Chart of Students First Work Placement…… 221
Figure 6-16 Bar Chart of Students Second Work Placement…… 222
Figure 6-17 Bar Chart of Why Students Chose Work Placements…… 223
Figure 6-18 Bar Chart of Reasons for Students Dissatisfaction with Work Placement 224

List of Boxes

Chapter 2

Box 2-1 UWA, The Pros and Cons of Work Based Learning, 1999…….. 77

Chapter 7

Box 7-1 Brief profile of Nina's identity and emerging vocational identity 289
Box 7.2 Brief profile of Lee's identity and emerging vocational identity 291

List of Tables

Chapter 2

Table 2-1 Numbers attending Third Level education in Ireland, Source DES. 35
Table 2-2 Number of schools and students in Transition Year 2001-2013 63

Chapter 5

Table 5-1 5th Year girl interview segment including a sample of coding 190

Chapter 6

Table 6-1 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Worthwhile…….. 227
Table 6-2 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Worthwhile…….. 228

Table 6-3	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Worthwhile……	229
Table 6-4	Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Reinforced Career…….	230
Table 6-5	Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Reinforced Career.	231
Table 6-6	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Reinforced Career.	232
Table 6-7	Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Highlight of TY…….	233
Table 6-8	Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Highlight of TY….	234
Table 6-9	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Highlight of TY….	235
Table 6-10	Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Did Nothing……..	236
Table 6-11	Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Did Nothing……..	237
Table 6-12	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Did Nothing……..	238
Table 6-13	Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on More Careful……	239
Table 6-14	Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on More Careful……	240
Table 6-15	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on More Careful……	241
Table 6-16	Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Focus Career……	242
Table 6-17	Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Focus Career……	243
Table 6-18	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Focus Career……	244
Table 6-19	Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Subject Choice…….	244
Table 6-20	Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Subject Choice….	245
Table 6-21	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Subject Choice….	245
Table 6-22	Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Put Off……	246
Table 6-23	Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Put Off……	247
Table 6-24	Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Put Off……	248
Table 6-25	Binary Logistic Model Output for Worthwhile……..	251
Table 6-26	Multiple Regression Model Output for Reinforced Career……	252
Table 6-27	Binary Logistic Model Output for Highlight of TY……...	254
Table 6-28	Multiple Regression Model Output for Did Nothing…….	255
Table 6-29	Binary Logistic Model Output for More Careful……	257

Table 6-30 Binary Logistic Model Output for Future Focus…… 258

Table 6-31 Binary Logistic Model Output for Subject Choice……. 260

Table 6-32 Binary Logistic Model Output for Put Off……. 261

Chapter 8

Table 8-1 Quantitative and Qualitative analysis relationships…… 312

List of Acronyms

ACER	Australian Centre for Education Research
AYPF	American Youth Policy Forum
BC	British Columbia
CAO	Central Applications Office
CCL	Canadian Council on Learning
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDT	Career Development Theory
CEIST	Catholic Education in Irish Schools Trust
CORI	Congregation of Religious of Ireland
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSPE	Civic, Social & Political Education
DE	Department of Education
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DES	Department of Education & Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DfES	Department for Education & Skills
DEST	Department of Education and Science Training
ERST	Edmund Rice Schools Trust
ESRI	Economic & Social Research Institute
F	St. Finnian's School

GSC	Grattan Street College
HAS	Health & Safety Authority
ICT	Information & Communications Technology
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSAY	Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth
LSC	Learning Skills Council
LTCC	Learning Theory for Career Counselling
MOE	Ministry of Education
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum & Assessment
NLSY	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth
NRC	National Research Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate Course
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PTS	Personal Transferable Skills
ROSLA	Raising of the School Leaving Age
RIASEC	Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional (Holland, 1959)
SCCT	Social Cognitive Careers Theory
SDT	Social Development Theory
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SLSS	Second Level Support Service
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SLTCDM	Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making
SM	St. Monica's School
SPHE	Social, Personal & Health Education

SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (or Product and Service Solutions)
SREA	Systematic Rapid Evidence Assessment
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths
STOWA	School to Work Opportunities Act
TYO	Transition Year Option
TYP	Transition Year Programme
TY	Transition Year
UWA	University of West Australia
VCAL	Victorian Centre of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Centre of Education
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VELS	Victorian Essential Learning Standards
VSS	Voluntary Secondary School
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WBL	Work Based Learning
WEP	Work Experience Programme
WER	Work Experience Resources
WLP	Workplace Learning Programme
YPLA	Young Peoples Learning Agency

Chapter 1: Introduction

"One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try". (Sophocles, 5th Century BC)

1.1 Introduction

This opening chapter sets the scene for this research by firstly looking at the background for the study and outlining the significance of the concept of experiential learning which effectively underpins the Transition Year programme. My personal rationale for embarking on this research journey is briefly explained, followed by an introduction to the research topic itself along with an outline of the conceptual framework used. After a reference to previous study in the field, there is a quick guide to each of the chapters in this thesis.

1.2 Background to the study

Experiential learning, in a broad sense, is as old as time. People have been learning from each another throughout human existence. Of course, learning is not necessarily dependent on others as we can learn through our own experiences; our own mistakes. Should we experience failure we adjust our approach to achieve a successful outcome. Learning is very much part of our human nature. The quote above from Sophocles is timeless and undoubtedly many will argue his iteration of experiential learning was not the first. We cannot know who first spoke of such learning experiences but we do know that Socrates and Plato made many well documented contributions to the philosophies of experiential learning (Stonehouse, Allison & Carr, 2009). There are many definitions of experiential learning: Dewey & Dewey (1915) referred to it simply as learning by doing; Kolb (1984) said "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and

transforming it" (p. 41). A definition that is a most appropriate fit for this research, along with that of Kolb, is by McElhaney (1998) who said experiential education "refers to a pedagogical philosophy and methodology concerned with learning activities outside of the traditional classroom environment, the objectives of which are planned and articulated prior to undertaking the experience" (p. 6).

Experiential learning through experiential education underpins the work experience concept in the Irish education system, or indeed, any education system. McElhaney's definition highlights the importance of advance preparation. Prior to the students making the transition from the familiarity and safety of their classrooms to the new context that is the workplace, it is vital that they are well prepared for the endeavour they are about to undertake. This research will examine the practice of work experience in the unique Irish education programme that is the Transition Year. I say unique because there simply is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world. A key component of Transition Year (TY) is the Work Experience Programme (WEP) which is the first opportunity presented to second level students in Ireland to leave the school environment and become immersed in the world of work.

My personal rationale for this study was to better understand the formal effects of time spent in the world of work on students who participated in an organised WEP. The interest began in 2002 during my time working as a Transition Year co-ordinator in a second level co-educational school. Over the years, I observed, through tracking students in my core capacity as Careers Counsellor, that several students had successfully pursued the careers trialled by them during their work experience placements. I initially conducted straw polls with terminal year students asking how many had applied for third level courses based on the career interest they developed during TY. The result, over a three year period, was invariably, that approximately half of the cohort, who had taken the TY option, would raise

their hands. This prompted the undertaking of a master's thesis on the topic in 2006-2007. One of the major outcomes from that single-school study was that between 44 and 50 per cent of students were shown to be influenced significantly by their work experience when choosing subjects for their senior cycle education. They believed these subjects would best prepare them for a college education which would in turn support their vocational interest (Moynihan, 2007).

This current study was conducted using 323 students from three different schools: one co-educational school, one all-girls school and one all-boys school, who were surveyed on their Transition Year and work experience involvement. That quantitative part of the research was followed by qualitative interviews with 32 of those students, randomly selected from the initial group who completed the questionnaires.

As well as gathering data on the various effects and outcomes of work experience on students, the study also looked at their developing personal identities and emerging vocational identities. Everyone has an identity and this is something that not only evolves over time but can also separate into multiple types. One of these is a vocational identity which has been defined as the "possession of a clear and stable picture of ones goals, interests and talent" (Holland, 1985, p. 5). Schools have begun to do more to help young people to nurture and develop their vocational identities through the implementation of work experience programmes all over the globe. Just as each person has and identity, each professional has a professional identity (Trede, 2012). Trede poses the question: how purposefully and consciously chosen is the professional identity of each individual? Schools, having adopted the role of preparing young people for their future careers, have taken on significant responsibility and need to ensure that they provide adequately for the needs of the students in their charge. Such preparation requires helping students to learn how to work as part of a team, to develop or enhance communication skills, to understand the subtleties

of workplace cultures as well as the fundamentals of disciplinary knowledge and technical skills (Trede, 2012). Prior to and during work experience, students can be exposed in one way or another to all of these. As well as advance preparation, it is equally important for students to revisit the experience and reflect on all elements of it. Schools can do much to assist students by making them aware of the value of reflective practice and creating the opportunity for students and teachers alike to take action in this regard. Often the learning through actions and experiences in the workplace is actually unconscious. Eraut (2000) argues the importance of collective reflection and the deliberative process in making non-conscious learning and tacit knowledge more explicit. He also highlights the importance of feedback with regard to improving performance. Along with drawing attention to areas for improvement, he said it can also help boost confidence and fluency. Most schools do seek feedback from each participating employer which is later shared by the co-ordinator with the students back in the classroom.

1.3 Research topic

The focus of this research then, as outlined by the research questions in Figure 1-1 and in Chapter 5.11, is fundamentally on the effect of work experience on the subjects chosen by students as they prepare for the first year of their senior cycle in secondary school. The perceptions and attitudes of the students to the work experience programme and, to a lesser extent, the Transition Year programme in general are also explored. The development of students' vocational interests, through their exposure to the world of work, is discussed with due regard to existing vocational choice theories. Students are often relatively unaware of their own development during a programme such as TY. It is only when the process is complete do they begin to realise what has changed for them in terms of who they are as young individuals and how their vocational interests have developed and grown. The

interviews used for this research served as a tool for reflective practice with the students. It is worthy of mention that invariably, the students spoke with great fondness and positivity about their time in TY and, in the vast majority of cases, in the work experience programme.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

Constructivism and socio-cultural learning are key concepts framing this research. The Irish Transition Year (TY) programme is built on a constructivist foundation where learning is treated as an active and constructive process. The TY programme itself was a reaction by the Irish Department of Education (DE) in the 70s to the classroom based didactic approach to teaching and learning that pervaded our schools. Likewise, constructivism as a paradigm was a reaction to the same didactic approaches such as behaviourism and programmed instruction. Constructivist research is more interactive, more personal and traceable back to the source (Mertens, 2005). Though the predominant methods used in constructivist research are qualitative, mixed methods were used in this instance to provide a deeper understanding of what was happening in the lived experience of the participating students. The Transition Year concept is closely linked to the socio-cultural view of learning. The DE (1993b, p. 3) states in the Transition Year Guidelines: "It is intended that the Transition Year should create opportunities to vary the learning environment and to dispel the notion that learning is something that happens only, or even most effectively, within the classroom". Work experience is an important part of the TY programme in creating an appropriate environment for such learning. Vygotsky (1986) described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects and events in the environment. Though not possessing the language of socio-cultural theory, several students talked practically about how much they learned during their time spent in the world of work. They described the learning while on placement as being so different to how learning happens in

school. They claimed that learning in the field was a more liberating experience by comparison to what they described as the controlled environment of the classroom. They used the term *control* in a negative sense. Students saw the employer as someone who trusted them to do a job and from whom they would receive reward or remuneration for successful completion.

The following diagram (Fig. 1-1) is a visual summary of the conceptual framework for this research. It outlines the paradigm, genre, methods used, theoretical underpinnings, and a summary of the research questions relevant to this study:

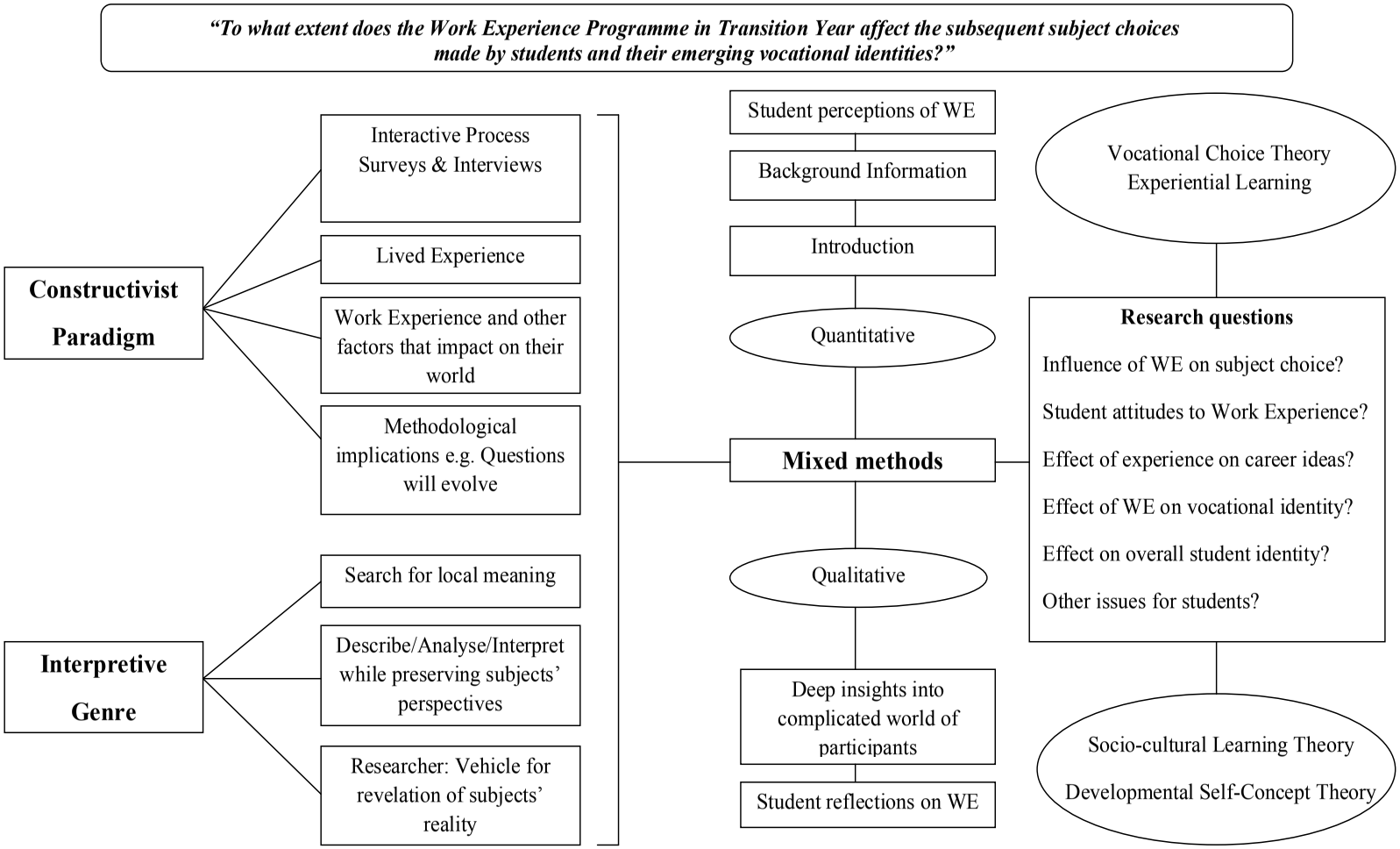

Figure 1-1 Conceptual Framework for this research

1.5 Research parameters

While this study gathered data on student academic performance, decisions relating to work placement choices, and student perceptions and attitudes, it did not focus on socio-economic backgrounds. This was because my interest lay in the decisions made by all students on their subject choices subsequent to their work experience placements. It was about identifying a possible connection between one phenomenon and another. Though the decision making process may be affected to some extent by students' social backgrounds, there are many other factors too that can have an impact such as academic ability, school policies, gender, to name but a few. However, these issues are addressed briefly in the study. Students from underprivileged backgrounds may lack the cultural capital and connections to secure high order placements. Those who do possess such cultural or social capital, especially boys, do not always take advantage of it and instead choose convenience placements or placements that offer financial remuneration despite being versed in school of the rationale for work experience placements. In sum, the intention was to gather student opinion on the extent to which their subject choices were influenced by work experience regardless of social background in schools with a good mix of young people from all social groups.

1.6 Previous research

While the area of work experience has failed to attract any significant research interest, there is a reasonable amount of information available regarding Transition Year itself. Many of these works make reference to work experience but there is no significant study on the work experience programme per se, leaving it ripe for further research. Work experience (when considered within the wider TY programme) is positively perceived by both students and teachers (Jeffers, 2007; NCCA, 2007). However, there are reservations regarding the ad hoc nature of placement procurement in the status quo (Smyth et al., 2005) and student

reservations about the type of work given during the placement. In addition, there are worries that certain disadvantaged students tend to select placements at their place of part-time employment or use work experience as an opportunity to gain such part-time employment. While there has been some research on student perceptions of the TY programme (Smyth et al., 2005; Jeffers, 2007), there has been none which has focused solely on student perceptions of the work experience component of the programme. While studies on the efficacy of work experience (and the perception of such efficacy) have been conducted internationally (Kablaoui & Pautler, 1991; Stern, Stone, Hopkins & McMillon, 1990; Creed & Patton, 2003; Misko, 1998), the place of work experience within the relatively unique TY programme merits investigation. This study is only a beginning with many other opportunities for further development as well as many new avenues to be pursued on what has proven to be a vast area of considerable possibilities. The Interviews conducted, as part of this research, showed that young people have much to share about their experiences in the world of work. Their voices need to be listened to and the work experience programme, that has become so important to them, deserves more attention from many quarters. Recommendations for further development are offered in the final chapter.

Vocational choice theory, socio-cultural theory, and experiential learning theory, are all explored in this research. Particular attention is paid to the work of Ginzberg (1951, 1966) and Super, (1953, 1957) who, despite the passage of time, have elements in their theories of Occupational Choice, that are still very relevant today. The work of Vygotsky (1986), Erikson (1968) and Kolb (1984) are also discussed considering the experiential nature of the learning style associated with Transition year. For decades now socio-cultural learning and experiential learning have been widely accepted as not just natural ways of learning but also very effective ways of learning. This begs the questions: why do so many school systems choose to pay such little attention to these learning styles on the ground? Why are schools

still teaching to the test when industry quite clearly states that rote learners are far from the ideal potential employee? Transition year has consistently shown that experiential learning is a most effective method. It is only in recent months that the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in Ireland has prepared to launch the new Junior Certificate which is being designed to include significantly more project work and teamwork with the view to changing the learning styles for our young people. Much of what is being considered for this new programme has been part of TY for the last 40 years. The French critic and novelist Andre Gide (1891) suggested that ultimately, everything has been said before but since no one listens, we have to constantly go back and start all over again. This appears to be the case, not just in TY, but in many issues around education.

1.7 Aims of the study

The aim of this study is to identify any effect that work placements can have on the choices students make subsequent to time spent on work experience. Subject choices in particular, can influence the areas of third level study chosen and ultimately the career area pursued by the students. The view of the key personnel interviewed for the research by Smyth, Byrne and Hannan (2004) was that work experience can lead to "more informed choice for Leaving Certificate subjects and third level education along with an increased awareness of possible careers" (Smyth et al., 2004, p. 94). I assert that it goes much further than this. Successful and even unsuccessful work experience can have a direct influence on the subjects chosen and on the vocational interests held by students. It also emerged that these experiences served as major motivators to study harder in secondary school senior cycle education. Work experience is shown to be a powerful means of building confidence, self-esteem, identity and vocational identity as well as mapping the possible futures of our young adults.

1.8 Outline of the chapters

This thesis consists of nine chapters in total. The first chapter introduces the background to the study. This includes an introduction to the idea of experiential learning and the author's understanding of how it is defined and how it fits with the basic philosophy of the Transition Year programme. The research topic is explained followed by an outline of the conceptual framework and the research parameters. With little previous research in this field, some of the theories to be drawn on and how they fit with the work experience programme are outlined. This is followed by the aim of the research and an outline of the thesis chapters.

Chapter Two is the first of three chapters attending to what the literature has to offer regarding the Irish education system. This is important for the reader as, whether you are an Irish resident, or otherwise, it is imperative to understand the education system in which this study is situated. No education system is simple and there is value in understanding firstly, what programmes are in place within that education system and, secondly, where does the key programme, Transition Year (TY), fit into the whole process. This gives context to the study and helps to build the bigger picture. Chapter two offers a concise description of the Irish Education System. It traces the development of the Transition Year Programme from its inception in 1974 to the present. The work experience programme (WEP) in TY is described in detail including some of the theoretical underpinnings that make both TY and the work experience component of it, the solid and resilient programmes that they have become. As well as the pros and cons of work experience, the benefits of the WEP to employers, are also explicated.

Chapter Three looks at work experience as it is practiced in other parts of the world. The predominant focus here was on education systems where English is the first language. Work experience, its history, and its development are described for the United Kingdom,

Australia, Canada, the United States of America and Russia. These countries all operate work experience programmes many of which have much in common with the Irish system but also with significant variations which are interesting from a comparative point of view.

Chapter Four considers some key concepts relating to work experience. In particular, it examines the most widely known theories of career development and occupational choice. This chapter also looks at identity and considers how the young person is constantly changing and developing while piecing together the puzzle of who he or she actually is. As well as describing the core identity, the concept of the emerging vocational identity of the student and what schools are doing in this regard, are also discussed.. The chapter closes by exploring some of the issues that impact on subject choice.

Chapter Five describes and justifies the methods used for the study. The main research question is stated, followed by an outline of the research design. This chapter goes on to explain the sample used, including a profile of the schools selected, the sample design for the qualitative component, and the measures. The data collection procedures are discussed followed by an explanation of the pilot testing phase. The chapter concludes with the study limitations.

Chapter Six is concerned with the analysis of the quantitative data. This section gives a detailed account of student perceptions of work experience based on a ten page questionnaire that was distributed to 323 students in three different schools. The results section opens with a graphical and numerical summary of the different response variables. This is followed by a piece on the testing for effect of the explanatory variables on response variables individually. The third part of this section looks at the testing for effect of explanatory variables on response variables conditioning for other explanatory variables.

This chapter culminates with a discussion on the findings and a final summary of the analysis.

Chapter Seven involves the analysis of the qualitative data. It explains how the data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with 32 students evenly but randomly conducted in the three participating schools. Following the coding of the data, ten themes emerged and each of these is discussed in this chapter. There are several verbatim quotes from the students' interviews used to support the emerging themes. The end of the chapter has a summary of the findings.

Chapter Eight looks at the convergences and divergences of the quantitative and qualitative analyses. Following the introduction, there is a table illustrating the common themes that came from both data sources. The variables from Chapter Six are shown to be very closely linked to the themes from chapter seven. A discussion follows on the findings of the two datasets.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis with an overview of the findings from the entire research study. Recommendations are made for further research as well as for interested parties in work experience programmes especially schools, students, parents and policy makers. The chapter closes with a summary and a brief reflection.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has given an outline of why this study was undertaken initially along with an understanding of the key concepts to be considered. It is intended to present a clear picture of what is to be discussed in the following chapters. Though the research on work experience in Ireland is sparse, there is significant work done on occupational choice and decision-making in relation to subject choice and vocational interest in general. Some of the

key theorists are mentioned and these will be explored in greater depth over Chapters Two, Three, and Four. The conceptual framework highlights the use of a constructivist approach to the study using a socio-cultural lens to look at how students respond to the time they spend on work experience. While this may have an effect on the actions taken by them subsequent to their work placements, I will also argue that work experience has a noticeable effect on each individual and his/her emerging vocational identity.

The next chapter looks at the Irish education system and situates the work experience programme therein. I believe it is important to understand how an education system works in order to appreciate any individual elements within it. This is even more important when such elements are not necessarily innovative, due to having been around for quite a while, but with the ability to revolutionise teaching and learning given the opportunity.

Chapter 2: Work Experience and the Irish Education System

2.1 Introduction

This chapter, along with the next two chapters, will investigate the different interpretations of work experience as a growing phenomenon in schools. The work experience programme (WEP), which is a key element of the Transition Year, will be situated in the Irish context by means of a concise description of the Irish education system. Work Experience Programmes in Ireland and in other parts of the world will then be unpacked with the intention of gaining insights into how such programmes are conceptualised and evaluated by researchers, by those responsible for the organisation of these programmes, and ultimately, by the students who participate in them. Finally some key concepts relating to work experience and its effect on young people that have emerged from the literature will be outlined.

The rationale behind this approach is to attempt to demystify what is happening for young people in schools who move from the familiar routine of the classroom to the complex and unfamiliar world of work and adult life through the process of work experience. Students find themselves immersed in an alternative learning environment where the focus is no longer on rote learning but on more socio-cultural and experiential learning styles. Young people participate in mutual arrangements where they have much to learn from experienced others, but they too, have much to share with their older counterparts. They are coming from an intensive education setting and, in most cases, students are quite comfortable with technology and innovation. This new way of learning for them does not just apply to work experience, but also to the many other tasks and challenges that they will encounter during the Transition Year experience.

This review of the literature is choreographed to spotlight the attitudes of all the education partners from the policymakers to the students using the education service. This will be followed by generating a picture of how work experience is viewed around the world. That picture will be used as a metaphorical backdrop for the showcasing of the eventual findings and conclusions reached from the data collected in the sample of Irish schools used for this research.

2.2 The Irish Education System

The Irish Education system was traditionally divided into three distinct sectors:

- Primary Education (8 years, age 5-12)
- Secondary Education (5 or 6 years, age 12-18)
- Third Level Education (age 17+)

In the latter decades of the twentieth century and the early twenty first century, the system expanded to include:

- Pre-school Education (age 3-5)
- Adult and Further Education

These additions came about as the concept of life-long learning began to gain momentum and the Department of Education (DE) tried to meet the demands of a population that was becoming more *academically aware* and intent on responding to market demands in a rapidly growing knowledge economy.

2.2.1 Historical background

A seminal work charting the history of Irish Education is Coolahan's *Irish Education: Its History and Structure* (1981). In the preface, he describes the book as "an attempt to fulfil the need for a single work which provides a general history of education at all levels from the early 19th century up to the early 1980s" (p. ix). While significant change has occurred on the educational landscape of this island since the 1980s, Coolahan offers an excellent understanding of the roots of the current education system. Ireland has had a long and noble tradition of respect and concern for education (Coolahan, 2009). This, he says, is reflected in the monastic schools which were seen as the "lights of the north" (p. 8) during the dark ages of Europe. The religious orders in Ireland remained quite active in education right through the 18th and 19th centuries. The Irish education system can be described as an *aided* system with the state assisting other agencies, predominantly in the form of funding (O'Buachalla, 1988). The vast majority of these agencies at first and second level, according to this author, are "churches, church bodies or trusts, or corporate bodies in which the churches exercise a large influence" (p. 205). A single exception to this, he adds, is the vocational system, where the aided agency is the local authority. At third level, most of the funding is provided by the state.

O'Buachalla describes the developments in Irish education, through the nineteenth century, as remarkable when one considers the economic deprivation of the time and the general political unrest. Though the root of the subsequent controversy and conflict by virtue of such a pairing's divergent perspectives, he attributes this success equally to the initiatives of the church and to positive interventions by the state (O'Buachalla, 1988). This author identifies three dimensions of policy relating to *access*, *process* and *structure*. He divides the development of education in Ireland in the twentieth century into three distinct phases:

1) 1900-1922. Aside from the political unrest at this time, he describes this as a "natural unit" identifying it as a time of "very high educational initiative and debate" (p. 50). Education reform and policy was considered a high priority among prominent figures of that time. The emphasis was on structural change which, ironically yielded very little change to the structure on the ground (O'Buachalla, 1988). However, the New programmes and regulations introduced in 1900 saw significant changes in national schools and in intermediate education. Developments within education were guided by these new programmes until the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922 (O'Buachalla, 1988).

2) 1922-1957. Following the formation of the Free State the Irish Department of Education was established in 1924. Since that time, the Minister for Education assumed sole responsibility for the formulation, implementation and funding of education policy (O'Buachalla, 1988). The term *corporation sole* is used in the Ministers and Secretaries Act (1924) which made the Minister for Education responsible for all the actions of the public sector workers in his/her department (Harris, 1989). This situation, in an effort to protect the Minister, led to an air of caution and conservatism with "an unwillingness to take risks" (Coolahan, 1995, as cited in Gleeson, 2009, p. 81). This cautious period, however, saw the initiation of the education policies of the new state. The focus was on the *process* dimension which O'Buachalla (1988) says:

> ...covers the central question of what goes on in the heart of any education system, in the individual school and classroom and includes the quality of instruction and the curriculum, the physical and instructional environment of the school and other determinants of quality (p. 50).

This author claims that the issues of *participation* and overall *access* to education were avoided due to the inevitability of this involving the further issue of *structure*

within the Irish education system which in turn would only precipitate church-state conflict.

3) 1957-1986. The significant issue during this period was the change in politicians' and peoples' attitudes towards education. There was a new commitment to the search for equality in educational opportunity (O'Buachalla, 1988). The issue of *access* was no longer ignored. The main developments, outlined by O'Buachalla, were increased state funding, a significant increase in participation rates and even some structural change. He adds, however, that the early momentum was not maintained being predominantly restrained by the economic recession of the 80s. Nonetheless, key reforms had commenced within Irish education making this third period a time of expansion and initiative unlike anything seen before (O'Buachalla, 1988). One of these reforms was the review and restructuring of the Intermediate Certificate and the Day Vocational Certificate examinations which were taken by students at around age 14 or 15. They were replaced by the new Junior Certificate in 1989 (see 2.2.4 below). Though criticised for remaining overly academic in focus, the new Junior Certificate did contain some innovative programmes.

Access and participation rates saw significant improvement then during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Factors such as the introduction of free post-primary education (1967), free school transport (1967) and the raising of the school leaving age to 15 (1972) had a significant impact on this. Numbers were rising in both primary and secondary schools. These patterns of expansion were reflected in higher education too. According to O'Buachalla (1988) there were 44,500 students enrolled in higher education in 1983. Throughout the 1990s the numbers attending third level education continued to rise significantly (*Table 2-1*). In 1991, the number had increased to 68,165 students in full-time

third level education. By 2001, this number had almost doubled to 116,909. In 2010 the number in full-time third level education was 157,946 with a further 32,877 attending on a part-time basis bringing the total to 190,823. This rapid increase in numbers was ameliorated by the introduction of the *free fees initiative* introduced in 1995 during the term of the Fianna Fáil/Labour government from 1992 to 1997. The free fees initiative applied to the tuition fees of eligible students attending full-time courses at undergraduate level. The courses had to be of at least two years duration in approved colleges and universities.

	1990/91	1995/96	2000/01	2005/06	2009/10
Full-time	68,165	95,099	119,991	136,719	157,964
Part-time	-	21,910	32,265	31,354	32,877
Total	-	117,009	152,256	168,073	190,823

Table 2-1 Numbers attending Third Level education in Ireland, Source DES.

Curriculum development was somewhat impeded by the Department's prime concern which was increasing participation rates coupled with limited resources taking precedence over any underpinning philosophical ideas (Gleeson, 2009).

2.2.2 Curriculum Development Policy

The OECD Review of Education Policy, Ireland (1991) was a catalyst for ongoing, significant change in the second level education system. That review was followed by the publication of the Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World* (1992) and the subsequent White Paper, *Charting our Education Future* (1995). The OECD (1991) was very critical of

the Irish education authorities for their "failure to take planning seriously" (Gleeson, 2009, p. 75). The curriculum was seen as little more than what the OECD (1991) referred to as a "bald list of required and approved subjects with their syllabuses and examination requirements" (p. 67). This is well removed from the since abandoned definition in the 1980 Government White Paper which read: "The totality of learning experiences to which the pupil is exposed at school or in association with the school" (p. 43). This earlier definition sits better with today's understanding of what curriculum should be, embracing experiences beyond the school (e.g. TY work experience). Following the OECD (1991, p. 67) findings that the curriculum had become "too static" the DE (1995) White Paper claimed:

> The term "curriculum" encompasses the content, structure and processes of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values. It includes specific and implicit elements. The specific elements are those concepts, skills, areas of knowledge and attitudes which children learn at school as part of their personal and social development. The implicit elements are those factors that make up the ethos and general environment of the school. The curriculum in schools is concerned, not only with the subjects taught, but also with how and why they are taught and with the outcomes of this activity for the learner (p. 18).

Despite these previous, more wholesome descriptions of curriculum, the DES describe it in the Education Act (1998) as instruction in recognised subjects. Similarly, Gleeson (2009) points out that the official definition of curriculum, according to the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools* (2004, p.4), is "the list of those subjects in which instruction is given to the pupils of the school in courses approved by the Minister".

Curriculum development, in the latter part of the 20th century seems to have been "overshadowed by the demands of the external examination system and its associated didactic approaches to teaching" (Gleeson, 2009, p. 96). There was a general sense that the Irish examination system was working well. Minister Hanafin described the Leaving Certificate as "an independent, objective assessment that is well regarded internationally.

People have great confidence in it and we should not undermine it" (Gleeson, 2009, p. 106). This was said in reference to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) proposals for senior cycle reform.

The 1990s have been heralded as a time of unprecedented change in education, particularly in terms of curriculum reform. Gleeson (2009) argues that this does not fit well with the reality which was that the junior and senior cycle reforms had more to do with changes in the content of subjects that with anything to do with school culture or classroom practice. He describes this as the rhetoric/reality dichotomy to which the OECD (1991, p. 56) drew attention when they pointed out the "mismatch beween the stated goals of education and the declared needs for substantial structural change on the one hand and substantial areas of school practice on the other". They outlined the need for the transformation of classrooms from *traditional centres of learning* to *active centres of learning*.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, however, Irish education saw many significant developments including the mainstreaming of Transition Year (TY) in 1994. The introduction of this innovative programme by Minister Burke in 1974 (see 2.2.6 below) was in response to what had been described as the overly academic nature of secondary schooling. The initial uptake for this programme was quite poor. Fourteen years after its introduction only one hundred schools (less than 15 per cent) had signed up to deliver the programme. Considerable interest came about when the programme was made more available to all schools following its mainstreaming in 1994 coupled with meaningful changes and a new set of guidelines. Further significant programmes came in the form of the expansion of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) (1994); the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) (1995); the introduction of project work and fieldwork to the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes. The NCCA (2002)

described this time in education as a "site of ongoing innovation and change" (p. 1). All of these initiatives were the first steps towards that transformation to active learning environments. They were accompanied by a raft of legislation commencing with the Education Act 1998, followed by the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Teaching Council Act 2001 and the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004.

One of the most distinctive changes then, was the move towards a more interactive and experiential style of learning. In the junior cycle, this was made available through programmes like Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). In the senior cycle, it was the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Transition Year Work Experience Programme, and various other TY programmes that characterised this development. These innovations, coupled with changes to the syllabuses in the established Leaving Certificate "radically altered the educational landscape for students and schools" according to the foreword in the NCCA (2002) consultative paper *Developing Senior Cycle Education*. Jeffers (2003) echoed the question posed in that paper by the NCCA itself as to whether or not the educational innovations of the 1990s actually led to the envisaged radical shift? He suggested that the engagement by schools with these new programmes was less than coherent for a variety of reasons including apprehension and resistance from educators. The NCCA (2002) outline a myriad of positive steps towards active and self-directed learning associated with the new programmes. However, they also acknowledged that the pace of change was, arguably, too slow. They also suggested that the change had perhaps not been "deep enough" (p. 8) and that key areas like teaching, learning and assessment in the case of the established Leaving Certificate had largely remained unchanged (NCCA, 2002).

2.2.3 Second level education in Ireland

The purpose of this chapter is to situate Transition Year (TY) work experience in the Irish education system. Therefore, the focus is going to be on second level education where TY is positioned. The 1995 White paper describes second level education as follows:

> Building on the foundation of primary education, second-level education aims to provide a comprehensive, high-quality learning environment which enables all students to live full lives, appropriate to their stage of development, and to realise their potential as individuals and as citizens. It aims to prepare students for adult life and to help them proceed to further education or directly to employment (p. 45).

Up to the 1960s the second level education system in Ireland comprised just two school types: secondary and vocational schools (O'Buachalla, 1988). Following the reforms implemented during the 1960s, there are now three distinct types of schools:

1. Voluntary Secondary Schools
2. Vocational Schools
3. Community and Comprehensive Schools

Voluntary Secondary Schools (VSS), commonly referred to as secondary schools, are privately owned and managed and are generally under the trusteeship of a religious order or a board of governors. The first decade of the 21st century saw the introduction of a number of trust bodies established to conduct the legal, financial, administrative and spiritual roles of trusteeship. The three largest trusts are: Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST) established in 2007, representing five religious congregations and 112 schools throughout Ireland; The Edmund Rice Trust (ERST) established in 2008, and with responsibility for 97 schools formerly run by the Christian Brothers; Le Chéile, established in 2009, representing 14 different religious orders and 52 schools. Their establishment is seen as a renewal by the religious orders of their commitment to Catholic education in

Ireland in association with the lay community. The Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI) suggest that in the light of contemporary challenges, such trust companies offer religious orders a way forward to preserve, into the future, the work done by previous generations in Irish education.

The Education Act 1998 required that all secondary schools are managed by a board of management which includes representation from parents and teachers. Secondary schools are usually non fee-paying and, by participating in the free education scheme, are entitled to a range of grants and subsidies from the State. About ten per cent of secondary schools are fee-paying and as such are generally not eligible for full State funding. Secondary schools were traditionally viewed as the more academic schools but in recent times the range of subjects available has expanded to include many practical, technical and vocational subjects. A declining number of secondary schools offer boarding facilities to students from within Ireland and abroad.

Vocational schools, including community colleges, are the second largest sector comprising around 30 per cent of Irish second level schools. They are administered by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which were established under the Vocational Education Act of 1930 as amended by the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001. These schools are largely funded by the State. Initially, their scope was to provide a technical education directed towards the advancement of manual skills and preparation for the world of work. Today, however, most of these schools offer the full range of academic subjects in preparation for the Leaving Certificate alongside a wide range of practical subjects. The Vocational schools are also the main providers of adult education and community education programmes.

Community and comprehensive schools appeared on the Irish education landscape during the 1960s. They were intended to provide the community with a broad curriculum for all of its children offering a wide selection of practical and academic subjects. Many of these schools were brought about through the amalgamation of voluntary secondary schools and vocational schools. They are entirely financed by the State and are run by boards of management consisting of representatives of local interests. They also cater for the needs of the adult population providing a broad range of night courses. A variant of the community school was the community college. This new school type emerged due to the wishes of the VEC to retain their role in the provision of schools (Coolahan, 1981).

Educate Together, an organisation established in 1978, is currently on the cusp of offering a new choice in second level education for Irish parents. They are proposing the opening of a number of multi-denominational secondary schools. Educate Together are already acting as patron to 60 primary schools throughout Ireland and it appears to be only a matter of time before the first second level schools will become a reality for the organisation. The Minister for Education and Skills, Ruarí Quinn, formally announced the recognition of Educate Together as a patron of second level schools at the Annual General Meeting of the group on May 28th 2011. This effectively opened the door for a new type of second level school in Ireland. In the summer of 2012, the DES sanctioned the patronage of three such schools in Blanchardstown, Drogheda and Lucan set to open in 2014. A further eight schools, under the Educate Together patronage, were announced in 2013 to be opened in 2016.

While the term *secondary school* was traditionally associated with what is described above as a voluntary secondary school, the term has become somewhat looser in its usage over the past number of years. More and more it has become a blanket term for all second level

schools with less distinction among the general public between one school type and another. This can be attributed to the increasing number of voluntary secondary schools, who traditionally provided a more academic education, offering more and more practical and vocational subjects. This change in provision was aided in no small way by the amalgamations of the various school types to form the new community and comprehensive schools, bringing together the various subject groupings to make a more balanced whole. Similarly many vocational schools have increased their provision of the more academic subjects. This overlapping of school types is reflected, to an extent, by the wording of the Education Act 1998 and its definition of school patrons and recognised schools. Effectively, the act makes little or no distinction between school types. However, for those involved directly in education, one significant differentiating and contentious factor is the varying levels of state funding offered to the different school types outlined above. Voluntary secondary schools, for example, are funded to a lesser degree than the other school types, supplementing their running costs through various fund-raising activities.

Secondary schools have a junior and a senior cycle. The junior cycle runs for three years while the senior cycle is a two or three year cycle, depending on whether or not a student chooses the TY option.

2.2.4 Junior Cycle

The Irish second level education system caters for students from around age 12 years to 18 years. Students commence year one at age 12/13 years. The next three years are spent pursuing a programme which ultimately prepares the students for their initial State Examination, namely the Junior Certificate. During the three year junior cycle, students generally take all of the following subjects:

- Irish
- English
- Mathematics
- Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE)
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- Physical Education (PE)
- A modern language (such as French, German, Spanish or Italian)

The other subjects are optional and based on what is offered by each individual school's curriculum. Typically students take ten to twelve subjects in total for the duration of the junior cycle.

The Junior Certificate, or Junior Cert as it commonly known, is a qualification awarded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) when the junior cycle of secondary education has been successfully completed. Students are required to achieve a minimum standard in this examination. The Junior Cert was introduced in 1989 to replace the Intermediate Certificate (Inter Cert) and the Day Vocational Certificate (Group Cert). The first state examinations for this new certificate took place in 1992. The Junior Cert has become the minimum education standard to secure employment in Ireland. Its predecessors, the Inter Cert and the Group Cert were, for many, a terminal examination as significant numbers of students left school to gain employment once they had reached the minimum age of 15 years and had one or other of these exams completed.

While the Junior Certificate programme has been criticised for an over emphasis on performance and achievement it does, nonetheless, contain what can be described as innovative programmes such as, Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Social,

Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Both programmes encourage group work and experiential learning.

On completion of the Junior Certificate Examination students can take one of the following routes:

a) participate in the Transition Year Programme
b) move forward to fifth year and begin the Leaving Certificate programme
c) leave school, by law having reached the age of 16 years, the current legal minimum age to exit compulsory education in Ireland.

During the 60s, 70s, and 80s, the Junior Certificate (formerly known as the Intermediate Certificate) was considered by many as a terminal exam as the legal age, at that time, to leave school was 15 years. The Education Welfare Act 2000 increased the age to 16 years or the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later. Today, students use the Junior Certificate as a foundation for the subjects to be followed in the senior cycle which begins in Fifth Year, or Transition Year, should a student choose that option. This extra time in school, from both remaining in school longer plus the addition of the TY programme, paved the way for some innovative developments such as the introduction of a work experience scheme for young people in the education system. The international comparison later will show how such schemes are frequently linked to the raising of the school leaving age.

On October 4th 2012, the Minister for Education and Skills published *A Framework for Junior Cycle* which built on proposals developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and published a year earlier in a document under the title *Towards*

a Framework for Junior Cycle – Innovation and Identity (2011). In the foreword the Minister explains that he wants the needs of the students to be at the core of what we do in our schools and to improve the quality of their learning experiences and outcomes. The reasons for change are explained as follows:

> There is significant evidence of the need to change junior cycle provision. For example, a significant number of first-year students do not make progress in English and Mathematics. A number of second-year students disengage from their learning and in many instances, do not reconnect. The experience of many third-year students is dominated by preparation for the Junior Certificate examination where the emphasis is on rote learning and on rehearsing questions for the examination (DES, 2012, p. 1)

This new Junior Cycle Framework is intended to introduce greater flexibility within schools around programme design, more opportunity to involve parents and students in the design process, and significantly, a shift from high stakes testing to a school based model of assessment. In the summer 2012 edition of *Studies*, a quarterly publication by the Irish Jesuits, the Minister for Education and Skills stated that the new programme should address the issues of curriculum overload and rote learning through the promotion of active learning, creativity and innovation. The programme will be officially implemented in September 2014 with the first students to be awarded the new School Certificate in English, to begin with, in 2017.

2.2.5 Senior Cycle

There are currently four programmes available to senior students:

1. The Transition Year Programme (TYP), plus one of the following:
2. The established Leaving Certificate (LC)
3. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)
4. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

The majority of students in Ireland follow what is known as the established Leaving Certificate (LC). This is often preceded by the Transition Year (see 2.2.6 below for a full description of the TYP). The LC is the terminal examination at the end of the senior cycle in secondary education. It takes a minimum of two years to prepare for the Leaving Certificate. If the Transition Year Programme is taken after the junior cycle, then it takes three years to reach this final examination. Subjects are studied at Higher and Ordinary Level. Two subjects, Irish and Mathematics have what is known as a Foundation Level which is designed to cater for students that may struggle with these subjects at the higher or ordinary levels. Students typically choose six or seven subjects though only six can be used for matriculation purposes. It is obligatory to take a minimum of five subjects including the Irish language. It is possible, however, to receive an exemption from Irish by fulfilling specific requirements set out by the DES. Mandatory subjects in almost all schools include Irish, Mathematics and English. The remaining subjects are chosen from an extensive range of around 32 subjects made available by the DES and today this list is expanding through the provision of examination facilities for many of the languages spoken in the Central and Eastern European countries that have gained entry to the European Union. Students need to be aware that some colleges and universities have specific entry requirements. Students, for example hoping to pursue a course of study at one of the universities in Ireland that constitute the National University of Ireland (NUI), must meet the minimum entry requirement of six subjects including Irish, English and a modern language.

The LCA is a two year programme, introduced in 1995, which is very student centred and takes a cross-curricular approach rather than a subject based approach as in the established LC. According to the ESRI study conducted by Banks, Byrne, McCoy & Smyth (2010), the programme was offered in just 15 per cent of schools in 1997 but this increased steadily

over a ten year period to 42 per cent by 2007. The breakdown of provision outlined in this study is noteworthy with 70 per cent of community/comprehensive schools offering the programme while 40 per cent of vocational schools and only 30 per cent of voluntary secondary schools embracing the LCA (Banks et al., 2010). Despite the relatively good number of schools offering the LCA, of all students who sat any sort of Leaving Certificate exam just seven per cent were LCA candidates. The study also pointed out the apparent reproduction of social class inequality with students most likely to be from working class or unemployed backgrounds. Banks et al. state that the LCA draws a diverse group of students including:

> Those who struggle with school work in junior cycle; those who experience behavioural problems at junior cycle; those who wish to enter the labour market when they leave school; those with special needs or learning difficulties; and those who felt "misdirected" by the school into taking the programme (p. XIV).

The DE White Paper (1995) stated that the LCA would "allow for an extension of the active learning approaches developed in the Transition Year Programme and for links to further vocational training" (p. 55). Banks et al. (2010, p. XVI) found that young people are very upbeat about the "interactive teaching methods" and "student centred learning" style associated with LCA believing it enhanced their confidence and self-esteem. The fundamental goal of LCA is to prepare students for adult and working life and caters for students whose needs are not met by the other LC programmes. The programme is divided into three main areas:

1) Vocational preparation: Work experience is an essential part of LCA. This experience is coupled with a series of courses and modules which help prepare students for adult and working life such as English and Communications, Jobsearch, Guidance, Enterprise, Community Work, Work and Living and, of course, Work Experience itself. Useful prepared materials are made available to schools and

students through the DES including reflective journals, placement record cards, sample letters and workbooks. This provision encourages advance preparation for a work placement, record keeping during placement and reflective practice on completion of the time in the world of work.

2) Vocational Education: Students pursue courses in mathematical applications and an introduction to information and communication technology (ICT). They also choose two specialist courses from the following list:

   Active Leisure Studies
   Agriculture/Horticulture
   Childcare/Community Care
   Craft and Design
   Graphics and Construction Studies
   Engineering
   Hair and Beauty
   Hotel, Catering and Tourism
   Office Administration and Customer Care
   Technology
   Information and Communications Technology

3) General Education: This section covers the broader dimensions of their education including courses in Arts Education, Irish Language, Modern Language/Sign Language, Leisure and Recreation, and Social Education. They may also take other approved elective courses which include subjects like Religious studies and Science. Each modules is of thirty hours duration and a total of 44 modules must be covered over the two years of the programme.

While The LCA does not prepare students for direct access to third level courses it does facilitate progression to Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. These, in turn, can open a gateway for students to access third level. Banks et al. (2010), however, showed that LCA students tend to be channelled into the labour market upon leaving school with relatively low levels of progression to post school education and training. They also made the point

that junior and senior cycle programmes across schools could benefit from making use of the teaching approaches used in the LCA.

The LCVP is a Leaving Certificate variant designed to enhance the vocational dimension of the LC. The LCVP was first introduced in the 1989 (DES, 2011). It was restructured in 1994 to broaden the range of subjects and to strengthen the vocational content through the introduction of the link modules outlined below. The LCVP had its most recent revision in 2002. This review included the reduction from three to two link modules by amalgamating the module *Preparation for Work* and *Work Experience* into *Preparation for the World of Work*. It also involved further redrafting of the link modules, an edit of the learning outcomes, clarification of cross-curricular learning, and modifications to the assessment criteria (to be examined in 2004) in order to take account of these changes (DES, 2002)

The LCVP incorporates the academic strength of the established Leaving Certificate with a focus on self-directed learning, innovation and enterprise. Students get a chance to develop their interpersonal skills as well as their vocational and technological skills. Following the restructuring in 1994 the programme grew steadily from being taught in 68 schools in that year to over 35,000 students in 530 schools by 2012 (PDST, 2012). Based on active learning methods, LCVP includes two *link modules.* The purpose of the link modules is to develop the creative and innovative capacities of young people. Students are afforded the opportunity to develop their own ideas, to put them into practice, and then to evaluate the outcomes (DE, 1995). The modules are as follows:

1) Link Module 1: Preparation for the World of Work

This module introduces students to the concept of working life. It is designed to teach them job seeking skills such as letter writing and CV preparation and interview

techniques. It explores the field of career investigation and ultimately offers students a work placement opportunity. Students are expected to plan, organise and engage in a work experience/work shadowing placement which is ideally consistent with their career aspirations. The LCVP Support Service stresses the importance of concluding the placement programme with a de-briefing session which encourages and facilitates student reflection and evaluation of their experiences.

2) Link Module 2: Enterprise

This second module focuses on enterprise skills and involves introducing students to local business enterprise where they can meet and interview enterprising people both in the field and in the classroom. Students also research and investigate local voluntary organisations and community enterprises. They are expected to engage in enterprise activities as vehicles of learning, usually within the school and the local community, helping to build their self-confidence while concomitantly improving and encouraging creativity, initiative and communication skills.

The link modules, according to the DE (1995) are

> Built on the premise that enterprising skills and attitudes cannot be "taught" in the traditional classroom based sense, but must be fostered through involvement in activity based learning. This emphasis on active methodology requires a learner centred approach. The LCVP teacher acts as a facilitator and advisor to the students, encouraging them to take their own ideas, develop them, put them into practice and evaluate the results (p. 24).

Students complete these modules over a two year period. There are particular subject groupings prescribed from the main Leaving Certificate curriculum and a modern language must be included. Students prepare a portfolio which is graded by State examiners and accounts for up to 60 per cent of the final marks. The remaining 40 per cent of the marks are allocated to a written exam which takes place on the first Wednesday in May, prior to the

student's participation in the state run Leaving Certificate examinations. The LCVP is fully recognised for entry to third level institutions across Ireland.

DES policy, following the 1995 White Paper, was to build upon and develop various programmes within the Leaving Cert framework. The senior cycle is currently undergoing further major review in consultation with the key partners including learners, teachers, management bodies and others. The aim is to develop a more flexible programme of learning with outcomes based syllabi. New short courses are also being developed along with proposed new methods of assessment (NCCA, 2012). Just as the new Junior Certificate, commencing in 2014, will involve new teaching and learning methodologies along with new assessment procedures, it is anticipated the ongoing Leaving Certificate review will follow a similar trajectory. Much of what will be required to transform the existing Leaving Certificate has already been developed over the past four decades in the Transition Year programme. Active learning, group work, continuous assessment and learning outside the walls of the classroom have been successfully pioneered. The next section discusses the development of the Transiton Year since its formation in the 1970s.

2.2.6 The Transition Year Programme

The Transition Year (TY) programme has been in existence in Ireland since 1974. It experienced its greatest expansion throughout the 1990s (Smyth, Byrne & Hannan, 2004). Its introduction was brought about by the recognition of the Irish Department of Education (DE), at that time, of the overly academic nature of the senior cycle. Richard Burke TD, the Minister for Education said during a speech, in 1974, at the annual conference of the Teachers Union of Ireland:

> Because of growing pressures on students for high grades and competitive success, educational systems are becoming increasingly academic tread-mills. Increasingly, too, because of these pressures the school is losing contact with life outside and the student has little or no opportunity "to stand and stare", to discover the kind of

> person he is, the kind of society he will be living in and, in due course, contributing to, its shortcomings and its good points. The suggestion was made that perhaps somewhere in the middle of the course we might stop the tread mill and release the students from the educational pressures for one year so that they could devote time to personal development and community service (Burke, 1974).

The Transition Year Programme: An assessment, by Smyth, Byrne & Hannan, (2004), deals with all aspects of TY from its inception in the 1970s to more recent times. The TY programme "has been relatively under-researched" according to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2002, as cited in Smyth et al., 2004, p. 7).

The Transition Year was seen as *transitional* in two specific ways:

1. The *transition* between school and the world of work for those who were ready or wanted to leave school.
2. The *transition* between the junior cycle and the senior cycle for those who wished to remain in education.

The original guidelines for the curriculum of the Transition Year in the Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools (1976) read:

1. The Transition Year project is a one year interdisciplinary programme for pupils who have completed an approved course for recognised junior pupils.
2. The project is directed towards the intellectual, social and emotional maturation of the pupil. It is conceived as an introduction to adult education and to *education permanente*. Transition Year curricula can therefore be designed to meet the needs of:

    a) Those for whom Transition Year will represent the end of formal full-time schooling: and
    b) Those who intend to follow approved courses for recognised senior pupils.

3. The content of Transition Year curricula will include elements of the following:
   Social education; moral education; education for living (including home-crafts and education for parenthood, employment and leisure); philosophy and applied logic; music and the arts; Irish studies; civilisation courses for students of continental European languages; visual education; media education and communication skills; etc.

The school then had the freedom to determine the content of its own TY programme and to set out what they wished to include from the guidelines presented by the DE.

In the first year only three schools participated in the programme. By 1986 this number had slowly risen to just under 100. Declining numbers in schools, partly brought about by government rationalisation in education, caused TY to become a more attractive option for many schools. In fact, in the school year 1986-87, 115 schools requested, and were granted, permission to introduce the TYP.

The original guidelines for schools in relation to TY were included in the Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools (DE, 1976). This was a clever political move by the Education Minister Richard Burke as it meant that for another minister to remove it he/she would have to make a political decision to do so and subsequently be open to parliamentary questions as to why such a decision was reached (Jeffers, 2007).

In 1986, following an increased level of participation by schools, a more complete set of guidelines was produced by the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB). The *Transition Year Option, Guidelines for Schools* (CEB, 1986) was effectively an expanded and improved version of the original guidelines. Notwithstanding the responsibilities attached to the school principal in the original guidelines, one of the significant additions to these new guidelines was the delegation of the day-to-day running of TY to a co-ordinator. Other major developments were:

- the greater emphasis on learning methodologies rather than teaching
- focus on self-directed learning
- emphasis on social and personal development
- increased exposure to careers education

- the development of inter-school communications
- increased attention to the notion of experiential learning

During the 1990s a six year cycle was looking more and more likely in keeping with the education systems of many of our European counterparts. Mainstreaming of TY looked like a feasible way to achieve this. Circular M47/93 (DE, 1993b) outlined the revisions to the senior cycle which were to take effect from 1995. Included in this was the promise of a new set of guidelines on TY which would replace the 1986 set. In 1993 the DE published a document entitled *Transition Year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools* (DE, 1993c) (see Appendix F). The outcome from these changes was an unprecedented increase in interest in TY with over 300 schools expressing an interest in implementing the programme.

The main developments in this publication were:

- Transition Year Option (TYO) became Transition Year Programme (TYP)
- TY was to be recognised as the first year of a three-year senior cycle
- emphasis was placed on teamwork and the establishment of a core-team to work with the co-ordinator
- the aims and philosophy of TY should permeate the whole school
- schools should involve the parents and the wider community as educational partners
- schools to become involved in staff development

The DE of the time claimed that the purpose of the 1993 Guidelines was to facilitate the design of programmes by individual schools. They said that they were targeted particularly at schools that were offering the programme for the first time. Remember, the Transition Year was originally developed in the mid 1970s, yet it took a full 20 years for a formal set of guidelines to be produced. It has now been almost a further 20 years on and the same guidelines still apply without any subsequent review, revision or updating. The 1993

Guidelines still stand as the main reference for schools offering or intending to offer TY. The first public reference to any subsequent major review was in 2006 when Paul Gogarty, Green Party Spokesman for Education, called on the Minister for Education and Science to initiate a full review of TY. He said:

> The challenges facing our young people are immense and they need to be given all the assistance possible to develop as mature, rounded, self-aware and free-thinking adults who can lead happy, fulfilled lives and who can contribute in a meaningful way - not only to the workplace but also to their families and society at large (Gogarty, 2006).

He pointed out that there had not been a review since the mid 1990s and that the programme was now been offered in almost 75 per cent of schools nationwide. Gogarty (2006) claimed that the time had come to examine how effective the current system was in terms of its stated aim of helping with personal development and the preparation of students for the workplace and adult life. In March 2006 the Green Party put forward a pre-election document entitled *50 steps to a Better Education System*. Step nine recommended a comprehensive review of Transition Year focused on the following ten areas:

1. An analysis of the overall effectiveness to date of the existing one-year Transition Year Programme in helping students with their personal development
2. An analysis of the quality of programmes currently being offered by schools and whether more guidelines need to be provided
3. A look at the availability of and access to the Transition Year for students in schools that already avail of the programme
4. A look at why the programme is not offered in all schools and whether it should be offered in all schools
5. A specific examination of the impact and potential of the programme in areas of educational disadvantage
6. An evaluation of student assessment under the current scheme
7. An evaluation of existing resources being provided, including staffing levels at the Transition Year Curriculum Support Service
8. A look at the quality of work placements being sought and provided and whether students receive sufficient support/guidance in obtaining same
9. The impact of work placements on future academic performance and on the future take-up of Science subjects, particularly Physics

10. An examination of alternatives to a one-year programme including Transition Year modules throughout Junior and Senior Cycle
    (Green Party, 2006)

These areas could have led to a significant re-examination of the entire TY programme. In this instance, despite being in government within one year of the launch of the document, the Green Party did not succeed in securing this review. Every programme needs regular review in order to maintain high standards and to ensure that what is being offered meets the demands and needs of the participants and their communities. Ireland has experienced unprecedented change in the past five years. Schools are, no doubt, adapting as much as possible to that change, however, it is imperative that the support systems are there to scaffold the on-going development of the existing education programmes.

So, what are the 1993 Guidelines actually saying, not just about the Transition Year programme, but also about the current Leaving Certificate programme that immediately follows it? A brief critical analysis of the document reveals quite an interesting perspective. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) involves looking at documents like this with a critical eye and attempting to understand the messages conveyed. The challenge is to shift from seeing written or verbal texts as abstract, to seeing them as having meaning in a particular historical, social and political condition (McGregor, 2003). It is worth taking a little time here to consider the TY Guidelines with a view to understanding the position the DE has taken in relation to TY and post primary teaching and learning methodologies along with the consequences, if any, of this positioning. Our words are never neutral (Fiske, 1994), therefore we should never simply accept the text of others without consideration of the possibility that there may be underlying meanings. As well as written language, CDA can also focus on body language, symbols, visual images and other forms of semiosis as a means

of discourse (Fairclough, 2002). However, the focus here is going to be on the written word. The text under consideration consists of the first six pages of the DE Guidelines (1993) document (see Appendix F). Huckin (1997) recommends the uncritical reading of any document as a first approach and then to approach the document again but with a critical eye, where questions may be raised and comparisons made to related texts.

Rather than just attempting to interpret the text word by word one should also attempt to position the text in terms of its genre (McGregor, 2003). This text then, is a DE policy document intended to guide schools on the design and development of a specific Transition Year programme. The initial, uncritical reading of this text gives the reader a clear understanding of how the TY should be structured and of what expectations the DE has of the programme. It provides the reader with an outline of the broad concepts that make the Transition Year significantly different to the other years in post primary education. The focus is on autonomy, participation, maturity, interdisciplinary learning and self-directed learning. All of these aspirations are what every manager, educator and parent would deem praiseworthy in relation to the education of our young learners. The Guidelines document proceeds to describe the importance of work experience as a key component of TY.

In terms of curriculum, there are ample suggestions with an open invitation for each school to take the lead in designing its own, based on the needs of its student population. The teaching and learning methodologies proposed are varied, exciting and very achievable in any school with a well-structured programme and core team in place. The assessment of the programme is intended to be *diagnostic* and *formative* with the opportunity for the learner to participate in the procedure via dialogue with the tutor and even self-rating. The DE suggests that this should lead to greater self-awareness and an increased potential to take

responsibility for both performance and personal learning. The closing pages of the document offer an outline of the organisational elements of the programme. A whole school approach is recommended and the necessity for clear co-ordination and teamwork on the part of the staff charged with the responsibility of TY. It impresses the need for planning and the importance of developing and maintaining a written plan. It strongly encourages in-service education and on-going staff development. It recommends a certification process and ultimately stresses the importance of regular evaluation of the programme involving all of the education partners.

This first, uncritical approach to the document gives the reader a reasonable expectation that, if implemented appropriately, the 1993 Guidelines offer the potential to help develop a sound and workable TY programme. This chapter could easily get immersed in peripheral issues such as funding, staffing, class size, teacher pupil ratios, and expected voluntarism from the business community. All of these issues are touched on but not fully dealt with in the Guidelines document. However, the emphasis now is going to be on the possibility that the DE may be preaching one thing regarding how our post primary model should be, but practicing something entirely different.

Throughout the Guidelines, the DE is promoting a very alternative style of education via the TY programme. They espouse the value of education through participative learning, self-directed learning, interdisciplinary learning, experience of adult and working life, increased social competence, personal development and increased social awareness. Such methods have been topics of discourse for many scholars internationally (Rogoff, 2008; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1985). The text is framed in such a way that the reader clearly understands what the producer of the text suggests is an innovative and effective way of advancing teaching

and learning. Nonetheless, the Irish post primary education system is still based on the *teach to the test* methodologies of education. In the Guidelines document, the DE seems to clearly concur with alternative theories of education. In so doing, they effectively undermine the widely used method of *exam centred education* which is the traditional method not just in Ireland but in many developed countries. In the opening paragraphs they advocate giving students space to learn, mature, and develop in the *absence of examination pressure*. There is a distinct sense of mutual exclusivity here.

The document declares how the TY is absolutely *not* intended to be used to spread the work of the two year Leaving Certificate over three years. They explain that by using the education techniques outlined above, students should be better equipped and more disposed to study. Concomitantly, they should be well developed and reflective young adults when compared to those who do not follow the TY programme. What a worthy set of goals for the education of our young people. Should these be the actual goals of not just our senior cycle programme, but of our entire post primary education system?

The DE states that where the choice is made to use Leaving Certificate material for study during TY "...it is to be studied in an original and stimulating way that is significantly different from the way in which it would have been treated in the two years to Leaving Certificate" (DES, 1993b, p. 3). This basically implies that the teaching in the examination years in our schools is neither original nor stimulating. What an indictment of our education system at the most senior level in post primary schools. While referring to the notion of interdisciplinary learning they refer to this approach as creating a unified perspective of education which they claim is lacking in what is described as the "... traditional compartmentalised teaching of individual subjects" (DE, 1993b, p. 3).

The Guidelines promote the introduction of a work experience programme and state that the intention is to "dispel the notion that learning is something that happens only, or even most effectively, within the classroom" (DE 1993b, p. 3). These quotes make it difficult to believe that the DE is satisfied with the study course for its flagship programme, the Irish Leaving Certificate. The Transition Year Guidelines, though a comparatively small document, speaks volumes about the traditional processes of education in Ireland.

Dr. Seamus Hegarty, Chair, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in a presentation at UCC entitled *Schooling in 2025,* in December 2009, rhetorically posed the question: Would we be confident undergoing a serious surgical procedure today with a 19th century medical team? However, he went on to suggest that a teacher from the 19th century could actually function quite well in today's classroom. This begs the question: why has classroom teaching not moved forward at a similar pace to that of the field of science and medicine?

The DE recommends the following series of teaching methodologies in relation to the TY programme:

- Negotiated learning
- Personal responsibility in learning
- Activity based learning
- Integration of appropriate areas of learning
- Team teaching approaches
- Group work: discussion, debate, interview, role play
- Project work and research
- Visiting speakers and seminars

- Study visits and field trips
- Work experience, work simulation and community service

They suggest that these methodologies should "enable students to have a valid and worthwhile learning experience with emphasis given to developing study skills and self-directed learning" (DE, 1993b, p. 4). These same methodologies could fit very well into the education programme for all senior students. However, they are not feasible due to the pressure placed on students by current education policy founded on the ideology of teaching to the exams. Our curricula are still very much defined in terms of subjects and within these subjects, topics tend to be set out in a very structured and often hierarchical manner (Hegarty, 2006). Hegarty associates words like *overload*, *incoherence* and *irrelevance* to the subject approach for many students. He adds that it is only one way of classifying knowledge and that it owes its current importance as a teaching style to tradition rather than to reasoned argument.

The Guidelines document highlights the importance of assessment and describes it as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Assessment should be "diagnostic so as to provide accurate information with regard to pupil strengths and weaknesses and formative so as to facilitate improved pupil performance" (DES, 2003b, p. 4). The terminal examination approach to assessment does not quite reach these lofty goals as, in reality these methods are nothing more than a measure of memory and rote learning skills. Such methods "draw on patterns of knowledge storage, dissemination and retrieval that are increasingly outmoded" (Hegarty, 2006, p. 5).

The Guidelines conclude with an outline of the organisational elements of the TY year such as co-ordination, whole school approach, planning, evaluation and certification. The most significant point made in this section is that all of the innovations and developments for the

TY programme must take place within the context of available resources and the efficient use of same. What the DE appears to be saying here, is that they would like all of this education transformation to occur, but at no extra cost.

This document reads well for the development of a TY programme. The discourse is clear, engaging and aspirational. The purpose of CDA is to reveal the ideological assumptions that are often hidden in written or oral text (Fairclough, 1989). In this text, the ideological assumptions are quite explicit and certainly not hidden with regard to the Transition Year programme. However, what appears to be hidden is that the DE, while clearly accepting the value of the alternative methodologies of education espoused in the Guidelines document, are not acknowledging the fact that these same methodologies have significant value and a very real place in the teaching and learning of our senior students in post primary education. The Banks et al. (2010) study for the ESRI clearly made this point as outlined earlier in Section 2.2.5 regarding the LCA. What appears to prevent them from transferring these alternative methodologies is, on the one hand, the possible risk attached to breaking with the long standing traditions in education and on the other, the potential financial implications of such ground-breaking change.

Good policy analysis looks at how the policy comes to the target group along with the way it brings positive changes (McNeil and Coppola, 2006). However they add that it looks too at the ways in which it may disrupt or even undermine previously strong programmes. The traditional Leaving Certificate is widely accepted as a strong programme with a significant international reputation. The TY Guidelines are like a metaphorical toolbox providing the mechanisms and methodologies to transform a strong programme into a ground-breaking, innovative one.

Today, the Transition Year Programme, as it is currently known, involves a significant number of students (Table 2-2). Adding the totals for any three consecutive years gives the true number of students in the senior cycle at any one time who are either following, or have experienced, Transition Year. For example, in 2009 there was a total of 82,650 students (the total for 06/07 + 07/08 + 08/09) in the senior cycle in Ireland either doing or having participated in the programme. This is approximately 57 per cent of all senior cycle students.

Table 2-2 clearly shows how the programme has gathered serious momentum and has become a significant feature on the Irish educational landscape. It continues to grow and would appear to have a bright future. Despite its success, however, it is also a programme at risk in terms of potential cuts in education spending and it is vulnerable to the pen-stroke of the Minister for Education at any time.

School Year	*No. of Schools*	*No. of Students*
2001/2002	*500*	*22,773*
2002/2003	*510*	*23,299*
2003/2004	*526*	*23,772*
2004/2005	*522*	*24,798*
2005/2006	*528*	*25,862*
2006/2007	*524*	*27,090*
2007/2008	*546*	*27,760*
2008/2009	*544*	*27,800*
2009/2010	*560*	*28,635*
2010/2011	*574*	*30,536*
2011/2012	*589*	*32.673*
2012/2013	*601*	*-*

Table 2-2. Number of schools and students in Transition Year 2001-2013

Data Source: Department of Education & Skills, Database Section, December 2012

2.2.7 Work experience programmes

A key constituent of twenty first century schooling in Ireland, and in many other countries across the globe, is the availability of work experience schemes to students who attend formal second level education. Such schemes evolved throughout the twentieth century and now have become quite sophisticated programmes which, in Ireland, include career investigation programmes, work shadowing programmes and work experience placements.

Career investigation programmes involve learning how to plan and research a career. Preparation for entry to the workplace requires this essential skill in a world that is constantly changing and demands, from our young people, the ability to respond and adapt to this rapid and perpetual transformation. The process of learning how to gather information in the first place, and then to investigate and analyse it thoroughly, can assist in uncovering the possible options available to each person. This is predominantly conducted within the four walls of the classroom with some site visits occasionally arranged by schools.

Work shadowing is a process where a student follows or *shadows* a worker for a period of time. Work shadowing provides an opportunity to increase knowledge, skills and understanding of a particular job role through first hand observation. Work Shadowing has the potential to be especially useful as a method of enabling a person to gain a deeper knowledge of a particular career, enhancing their understanding of the roles of workers in a whole range of professions as well as building their knowledge of how things operate in the world of work. They have a unique opportunity to monitor how people interact with each other and ultimately get things done. This period of observation can provide a significant learning experience for a young mind.

Work experience is where a person actually participates in a formal work placement for a prescribed amount of time. The participant in such a programme has the opportunity for hands on experience of a particular career, working with others and experiencing adult life in the world of work. Usually the placement chosen will be, though not necessarily, in a field or occupation connected to the aspirations or hopes of the person involved. In Ireland the average duration of a placement is two weeks with most schools offering a minimum of five days.

The workplace, in modern society, has become very detached from normal human existence (Eggleston, 1982). Work was once inseparable from family, the wider community, and society. Over the past fifty years it has become a separate entity and has grown further and further apart from daily life to a more inaccessible, institution based phenomenon. Today's workplace is removed from general access by limitations in the form of restricted hours, strict security, health and safety legislation, hygiene requirements, fire safety legislation, exacting clean-room standards and personnel protection policies. It can be complex at times for staff to gain access to their own workplace let alone a beseeching student who would care to sample the work place environment. Formal liaison between educational institutions and the world of work however, has facilitated such access for young people.

2.2.8 Work experience policy: A fit with learning and curriculum theory

The Work Experience Programme (WEP), a fundamental component of the Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in Ireland's second level schools, has failed to attract any significant research interest. In the light of socio-cultural developments in Ireland before and after the turn of the 21st century, the Work Experience element of the Transition Year Programme in particular, appears to be

ripe for further research. Due to the limited existing research on the WEP, sourcing research material specific to the Irish situation is somewhat challenging. Information can be easily gathered about the TYP itself, from the research of others, but not so easily in the case of the work experience component. Miller, Watts and Jamieson (1991) point out that in the United Kingdom too there is "remarkably little research on work experience which operates with anything like an adequate research design" (p. 278).

The Transition Year Programme was designed to promote the range of competences and skills that are not usually emphasised in what can be described as the *traditional* academic education provided by the Irish school system (Smyth et al., 2004). Transition Year endeavours to place an emphasis on personal and social skills, self-directed learning and providing young people with some experience of adult and working life. It is the latter that the Work Experience Programme is intended to deliver and which provides the foundation for this particular research. The purpose of this study is to isolate this element of Transition Year and examine any effect that it may have on the subsequent education related choices made by students and indeed what effect it may have on the students themselves as developing young adults. Transition Year work experience is differentiated from the work experience elements of LCA and LCVP because in TY, there is the potential for subject choices to be influenced. In the other two programmes, these subject choice decisions are already made and committed to by the participating students. These education related choices in TY may be initially pertaining to subject choices but later, perhaps, to potential career trajectories along with the development of the students' identities and vocational identities. The DE (1993b) in its guidelines state:

> It is intended that the Transition Year should create opportunities to vary the learning environment and to dispel the notion that learning is something that happens only, or even most effectively, within the classroom. One of the ways of doing this, and of

> providing an orientation towards the world of work, is to include a component of actual work experience (p. 3)

Two types of work experience prevail for young people in the Irish schooling system. Firstly there is what is described as *work experience placement* and secondly, *paid part-time employment* (Smyth et al., 2004). My intention in this research study is to turn the focus on the work experience placement. Work experience has the potential to influence later choices and decisions made by students. It is a compulsory module in both the LCA and the LCVP. Rather than being a compulsory module, work experience in Transition Year has been described as "an essential prerequisite of the TYP" forming part of the programme in the vast majority (97 per cent) of schools (Smyth et al., 2004, p. 85). Only what has come to be known as the established Leaving Certificate does not have any work experience component.

Work experience has been described as a paradoxical phrase in that it is clearly distinguished from actual *work* and is used to describe schemes where students are only exposed to part of the full experience of work (Miller, Watts & Jamieson, 1991). They add that a key difference is that the role of the student on work experience is that of a *learner* and not of an *employee*. Miller et al. (1991) state that a further paradox is that the learning yield will be "substantial and distinctive" (p. 16) only if the experience gets the student as close as possible to actually being an employee.

Some of the key objectives of Irish second level students participating in a work experience programme are to:

- link the core academic curriculum with the world of work
- promote the school-to-career transition for students

- increase students' confidence levels
- assist students in the development of attitudes, skills and habits conducive to job success and personal development
- increase student understanding of enterprise and working life
- use the local business community as an incubator to help students develop a positive work ethic
- help students to make better informed decisions about their future
- help students acquire, or indeed refine, work related skills and job performance in a real work environment

Smyth et al. (2004) deal with Work Experience under a number of headings. Under the heading of *perceived effectiveness*, reference is made to students making "more informed subject choices for Leaving Certificate and third level education" and this is described as a "benefit of Transition Year" (p. 94). For this study I intend to build on that concept and provide perceptions, insights and reflections from the student population about the work experience programme along with any influence it may have had on themselves and their subsequent actions. A further potential benefit highlighted by Smyth et al. in their study, is that students may gain an increased awareness of their future careers and hence the development of their possible selves.

Work experience in Ireland presents young people with "engaging and relevant learning opportunities" (Jeffers, 2006, p. 409). Jeffers comments that following the restructuring of senior cycle education in Ireland in the 1990s, preparing young people for adult and working life became a more explicit goal within the new programmes developed. Work Experience is an important part of TY, offering students personal growth, maturity and preparation for

adult and working life (Smyth et al., 2004). In a longitudinal study entitled *From Leaving Cert to Leaving School*, work experience was highlighted as a very valuable component of the school lives of Irish adolescents. The study was published in 2011 by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). In this study, 6th Year students "highlighted the need for greater preparation for adult and working life, suggesting that a life skills course and access to *work experience for all students* [emphasis added] would enhance their overall educational development" (Smyth, Banks & Calvert, 2011, p. 192).

Questions have been raised about the usefulness of work experience, particularly in terms of whether or not it offers any real *personal transferable skills* (PTS) to students that could as effectively be acquired elsewhere, including on the school campus (Shepherd, 1998). The importance of the acquisition of transferable skills has been highlighted by several authors as being a significant part of work experience (Longson, 1999, Herbert & Rothwell, 2005). These are skills that, in essence, transfer easily from one job to another or indeed from one context to another. The DE (1993c) states that, as part of the active learning in TY, students will develop "a range of transferable critical thinking skills and creative problem solving skills" (p. 1). PTSs can also include information technology skills, communication skills and self-management skills. However, it has been argued that the commercial basis of most companies, where making money is the key objective, is not necessarily the most ideal environment to acquire new, quality skills. The aforementioned c*ommunication skills*, for example, is one of the desirable skills from a work placement but surely "economy with the truth to close a sale" is not the best experience of this skill for any young person (Shepherd, 1998, p.139). Shepherd also states that most researchers, including himself, in previous writings on the subject of work experience, affirmed that students really need to sample the world of work in order to ensure the effective acquisition of personal transferable skills.

Here, however, he tries to deliberately and provocatively contend that the development of PTSs and work experience are "not necessarily the best of bed partners" (p. 137).

Transition Year "pupils will participate in learning strategies which are active and experiential" (DE, 1993c). Experiential learning can be simply defined as *learning by doing* (Dewey, 1915). It can be traced back to the time of Socrates and Plato whose contributions to the philosophies of experiential learning have been well documented (Stonehouse, Allison & Carr, 2009). Chapter One opened with a quote from Sophocles (5th Century BC) with his statement on *learning by doing*. However, much of what has been written in modern times in this field is based on the work of Kolb (1984). His useful, though often contested, experiential learning model is based on four stages: 1) Concrete experience, 2) Observation and reflection, 3) Formation of abstract topics and 4) Experimentation in new situations.

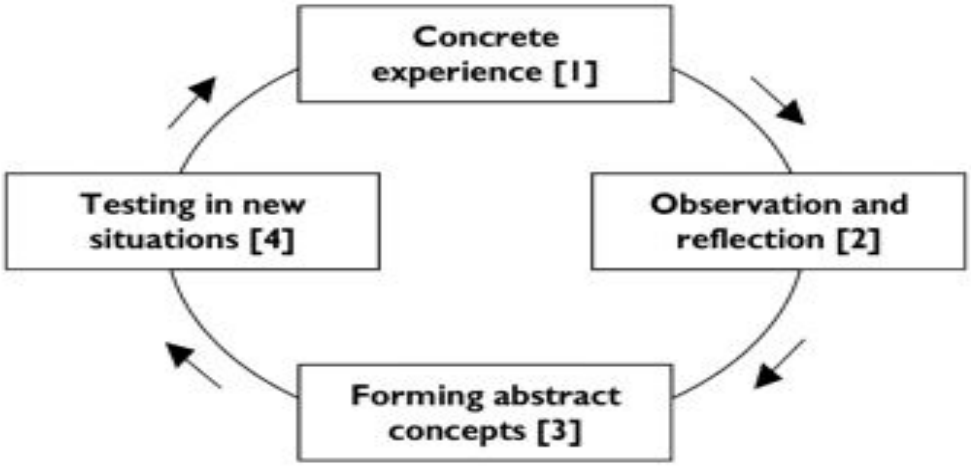

Fig. 2-1 Kolb's Learning Cycle

Within Kolb's theory, learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41). Though the process can begin by simply doing or experiencing something, Kolb suggests that the learning cycle can actually begin at any one of the four points, and that it should really be viewed as a "continuous cycle"

(Herbert & Rothwell, 1984, p. 49). Though relevant to Transition Year as an overarching programme, Kolb's model is also very applicable to the Work Experience element of TY. While the "doing" is key to this style of learning, it is made truly complete by the contemplation or reflection stage followed by the conceptualisation or application stage. Through reflection the learner can ask questions about the experience in terms of previous experiences. He/she can share reactions publicly and make meaning of the experiences by discussing and analysing (Carlson & Maxa, 1998). These authors add that the application, or more simply the action stage, helps the learner to acquire a deeper and broader understanding of the concept or situation by solidifying their experience through application or action.

Preparation in advance is essential too in generating successful outcomes for participating students. The objectives of learning activities outside of the regular classroom environment should be planned and articulated in advance of undertaking the experience (McElhaney, 1998). Students participating in work experience in Irish schools are generally prepared by a co-ordinating teacher in advance of their placement. They are given time to think about what they would like to do and are usually given the responsibility to seek out their own placements. Once the placement commences, students are expected to keep a diary of the activities during that time. Most schools arrange site visits by school personnel to liaise with employers and monitor student progress. On the return to school an essential debriefing and time for reflection is usually provided. This formal arrangement gives students the opportunity to contemplate their placements and investigate the possibilities. The process therefore, does not necessarily begin with the concrete experience as highlighted above by Herbert & Rothwell, demonstrating their point of the continuous cycle in the Kolb model. The other elements in the school routine, outlined above, encourage each one of the four

stages though the students will most likely experience them anyway if they have taken the work experience process seriously and given it the attention it requires. In terms of reflection on the work experience process, Dewey (1991) had much to say in this regard over one hundred years ago. In his book *How We Think*, originally published in 1910 and revised in 1933, he suggested five phases of reflective thought. These phases offer an interesting description of how he believed the process of reflective thought might operate. But he added that being aware of the phases proposed by him was not enough. He said there must be a desire to use them. He went on to identify four attitudes - Open-mindedness, Whole-heartedness, Responsibility, and Directness, that he believed were essential in order to engage in reflective enquiry. I suggest these four attitudes can be easily adapted and equated to the attitudes required by students who want to participate in the process of work experience and maximise their involvement in it. Open-mindedness: where students are free from prejudice and willing to consider new possibilities and experiences. Wholeheartedness: where students give the work experience project their undivided attention and participate with a whole heart. Responsibility: where students consider and reflect on the consequences of what has been learned. Directness: where students have faith in human action and believe that what they are doing is actually worthwhile. With these attitudes, students will make a greater success of their work experience and, by virtue of possessing these attitudes, will be better prepared to engage in the process of reflective thinking. They overlap very well with Kolb's model.

The *Evaluation of the Transition Year 1994-1995,* by the DE (1996), reported that most schools "saw work experience as a vital element in TY, providing schools with alternative learning environments, acquainting them with the world of work and offering positive opportunities for personal growth and development" (p. 2). This report by the DE was produced following an appraisal of the Transition Year programme in 146 schools

throughout the country. It was undertaken in March 1995 with schools randomly selected from different categories of post-primary schools of diverse socio-economic backgrounds in both urban and rural locations.

While it takes considerable time and effort to put a work experience programme in place, the report goes on to say that the educational benefits accruing to the students far out-weighed the difficulties that can be encountered by the school in organising the work placements. The inspectors who produced the report discovered that some schools operating a TY programme did not have a work experience component. The main reasons given were that the pupils were not old enough to derive any significant educational benefit, that work experience itself was not sufficiently important, and that school insurance difficulties precluded the work placement of pupils.

According to the above evaluation, students generally spend an average of 15 days on work experience, with most schools involved in the programme usually offering a minimum of five days. A minority of schools offered three or even four weeks. The DE (1996) points out that the variation in duration seems to be influenced, in some instances, by the ethos and traditions of schools as well as the long term intentions of the students: “schools whose curricula had traditionally an academic orientation having shorter periods with those of a more vocational bent opting for longer periods” (p.15). The report claims that pupils were found to be well prepared for their work experience placements. The three key partners in this preparation were usually the TY co-ordinator, the guidance counsellor and the potential employers. Employers were found to be co-operative and very willing to provide the schools with feedback on completion of the placement (DE, 1996). Preparation of students for work experience varies from school to school. Some schools have no formal training programmes

while others have work experience preparation time-tabled on a weekly basis. The time allocated for that can be used for monitoring while students are on placement and de-briefing when students return to school.

A question in the minds of many during consideration of a work experience programme is why do potential employers get involved in work experience schemes in the first place? Work experience placements can actually provide many benefits and opportunities to the employers who choose to get involved. The following list outlines the key benefits based on the summation of the best ideas put forward by the English Department for Education and Skills (2002), the Leicestershire Education Business Company (2009), and Business in the Community Ireland (2005):

1) The opportunity to influence the quality of future employees. Employers have a chance to showcase their field of work and increase students' interest it. They can nurture a young person's interest in pursuing an appropriate course of study to realise a career particular to the employer's field.
2) The possibility of facilitating the growth of a young person's aspirations and achievements. If the organisation succeeds in confirming a student's interest in a particular career, they can assist in giving the student the encouragement and drive necessary to raise their standards in order to achieve their goals. Conversely, if a student discovers the career is not right for them, the organisation can be responsible for that young person finding a new and potentially more focused trajectory.
3) Cost neutral development of staff. Students receive on the job training by actually doing the work. Generally students do not receive payment for their work placement therefore there is no cost to the organisation.

4) The development of remedial and basic skills training. Research in the USA by Shapiro (1999) found that school-to-work partnerships reminded organisations of the on-going need to provide such training which might not otherwise have been offered and which may still be required by front-line, administrative and technical staff.
5) The development of recruitment channels. After work experience, many employers take on students for temporary or seasonal work. They are confident that these students know the job and what is expected of them. In other cases employers have the opportunity to attract school leavers into employment and thereby reduce recruitment associated costs.
6) Raising the employer's community profile. Offering work placements can help build a positive image of an organisation with the school, the students, their parents and the wider community. This can assist an organisation in promoting further interest in its industry.
7) The opportunity for in-house management development. An organisation can develop the management skills of its own employees by giving one or more of them responsibility for mentoring, planning, overseeing and evaluating the work experience programme. These employees could also take responsibility for the development of policies and procedures around the process.
8) Reinforcing good health and safety practices among young people. By receiving hands on work experience students learn the fundamentals of health and safety in the workplace and learn to understand the necessity and importance of good and safe practice.
9) Organisations can acquire an insight into the youth market and the developments that are taking place in the field of education.

10) With this insight, organisations may have the opportunity to have a positive influence on what is happening in schools. By building a relationship with a school, organisations can get involved through various mutually beneficial sponsorship arrangements, the provision of guest speakers to encourage and develop enterprise education and the possibility of having some influence over the curriculum by encouraging specific subjects. For example, a major pharmaceutical firm may be in a position to raise the profile of science subjects in a school.
11) The promotion of sector specific skills and qualifications. There is currently a significant shortage of trained workers, especially in the field of Information Communication Technology (ICT). A Joint Oireachtas Committee Report (2012) stated "it is vital that efforts are made to engage students with the idea of a career in ICT and that they are being taught the skills which the industry requires" (p. 34). The Committee recommended that ICT/Computer Studies subjects are made available at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations in all schools.
12) Simple altruism. A chance to give something back to the community.

The literature offers many reasons why work experience is a worthwhile practice for school-going adolescents. Its widespread use throughout the world is testament to this. The evolution of work experience programmes over the past six or seven decades has caused the process to become more streamlined and more culturally accepted in the wider community. Naturally, there are negative aspects too. While these certainly need to be acknowledged, they do not necessarily negate the power or importance of work experience as a practice. The following list was adapted from the webpage of the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning at the University of Western Australia (UWA). It outlines some disadvantages from the perspectives of the student, the educational institution and the

employer. The list could easily apply to any country or level of education and is certainly not exhaustive. Many of the disadvantages below are based on potential issues that may arise or, in some cases, issues of convenience or inconvenience:

The Student's Perspective
• Little or no planning on the part of the employer may result in a lack of meaningful work • The focus of the learning programme may be too narrow making the experience restrictive • Student may be given tasks beyond their capabilities • Students fail to see the link between their placement and their course of study • There may be a lack of on –the-job supervision and mentoring
The Institution's Perspective
• It can be difficult and time consuming to find employers and appropriate work based opportunities • There is little control over the content, learning environment and outcomes • Assessment of student learning can be a challenge
The Employer's Perspective
• Time and money invested in developing work based programmes and in supervising students • Difficulty in identifying suitable projects or tasks for students • Offering access to limited space and computers • Poor performance from students through lack of motivation or competence • Potential issues of work quality control • Difficulties in relation to health and safety requirements of the organisation or legislation

Box 2-1 University of Western Australia, The Pros and Cons of Work Based Learning (1999)

A further noteworthy constraint is the assertion that work experience in school "could reduce the choice of the individual by inducing *premature specificity* and run counter to a broader careers education or counselling programme" (Eggleston, 1982, p. 21). This in turn, the author adds, could lead to a decline in the acceptance of what the students may deem to be the *less relevant* aspects of their educational experience. In the Irish education system the

programmes tend to be quite broad with a wide range of subjects. For students to lose interest in some of these subject areas could pose a significant challenge for students and teachers in the classroom.

Eggleston (1982) highlights one of the greatest criticisms of work experience schemes which contends that such schemes are no more than a re-styled version of vocational education from the early 20th century fitting working class children into working class jobs: "a second class education in the interests of class stratification" (Grubb and Lazerson, 1981, as cited in Eggleston, 1982, p. 22). Subsequent research has shown this assertion to be a fallacy (Eggleston, 1982). Eggleston argues that to accept such a negative viewpoint would return schools to an earlier position when it was asserted that schools made no difference. The issue of whether work experience should be for all students or just for some has been raised many times. In countries such as France, Luxemburg and Germany it appears to be viewed as more suited to less academic students (Miller et al., 1991). In other countries it is seen as being suited to all students including the more academically able. Miller et al. claim that Britain has moved towards the latter position. This, they add, is supported by American evidence that suggests work experience does not have any negative effects on academic achievement.

2.3 Socio-cultural Learning Theory

Throughout this chapter there has been reference to new learning styles forming part of best practice in Irish secondary education. For the TY programme, the LCA and the LCVP, terms such as *active learning* and *self-directed learning* have been utilised. The concept of experiential learning has been defined and explored. The opening quote in Chapter One establishes that *learning by doing* is far from being a new concept. That chapter goes on to

show that people learning from each other, also predates modern education systems. Significant learning can occur in the company of others. Rather than focusing on the individual, socio-cultural learning is more concerned with the important roles social relations, community, and culture play when it comes to cognition and learning (Rogoff, 1990).

Contemporary conceptualisations of socio-cultural learning theories draw heavily on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. He believed that social events have learning embedded within them (Vygotsky, 1978). Unlike Piaget's belief that development precedes learning, Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (SDT) proposed that social learning precedes development. According to Vygotsky, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological)." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). Interaction between a child with significant others commences from the moment of birth. While Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning is not development, he also believed that carefully planned learning facilitates mental development and can trigger a variety of developmental processes that would not otherwise occur. He postulates: "Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (p. 90). Vygotsky proposes that what a child can learn with the assistance of others (social learning) is more indicative of his/her mental development than what s/he can learn alone. While he acknowledged the role of the teacher as vital to a child's learning, he also saw the classroom itself as a social setting and quite representative of larger society.

Transition Year, with its focus on active learning and experiential learning, combines the best of both these worlds in terms of how students learn. They have the benefit of the teacher in the classroom while, at the same time, having substantial access to the many more

experienced or more knowledgeable others within the school or the wider community. The work experience programme gives students the opportunity to access the world of work and expose them to adult and working life. Moving from the safe and familiar school environment into the world of work can be a daunting experience for students. Whatever the school can do to facilitate this and make the transition as comfortable as possible for the student can be crucial to the success of the programme. The change and development in young people that can arise out of the move from one learning context to another, in this instance from the school to the workplace, is an important outcome of any work experience programme. Engeström (1996, as cited in Guile & Young, 2003), describes this "boundary-crossing" as a form of "horizontal development" (p. 70). By boundary-crossing he means "learning how to cross the social and cultural borders between different activity systems" (p. 70). The idea of horizontal development was a significant advance in socio-cultural theory contrasting with the traditional concept of vertical development, which was more concerned with intellectual development. Each person's growth was based on navigating a hierarchical body of knowledge and skills which Gick (1995, as cited in Guile & Griffiths, 2001) described as the cornerstone of most cognitive development theories. Vertical and horizontal learning tend to be treated in isolation from one another which, really is a reflection of the institutional separation of formal learning from informal learning (Guile & Griffiths, 2001). Such separation had been "a feature of most academic communities for many years" (Bourdieu, 1988, as cited in Guile & Griffiths, 2001, p. 3).

Engeström argues that learning how to cross social and cultural borders is one of the main challenges faced by people and groups in modern society. He outlines three main challenges to be dealt with by boundary-crossers:

- Learning how to overcome the contradictions of everyday life such as the positive and negative experiences that can shape a person's identity development
- Being prepared to change their ways by learning to work with other people
- Learning to move from immaturity and incompetence to maturity and competence

Students on work experience must face these same challenges, though for a limited time, and in a somewhat more controlled environment. These challenges, however, can be essential constituents of the learning associated with time spent by young people in the world of work. Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Guile & Griffiths, 2001) described learning as "a complex mediated act" (p. 5). He spoke of a triad including the subject, the object, and the mediating artefacts. In the case of work experience, the student is the subject, work experience is the object and the mediating artefacts are communication, information technology, and the workplace to name but few.

A well organised and successful placement can be an immersive experience, a metaphor David Boud (2008) defines, in the positive sense, as "being deeply absorbed or engaged in a situation or problem that results in mastery of a complex and demanding situation" (p. 1). While every student may not necessarily experience *mastery* of the work undertaken by them during their placement, there is still, nonetheless, significant learning involved. While work tasks in the workplace are usually made explicit, the associated learning is often implied (Boud, 2008). This author claims that students, however, are legitimate learners while they are on work placements. While the permanent members of staff can understand this, Boud suggests that it creates a new tension which is that a true experience can only be achieved if the student is doing the work for real and can convince the others that this is actually the case. This aligns with the sentiments of Miller et al. (1991) outlined in Chapter 2.2.8 earlier.

When Transition Year students enter the workplace, they engage in a new *community of practice*, a term developed by Wenger and Lave (1991), describing the social learning process that takes place when people are actively involved in a common pursuit. Interaction is the key to a true community of practice where individuals build relationships and learn from one another (Wenger, 1999). Such interaction is reflected throughout much of Transition Year as well as specifically during work placements. This same practice is now set to play a significant role in the new Junior Certificate and revised Leaving Certificate discussed earlier in this chapter. Such developments in education indicate that the next major transformation in Irish education may well be the transition from traditional individual learning to a more participative, interactive process where students will play a more active role in a more experiential learning environment. Boud (2008) prefers the term experience-based learning over experiential learning. His view is that "all learning needs to be seen as coming from experience" (p. 2). He argues that learning can only take place through engagement by the learner with whatever activity is being conducted inside or outside of the classroom. However, true experience-based learning, he adds, is concerned with instances where learning activities are arranged with the clear goal of substantial engagement with the learner's actual experience and where the learner occupies the central place in all aspects of teaching and learning. Transition Year students have many opportunities to experience this through general classroom activities specific to a well written and well implemented TY programme, along with other activities such as mini-enterprise, drama, musicals, community work and so on. More specifically, work based learning (WBL) occurs through participation in the work experience programme. Raelin (2000) argues that there are clear distinctions between traditional classroom learning and WBL. A significant example of this is that WBL should be centred around reflection on the work practices experienced. Primarily, he stresses the importance of reviewing and learning

from what has actually been experienced by the participant. Boud (2008) also attaches major importance to reflection. In his list of essential criteria for experience based learning, he portrays de-briefing and reflective thought as crucial to the process. Boud sees reflection as more than thinking, as suggested by Dewey, involving feelings and emotions. He describes three elements of reflection:

1) Return to experience: This involves returning to the experience in "an attempt to fully recapture it in context" (p. 6).
2) Attending to feelings: Learners attend to the feelings that were (and may still be) present. Negative feelings may need to be "discharged" while positive ones are "celebrated" (p. 7).
3) Re-evaluation of experience: Students can re-connect with the event and attend to the feelings associated with it. This can prepare a person for further consideration of their experience.

This reflective process can be undertaken individually or in the company of others (Boud 2008). Reflective practice can lead to the reinforcement of pre-existing ideas and possibilities as much as the possible need for their reevaluation. Work based learning is not just confined to the time students spend on placement as part of their work experience programme. Hodkinson, Hodkinson, Ford & Hawthorn (2006) argue that learning through and for work is a lifelong process that forms a real and relevant part of peoples' lives connecting to all elements of their lives and learning. They describe it as part of the "ongoing life course" (p. 2).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the evolution of the education system as it currently operates in Ireland. It serves as a useful backdrop against which to turn a spotlight on the work experience programme situating it within Transition Year and the second level system itself. The evolution was a most protracted process framed, to quite an extent, by our colonial past. The eventual metamorphosis to a free and independent republic, while clearly a welcome one, was still haunted by the ghost of "a dependency syndrome that had wormed its way into the Irish psyche during the long centuries of foreign dominance" (Lee, 1989, as cited in Gleeson, 2009, p. 9). Much of the subsequent education reform was evidently built upon the foundations of what had already developed in previous centuries. Nonetheless, the cautiousness of the first half of the 20th century was replaced by a more confident and courageous second half. Education policy finally appeared to be dealing with the *participation* and *access* issues and actually began to involve the people in the future of Irish education. The emphasis seemed to be more fixed on the future than on the past.

Politics continued and continues, to be a significant issue in education. However, as the 20th century drew to a close, the emphasis on the child at the centre of education had taken a firm foothold. Innovation, creativity, active learning methodologies, experience based learning, were the new key words on the lips of Irish politicians. The new and innovative programmes such as the LCA, LCVP, Transition Year and so on, heralded a new era in Irish education as the gates were opening to the new millennium. There are still many questions around what has been done, and what is yet to be done, to ensure that what we have to offer our young people is the best it can possibly be. One of these questions is in relation to how we deal with the ever persistent issue of the reproduction of social classes. A case in point is the two programmes discussed earlier, the LCA and the LCVP. Both are impressive programmes bringing creativity and active learning to the fore. The LCVP is taken by around 30 per cent

of the senior cycle population while LCA is only attracting around seven per cent. Despite the similarities between the two programmes, a significant difference is that LCA, by not being designed to lead to further education, does not figure as far as Leaving Certificate points are concerned. LCVP, as well as offering full access to the so called *points race* can give students an opportunity to ameliorate their points performance by replacing there lowest scoring subject with up to 70 points from their LCVP performance. The search for equality in the provision of educational opportunity, which gained momentum through the 1990s continues to need further tuning. The on-going dominance of the Leaving Certificate as a high stakes terminal examination has a powerful hold over all that happens before it. While the new Junior Certificate will cease to be a high stakes state exam it will continue to be used as a measure towards the dominant established Leaving Certificate until the senior cycle curriculum and teaching and learning methodologies are fully addressed.

The many theorists mentioned in relation to the concepts of work experience and learning styles in this chapter, shows that we are dealing with a complex field worthy of greater attention than given heretofore. The affordances and constraints of work experience offer food for thought as does the outline of why employers get involved in work experience in the first place. Socio-cultural learning is an integral part of the Transition Year programme emphasising the importance of human interaction from an early stage in the human life cycle as a learning process fundamental to development.

The next chapter offers a glimpse of work experience in other jurisdictions. This will be useful for comparison later between the Irish system and what is happening around the world with the phenomenon that is work experience.

Chapter 3: Work experience - an international perspective

3.1 Introduction

While work experience has become a significant part of the Transition Year programme in Ireland it also forms part of school programmes in many other countries. This chapter is included to help situate work experience as an international phenomenon that has captured the imagination of students, educators and employers alike over the past fifty or so years. The definition tends to vary somewhat from country to country but the central aim of introducing young people to the world of work, with the goal of creating a new and innovative way of learning, is a common thread through the various practices worldwide. In many cases, most notably the UK and Australia, the work experience programmes' aims and objectives have much in common with the Irish model. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2002) in England define work experience as:

> A placement on an employer's premises in which a student carries out a particular task or duty, or range of tasks and duties, more or less as would an employee, but with the emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience (p. 4)

This definition is particularly appropriate to the field of education and especially to this particular research as such placements, in second level education, are primarily concerned with *learning*. Students leave the school environment to take up their work placement in the local community, or perhaps, even further afield. This is congruent with the spirit of the work experience element of the Irish Transition Year Programme. It concurs with the aim of the Irish DES to develop the notion that learning can happen successfully outside of the four walls of the classroom.

The countries chosen for this section, with the exception of Russia, are countries where English is the first language. This was to facilitate access to reading material and legislation relating to work experience. The cultures of the countries chosen are not very diverse by any means. In fact there are many things that we have in common, especially in terms of our education systems. The inclusion of Russia in this part of the study was because of its long association with vocational training and its commitment to combining work training and education for the world of work with overall educational instruction. Work experience in some mainland European countries is briefly raised too in other chapters throughout the thesis.

3.2 United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, work experience programmes similar to the Irish model are widespread operating in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Though each country within the UK has its own Department of Education, the guidelines are very similar. They are fundamentally based on the Department for Education and Skills comprehensive guidelines for work experience entitled *Work Experience: A Guide for Secondary Schools* (2002). A similar and equally comprehensive guide for employers is also available.

3.2.1 History

Work experience has actually been a feature of second level education in the UK since the 1950s. The Newsom Report (1963) entitled *Half our Future* found evidence of schools organising work experience placements right through the 1950s across England and Wales in the last year of second level education. The report speaks favourably about *outside school experience* for pupils. Firstly, it mentions "spare time employment" (p. 76) which it describes as a ready-to-hand, but seldom used, opportunity for real experience. In the sample used to prepare the report they found forty-two per cent of the fourth year boys and fifteen

per cent of the girls had an out of school job. It effectively dismisses the potential of these jobs as future careers as many of the boys, for example, are working on paper rounds. However, the report advocates teachers encouraging students to make useful sense of the experience of the world of work. Secondly, the report outlines the "possibility of limited experience of different kinds of employment on a release from school basis" (p. 75). It highlights the introduction of sample work experience into the education system in Sweden. It points out that in the USA such placements have been in operation for years. Young students worked, under supervision, in offices and business establishments with credits being awarded towards their graduation. For the UK, Chapter Nine of the Newsom Report makes a clear recommendation that "experiments enabling some pupils over the age of fifteen to participate, to a limited extent under the auspices of the school, in the world of work in industry, commerce, or in other fields, should be carefully studied" (p. 79).

A decade or so later, the Institute of Careers Officers, in a survey, found that less than two per cent of 14-16 year olds had actually been on work placement. Work Experience subsequently received a stronger footing following the introduction of legislation in the form of the *Education Work Experience Act of 1973*. The aim of the Act was to enable education authorities to make work experience possible for children, as part of their formal learning, during the final year of compulsory education. The Act became necessary due to the raising of the school leaving age (ROSLA) in 1972 from 15 years to 16 years that effectively extended childhood for a further year and proscribed certain work environments and activities for those of compulsory school-going age. This was an unintended development caused by ROSLA.

In 1974 the Department of Education and Science (England and Wales) made a very clear statement on the overall aims of work experience. It said:

> The principle which should underlie any work experience scheme is that pupils should be given an insight into the world of work, its disciplines and relationships. This principle, and the requirement of the Act that schemes for pupils of compulsory school age must form part of an educational programme, would not be satisfied by arrangements made either in school or elsewhere, whose purpose was specifically or mainly to assess individuals for particular forms of employment, or to occupy pupils in producing articles for sale. Schemes should include provision within the school curriculum for preparation before the pupils take part in work experience and for following up and discussing the experience gained. Employers should be made fully aware of the aims of the scheme and should be invited to plan their part in co-operation with the schools.
> Work experience should have value for pupils of varying ability and aptitudes and should neither be designed as vocational training nor aimed at a limited range of pupils only. If it is possible to arrange for a variety of types of work to be available the opportunity for drawing comparisons will obviously be increased. It would, however, be undesirable if the time spent by an individual pupil in any place of work were so short as to give only a superficial impression. The total amount of time spent out of school on work experience schemes, and its distribution, will necessarily vary according to local and individual circumstances. In deciding how much time is appropriate, schools and local authorities will need to take account of the time needed for supporting studies in school and to satisfy themselves that the total amount of time spent is appropriate within the educational programme of the pupils (DES, 1974)

Following several amendments, the Education Act of 1973 was eventually rationalised in the *Education Act, 1996* allowing an extension of the work experience season to include all students in years 10 and 11. It also made the legislation clearer and more understandable. A further amendment by section 112 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, removed the prohibition of the employment of children during the last two years of compulsory schooling if such employment was in pursuance of arrangements made by a local education authority (LEA) or by a governing body of a school on behalf of such an authority. The employment had to be offered solely with a view to providing the young person with work experience as part of his/her education. Since the 1996 Act the Department for Education had the expectation that all schools would provide a minimum of

ten days work experience for all pre 16 students and five days for post 16 students. There was no statutory limit placed on the number of days spent on work experience.

Work experience in Scotland is an established part of the secondary curriculum. It can provide students with an experience of the workplace and an opportunity to observe work roles (Howieson, McKechnie & Semple, 2007). It gives young people a chance to undertake basic tasks, test out career ideas, learn about responsibility and see how core skills learned at school can be transferred to the workplace. Many students also experience work through their part-time paid employment. Howieson et al. (2007) suggest there is a strong case for schools to take account of pupils' part-time work when planning the delivery of a work experience programme. In their study, part-time work was described as *more real* than work experience.

3.2.2 Is work experience working in the UK?

There are many case studies on individual schools' work experience programmes in England. Fitzgerald & Bodily (1984), for example, conducted a study of the work experience scheme operating in Redborne Community College in Bedfordshire in the early 80s. Work experience in Redborne came to be viewed as "an agent for possible change" (p.8). While they found some areas that could be addressed to ameliorate the school's work experience programme, they concluded the positives of work experience were that students got practical experience, acquired basic vocational skills, and learned some of the social skills required to operate and cope in the workplace. Many argue that work experience should be about giving students an experience of working life and the chance to appropriate the key skills needed in the workplace rather than a chance to try out an occupation they may wish to follow. The Newsom Report (1963) supports this stating:

> In all the examples brought to our notice, the experience has been designed as part of a wider programme of general preparation for school leavers, rather than as an introduction to any specific field of future employment (p. 75)

This is clearly debatable as young people have a raft of reasons for choosing what they do during their work experience placement. In the Irish context, this research has shown that a very significant factor in choosing work placements is the existing vocational interests that a young person may have. This includes career ideas that date back to childhood and even early childhood, something Ginzberg (1966) and Super (1957) were very interested in. Students also use part-time work experience, influences from parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and other family members and acquaintances to help choose a work placement. Many of them are trying to realise a vocational idea or engage in something that they believe may be a good fit for their particular interests and talents.

Today, work experience across the UK continues to be an important part of the education of young people with 95 per cent of students in Key Stage 4 participating in work placements and around 50 per cent of sixth form students securing a second work experience or work shadowing period (DfES, 2002). Funding was originally provided by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to ensure high quality placements, the maintenance of local co-ordination and to ensure the provision of monitoring systems and health and safety support. The LSC, which was founded in 2001, had responsibility for the planning and funding of post-16 education and training. Its existence however, was relatively short-lived. As a result of what was described by the Public Accounts Committee as "catastrophic mismanagement" the organisation was eventually abolished on March 31st 2010. It was replaced by two organisations namely the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The former now supports the delivery of training and education to all 16 to 19 year olds, while the latter funds and regulates adult further education and skills training.

3.2.3 The future of work experience in the UK

A question asked by one particular group of researchers was to what extent is it possible to reform the current work experience system in operation across the UK to a more formally structured and assessed model than has previously been the case? (Ahier, Chaplain, Linfield, Moore, & Williams, 2000). In 1996 the Institute of Employment Studies expressed the view that it is important to focus on the *objectives* of placements and the identification of *learning outcomes* (Hillage, Honey, Kodz & Pike, 1996). They said the aim of work experience as a chance to experience working life was simply not good enough considering that it was going to require anything up to three weeks of tuition time.

The UK Department for Education and Skills puts significant emphasis on the work experience programme providing worthwhile learning outcomes. The guidelines state:

> Work experience needs, therefore, to be properly integrated into the curriculum with clear aims and objectives. An important aspect of the quality of work experience placements is the extent to which it enhances the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes of students (DfES, 2002, p. 8)

There have been many attempts internationally to measure the effectiveness of work experience. The emphasis seems to be on looking at the development of the key skills for employability. The development of these skills while on placement should, in essence, contribute to the education of the young person involved. Calls have been made for the assessment of the skills development aspect of work experience to ensure that real skills are being developed as opposed to simply ticking boxes that the relevant skills were covered by the work placement fulfilled by the student. Work experience, however, is not a subject. Assessment, therefore, is complex. The process can lead to cross-curricular learning and this can be absolutely immeasurable. If work experience is going to continue to be an important part of the learning experience of school-going young people in the 21st century then schools

and their controlling bodies will need to adapt to a rapidly changing world (Allen, 2010). He suggests work experience in the 21st century needs to be an experience which:

- fulfils curriculum requirements;
- meets the needs of individuals;
- motivates learners;
- challenges stereotypes;
- develops essential skills;
- results in real learning at the appropriate level;
- has identified outcomes;
- contributes to qualifications ;
- prepares for working life;
- reflects current & emerging practice in the workplace;
- helps to clarify future choices that need to be made;
- is progressive across phases;
- helps progression of learners;
- meets quality standards;
- meets the needs of employers as well as the school's;
- strengthens the school-business partnership.

The Labour government, in office until 2010, was developing a programme to improve the provision of work experience in schools. The intention was to have this in place for September of 2010. The programme was going to deal with placements of all types for both pre and post 16 education. The intention was to provide for high quality placement opportunities providing young people with an insight into the skills and attributes required for the world of work. In summary they were going to:

- Consider making the DfE standard for work experience a mandatory requirement for the organisers of work experience and the providers of placements
- Raise the profile of the Institute for Education Business Excellence (IEBE) and work with them to promote best practice for schools and employers
- Attempt to secure commitments from professionals to provide more placements
- Fund events to help make best practice common thus expanding and improving work experience
- Challenge stereotypes in career choices and help those from disadvantaged backgrounds with the ability to enter the professions

- Promote more opportunities for work experience for young people aged 16-18 in line with the programme to *Raise the Participation Age* and extend career education to 18
- Encourage the public sector to do more by ensuring the Department for Children and Families leads the way as an employer

  (Allen, 2010)

It is anticipated that all of these proposals will be reviewed in due course by the current Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government.

3.3 Australia

Australia enjoys a global reputation for a quality education system. The 2009 PISA Report ranked Australia ninth best in the world. The 2009 report focused mainly on reading but mathematics and science performance also formed an integral part of the assessment. PISA, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Programme for International Student Assessment* evaluates the quality, equity and efficiency of school systems in 70 countries. Together, these countries make up 90 per cent of the world economy (OECD, 2010).

States and territories in Australia have the primary responsibility for funding state government schools. They also provide supplementary assistance to non-government schools. Most of the non-government schools have a religious affiliation with almost 70 per cent of their students enrolled in Catholic schools. Different states and territories, however, have specific education and training policies. The Australian Government is the primary source of public funding for non-government schools while also providing supplementary assistance for government schools.

3.3.1 History

Work experience programmes have been in operation in Australian secondary schools since the late 1960s but really only became a significant feature of the senior curriculum in the 1980s. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (1999) in its report, describes Work Experience as:

> a program of relatively short duration that enables students to become actively involved in gaining first hand experience and a broad awareness of the world of work, and to develop and test career choices in the actual workplace (p. 3)

Today most secondary schools across Australia provide the opportunity of work experience to their students. Such work experience programmes are generally short in duration and are organised in blocks of time towards the end of compulsory education. School education is mandatory until the age of 15, 16 or 17 depending on the state or territory. The aim of the work experience programme is to give full-time students a "taste" of the world of work and a particular occupation (ACER, 2001).

Work experience programmes are widely accepted as a positive element of the education system, according to the ACER report, with on-going growth in their development. Schools have placed an increased emphasis on giving students direct knowledge and experience of the world of work. The ACER report is based on 1996 and 1997 data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) programme. The LSAY is a research programme jointly managed by ACER and the Commonwealth Department of Education and Science and Training (DEST). The programme uses over 20 years of data on young Australians to track young people as they move through school and onto post-school destinations including tertiary education, the labour force and adult life in general. The LSAY surveys showed that the majority of Australian students participated in work experience in Year 10 and Year 11. Such participation was widespread in most states and territories with a high of 96 per cent in

South Australia and a low of 66 per cent in Queensland. Girls were shown to be more likely to participate in work experience programmes than boys while generally, students in independent schools were less likely to participate than students in Catholic or government schools (Fullarton, 1999). The programmes tended to last for one or two weeks as in the Irish and UK systems.

The Australian education system differentiates between *work experience* and *workplace learning programmes* (WLPs). The latter tends to be a more ambitious programme usually involving an extended period of time in the workplace by comparison to work experience. Rather than only trialling a career or workplace, the intention is to acquire specific occupational skills and knowledge with the potential to help students gain qualifications that may prepare them for direct entry to the labour market or to pursue vocational studies at third level. WLPs for post-primary students in Australia had their genesis in the workplace learning reforms on the 1980s and 1990s. The Kirby Report (1984) first proposed the use of competency-based training as the basis for Australia's structured workplace learning programme (Welsh & Williamson, 2001). Several reports later, and in particular, following the Carmichael Report (1992) recommendations, structured workplace learning programmes became more desirable than work experience placements, particularly for those students of post-compulsory school age. They were primarily aimed at Year 11 students who were not quite suited to the traditional senior programmes in secondary schools. A positive spin-off of workplace learning programmes is that they can make secondary school more attractive to students who do not engage with, or do not have adequate interest in, the more academically driven programmes. WLPs expanded rapidly in Australia in the late 90s increasing from 46 per cent in 1995 to 67 per cent by 1997 (Fullarton, 1999). Alongside this growth in WLPs,

regular work experience placements continued to remain popular with high participation rates on average but with significant variation from state to state.

As in the USA, part-time work is an important feature on the Australian youth landscape with around one third of students in a sample of 3,000, working in part-time, paid employment at age 17 years. Some of the reasons given by students for securing part-time work were the acquisition of independence, enjoying participation in the world of work and many believing that it would help them to gain employment in the future (Robinson, 1999). Robinson found that students in part-time work were more likely to be happy with various elements of their lives particularly with the money they earned, their independence and their social lives compared with students who did not work. Part-time jobs tend not to be held in fields where students intend to make their careers. They are usually in the field of retail sales or manual labour with the balance in favour of girls in retail sales and boys in manual labour. Most of the reports produced around young people and work in Australia have shown that there are many positive outcomes for the students who get involved in work experience, part-time work or workplace learning programmes. Students' perceptions of the value of each of these programmes are different (ACER, 2001). Work experience is seen to provide skills relevant to a particular job while part-time work is seen to provide more general employment skills. Workplace learning programmes are viewed as helping to acquire employment skills and potential qualifications for earlier and direct entry into the workforce.

3.3.2 Victoria as a model for work experience in Australia

Victoria is noted for its high standard of education delivery at all stages from early childhood to early adulthood. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Victoria takes responsibility for this, both directly in the case of government schools, and indirectly in the case of non-government schools through

regulation and funding. The Victorian system can be showcased as a representative model of how work experience is managed and understood in Australian schools.

The short term work experience placement is intended to place students in the workplace with a view to providing insights into the industry and the work environment in which it is located (DEECD, 2011). The *Work Experience Resources Manual* (2008) looks at all aspects of work experience. This manual is available to schools and outlines:

- the roles and responsibility of the school
- the procedures and guidelines
- how to deliver the programme
- the relevant forms and brochures
- policy and ministerial order
- health and safety guidelines
- other resources and links

Work experience in Victoria dates back to the 70s. It developed over the past 40 years into a well structured and regulated programme on offer in most schools. The Education and Training Reform Act (2006) sets out the arrangements for work experience and requires that work experience can only take place during the normal school year. It includes the holidays that take place during the three school terms but not the end of year holidays (DEECD, 2008). The Act itself was amended in December, 2010 by Ministerial Order 382 which now provides the operational framework for all work experience arrangements but especially deals with arrangements for students under 15 year going on work placements.

The Work Experience Resources (WER) Manual (2008) describes work experience as something that should be incorporated in a quality careers education programme. It encourages schools to develop a quality work experience programme that is actually part and parcel of the mainstream curriculum. Work experience is generally undertaken in years 9 and 10. The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) recognised that students in these year groups had a growing interest in the future and especially in the career paths they

may choose to pursue. The VELS outlines what is essential for all schools in Victoria from Preparatory Year to Year 10. They provide a set of common state-wide standards for schools based on best practice in Victoria and drawing on national and international research about how students learn. According to the WER manual, work experience can provide young Australians with the knowledge and skills they need as they take their first steps into adult life. Work experience can assist students with the acquisition of employability skills. It also scaffolds their understanding of the workplace environment along with their career options and directions whilst laying a positive foundation for their path to life-long learning (DEECD, 2008).

Twenty years earlier, Coles (1980) identified two distinct levels of activity within work experience. The first he describes as specifically relating to the student sampling and testing particular career options. The second is concerned with work education helping students to prepare themselves for the world of work and all that goes with it. Coles developed a diagrammatic representation of the school/work interface.

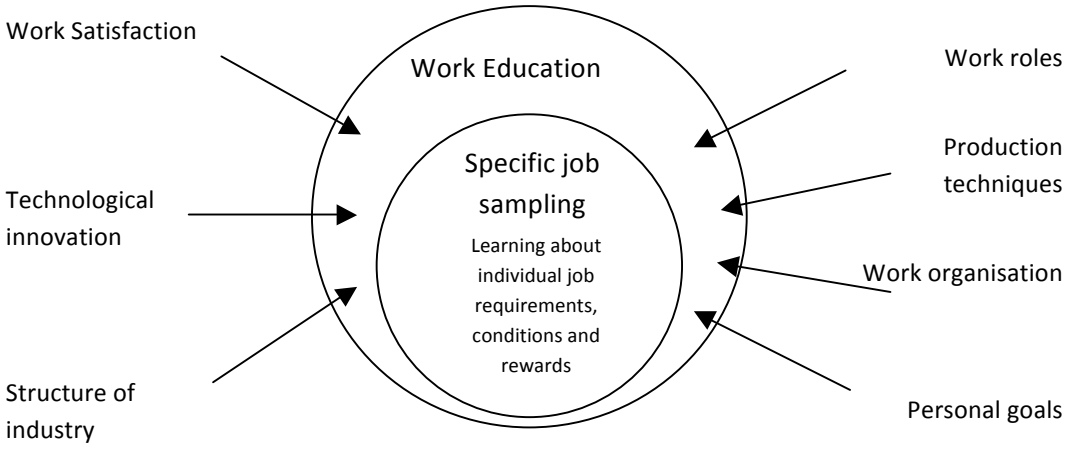

Fig. 3.1 School/Work Interface, Coles (1980).

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) was a major initiative undertaken to address the needs of young people who found themselves on the margins of schooling. The programme was introduced to a limited number of schools in 2002, and within three years there were almost 11,000 students enrolled in VCAL across Victoria. The significance of this programme is in its primary aim which is to provide students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to make informed choices about pathways to work and also towards further education (Stokes, 2005). With the objective of developing employability skills, VCAL gives students the choice of undertaking a structured work placement, a part-time apprenticeship or traineeship, or part-time work.

The VCAL stands beside the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) which is the certificate the majority of students in Victoria receive on the satisfactory completion of their secondary education. VCAL effectively meets the learning needs of young people who have limited or poor outcomes from compulsory post primary education streams. The *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria* found that the most cited reasons by students for leaving school early were 1) the desire for work and 2) the lack of interest in schoolwork (Kirby, 2000).

The VCAL and the VCE are very different programmes but they are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for students to take VCE units within their VCAL course. Students who initially pursue the VCAL are subsequently allowed to transfer to the VCE and may have any VCE units completed as part of VCAL count towards their terminal VCE.

3.3.3 The future of work experience in Australia

Generally, work experience enjoys a positive role in Victorian and Australian education. The positive views expressed by students who participate in such programmes are consistent

with the findings of many other studies (OECD, 2000). Work experience programmes are partly concerned with a student's vocational education and partly concerned with social and life skills in the adult world (Evans & Poole, 1992). They found in their study that students who participated in work experience placed a high value on the programme in terms of value for future employment and enjoyment. Students also expressed satisfaction in terms of their gains in knowledge of particular work related skills, experience, and an understanding and awareness of their own skill related competence. However, the authors caution that:

> as a vehicle for helping students to develop other life skills or greater awareness of the nature of work, it would appear that there needs to be much more reflective activity in the school or college to make these programs more successful. In terms of the development of cognitive skills, they may be far too short to have a useful contribution (Evans & Poole, 1992, p. 6).

3.4 Canada

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) (2009) produced a report on the outcomes of experiential learning programs on student success. In the report they say that work experience programmes, which are commonplace in most Canadian high schools, are designed to enhance student learning. Concomitant with that is the very real opportunity to explore career options. The report defines work experience as:

> a planned learning opportunity, within any credit course, that provides students with relatively brief work experiences, usually of one or two weeks' duration and not exceeding four weeks (p. 6).

3.4.1 History

Work experience has been a feature of Canadian education since the latter part of the twentieth century. Through the 1970s and 1980s more and more high schools across Canada began to offer structured and varied work experience programmes for students. Canada enacted a raft of legislation relating to the employment of children from the 19th century onwards. These were based on similar English legislation adopted around 1835. Today there

are still restrictions on the employment of young people on many of the statute books especially in the areas of employment standards laws, health and safety legislation and, of course, in education acts. The employment of children in most of the current legislation is subject to compulsory school attendance. This varies from province to province with the minimum school attendance age ranging from 16 years to 18 years. In the last 20 to 30 years the approach of the various jurisdictions has been to allow young people to have broad access to the workplace under approved work experience schemes organised by their educational institutions. However, some types of work are prohibited for students such as forestry and logging, working on oil rigs, mining and working in sawmills for example.

Today's work experience programmes are developed with the aim of enhancing student learning and providing students with an opportunity to explore various career areas. The Secondary Education in Alberta Policy Statement (1985) claims:

> Today, opportunities for learning beyond the secondary school are increasing. Secondary education must be planned to incorporate significant learning experiences that may be acquired and delivered through a variety of community and other agencies. Consistent with the purpose of secondary education and the role of schools, the community which benefits from the system of education shares a responsibility to contribute to the continuing improvement and extension of secondary education.

Similar statements can be found in the policy statements of most provinces across the vast territories of Canada. This reflects the Irish Department of Education and Skills description of learning outside the classroom. Whatever province or country has a work experience programme, the common aim is to take learning outside of the school.

3.4.2 Work experience today

Many of the new programmes in Canadian high schools emphasise the importance of what they refer to as *out-of-classroom experiences* related to careers. Across Canada, students, schools and businesses are putting tremendous effort into work experience programmes.

Underpinning these efforts is the assumption that well organised work experience can bring benefits such as:

- better engagement in learning and in work
- improved academic achievement
- higher graduation rates
- smoother transitions from school to work
- smoother transitions to third level education

(CCL, 2009)

Ontario, in particular, has been making a significant effort to improve academic standards with the aim of raising the post-primary graduation rate to 85 per cent by 2011. Experiential learning complements academic learning and is a major part of this effort helping to prepare students for life after high school. The CCL was contracted by the Ministry of Education in Ontario to conduct a systematic rapid evidence assessment (SREA) of the literature that is concerned with scrutinising the effects of experiential learning programmes on student performance (CCL, 2009). The focus was on the impact of experiential learning on student achievement, high school graduation rates and preparation for post-secondary school pathways for students. The report was the result of an in-depth review of 35 international studies on experiential learning programmes. Initially the researchers had gathered 514 studies but after intensive screening and key-wording, this number was whittled down to the final 35 reports used. In summary, the study revealed that experiential learning had positive effects on career awareness, self-esteem, engagement in school or the workplace, motivation, retention rates and graduation rates (CCL, 2009). The report, however, claims that the evidence of the impact of experiential learning through work experience on academic success is inconclusive.

The CCL (2009) report breaks work experience into several forms:

1. *Work experience:* provides students with an opportunity to learn for a limited period in a workplace. Many Canadian schools require pre-instruction in a number of areas including job readiness skills, health and safety practices, and school and placement expectations for the duration of the placement.

2. *Virtual work experience*: this allows student to explore workplaces, jobs and tasks through a virtual learning environment (VLE). Students get to see what the work environment is like and to develop an understanding of what would be expected of them during an actual work experience placement through virtual tours. The implementation of virtual work experience must follow the same policies and procedures which a school outlines for actual work experience.

3. *Job shadowing*: this option allows a student to observe (shadow) a competent or professional worker in their place of work. The duration is usually one to three days.

4. *Co-operative education*: a programme that combines course-work with a work placement in a particular occupation. It may include a number of elements such as job shadowing, job twinning, work experience and virtual work experience. The class-room component may include pre-placement and integration activities.

5. *Job Twinning*: this is where a student has the chance to accompany a co-operative education student to his/her workplace. The placement is usually for a half day or a full day. Students may participate in more than one job twinning experience thus gaining a broader range of career information in a typical work environment.

6. *Apprenticeships*: These placements are paid, work-based training which is combined with post secondary education. 80 per cent of the time is spent learning skills on the job while the remaining 20 per cent is spent in a classroom setting. These programmes last from three to five years.

7. *School to work transition programmes*: These are specialised programmes preparing students for direct entry to employment or self-employment. Efforts are made to select placements from employment sectors where job opportunities are known to exist. These programmes include in-school and work-based experiences for students. The duration of school-to-work transition programmes is usually two to three years while the students are pursuing their high school diplomas.

3.4.3 Examples from across Canada

The education system in Canada offers a wide range of work experience for students in full-time education. Like Australia, Canada has a range of education departments across its ten provinces and three territories. Each department is specific to that area and therefore there are variations in legislation and departmental guidelines from province to province. The transition from education to work has become a key area for researchers and policy makers throughout the OECD countries in recent times (Taylor, 2007). She adds that successful transition systems are characterised by:

- well organised pathways that connect education to work and further study
- widespread opportunities combining workplace experience with education
- good information and guidance
- safety nets for those at risk

De Brouker (2005) suggests that for Canada to have a more effective system would require strong political will along with a focus on curriculum and improved counselling. He also states that the attitudes and expectations of parent and students alike need to be addressed as does the engagement of the business and working community. Many Canadian schools have placed an increased emphasis on high school career planning as part of the regular secondary programme with some schools requiring students to prepare a portfolio on employability skills and careers (Taylor, 2007).

In British Columbia (BC), the Ministry of Education states that the definition of work experience in *legislation* is:

> that part of an educational program that provides a student with an opportunity to participate in, observe or learn about the performance of tasks and responsibilities related to an occupation or career (MOE, 2009, p. 1)

This definition may be applicable to not just any province but to any country in the world where all official government departments of education support the concept of work based learning and what it can offer students within that education system. In BC work experience is incorporated into the high school curriculum with students having the opportunity to learn about careers, participate in tasks, and develop an understanding of the responsibilities associated with specific occupations. The placements take place in the local community and students can acquire new skills which can be transferable to future job or career settings (MOE, 2009).

In Saskatchewan, credits are awarded for participation in what they refer to as *Career and Work Exploration*. This occurs in other provinces too. In Alberta students are allowed explore their career options in more than one career area while in New Brunswick the *Youth Career Connections Programme* offers approved students paid summer work experience along with "preferred status" at some of its universities after high school.

3.4.4 The future of work experience in Canada

With all the variations that occur across the enormous plains of Canada, ultimately, government education departments seem to agree that work experience helps prepare students for the transition from school to work. It allows them to observe and put into practice employability skills and other applied skills relating to particular occupations. Work experience also offers students the opportunity to sample specific careers with a view to

pursuing further study to help realise those possibilities for themselves. The findings of the CCL (2009) report suggest "a positive relationship between career education and various student outcomes" (p. 4). This bears well for the further development of formal work experience programs.

3.5 United States of America

Smyth and Hannan (2004) state that Transition Year students in Ireland engage in two types work:

1) part-time paid employment
2) work experience placement as a prerequisite of the TY programme

In the USA work experience in high school is considered under these same two headings. Major debate there has focused on the issue of students working in long term, paid part-time jobs while at school. This work is loosely referred to as Work Experience (WE). Much of the research looks at the positive and negative effects of such WE on the development of students as they progress through high school. Almost 50 per cent of 16-19 year olds enrolled in schools during the 1990s were also in the labour force as defined by the US Department of Labour (Carr, Wright & Brody, 1996). Some of these students worked only in the summer. However, of the high school juniors and seniors surveyed by the National Survey of Families and Households almost 90 per cent of them worked for at least part of the school year (Manning, 1990, as cited in Carr et al, 1996). They gathered significant statistical data on educational attainment in high school for those involved in on-going part time work. Their sample was taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 data (NLSY79). The NLSY79 consisted of 12,686 young people who were first interviewed between the ages of 14 and 22 in 1979. The participants were then interviewed every year right up to 1994 and biennially thereafter.

Several previous studies (D'Amico 1984, Mortimer & Finch 1986, Steel 1991, Steinberg and Dornbusch 1991) looking at the effects of working while at school have mixed and even contradictory results (Carr et al, 1996). Mortimer and Finch (1986) reported negative consequences of part-time work for student educational attainment in high school. In contrast, D'Amico (1984) using NLSY data found no negative effect from working while in high school. In fact he found that for some, working actually improved there standing in class. He also showed that negative school performance from employment was mainly restricted to students who had intensive involvement in work, usually exceeding 20 hours per week (Carr et al, 1996).

For their study, Carr et al used a sample of 2,716 high school students aged 16 to 19 years old from NLSY79 and took two snapshots of the teenagers involved in 1979 and in 1991. They concluded that in the long term they found that there was a statistically significant negative effect of working while at school on educational attainment. Positive effects were also identified by the study in relation to employment and income. In the short term at least, students who worked while at school had higher employment rates and earned more money after graduation than those who did not (Carr et al, 1996).

3.5.1 History

Work experience resembling the Irish, UK and Australian models is also quite prominent in the USA in both the private and public schools system. The concept of work experience in school dates back to 1911 when legislation relating to school attendance was passed allowing young people to work part-time and go to school part-time. Such legislation came in to being in Wisconsin in 1911, in Ohio in 1913 and in Pennsylvania in 1915 (Joyal & Carr, 1944). By 1922, half of the states had similar laws which provided for what were

referred to as part-time and continuation high schools. In 1936 the George Deen Act gave more impetus to school-to-work programmes providing funds for the teaching of what were termed *distributive occupational subjects*. These classes essentially consisted of class-work integrated with part-time work under the supervision of a specially trained teacher and with credit awarded towards graduation for acceptable job performance. The report of the Youth Conference in Stanford University in September 1942 defined work experience as:

> Practical activity of value to the individual and to society which produces goods or services and which meets acceptable standards normal to that work situation. It may or may not be accompanied with pay, and it may be conducted both in and out of school (Joyal & Carr, 1944, p. 110)

In the early 1940s the country was moving towards a general adoption of work experience as an integral part of high school education. The onset of the Second World War had a significant effect on schooling with major reductions in school attendance and the loss of teaching personnel. Schools adjusted to these new conditions and continued to develop their school to work programmes. After the war these programmes continued to grow and looked set to be a permanent feature of American high school education. Joyal and Carr (1944) suggested that state education departments would need to formulate policies for school supervised work for high school students. They made the following predictions for schools:

- Schools of the future will be more closely integrated with the community
- Work experience programmes will be a method of strengthening school and community relations
- Work will not be something separated from education

3.5.2 Work based learning

In American high schools today, work experience is commonly referred to as *Work Based Learning* (WBL). WBL is defined by the United States Congress Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) as:

> learning that results from work experience that is planned to contribute to the intellectual and career development of students. The work experience is to be supplemented with activities that apply, reinforce, refine, or extend the learning that occurs during work, so that students develop attitudes, knowledge, skills, and habits that might not develop from work experience alone (OTA, 1995, p. 3)

Schools in every state are now familiar with the concept of WBL which was supported by legislation when President Clinton signed the *School to Work Opportunities Act 1994* (STWOA). The act came about due to research that showed there was a lack of systems connecting school and work. STWOA was designed as a one-time venture capital initiative. The authority of the act was to terminate or "sunset" on October 1st 2001. The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) produced a report in 2000 following two years of discussions by those involved in school-to-work programmes and activities throughout the United States. The group of over 50 individuals met five times during 1998 and 1999 to discuss how to sustain the momentum generated by the STWOA funding. The funding had been provided to facilitate states in the development of structures and supports which would help young people to make effective transitions, through schooling and career preparation, into further education and careers (AYPF, 2000). This report outlined promising initiatives, partnerships and reform through WBL which were supported by the School to Work Opportunities Act 1994. During the lifetime of the funding great advances were made in the development of school-to-work activities. In the aftermath, following the end of funding, STWOA was described as the driving force behind uniting the policy makers, employers, schools, parents and students to enhance student learning and prepare young people for the world of work and further education (Lankard Brown, 2002).

3.5.3 The future of work experience in the USA

The National Research Council (NRC) suggested that carefully constructed work experiences can create opportunities for young people to participate in meaningful work and

do something that gives them a real taste of adulthood. It can enhance their understanding of school and may increase their motivation to participate fully (NRC, 2003). Students are unlikely to be highly engaged in schoolwork if they do not understand the relevance of the work they are doing in school to their future goals (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). They add that programmes involving work placements can help students:

- envision various future careers
- acquire direct information about careers
- comprehend related educational requirements

In summary, work experience is greatly valued by the education system across the states. It is seen as an opportunity for students to acquire employability skills, develop interpersonal skills, develop positive attitudes to school, trial particular careers and prepare young people for adult and working life.

3.6 Russia

Though the focus in this section has been on English speaking countries, it would be remiss of the author not to make reference to a country where work experience has been a historically significant feature of the education landscape. There has been a strong commitment in the Russian education system to the notion of combining work training and preparation for the world of work with educational instruction. According to Marx, work is "not only a means of life, but life's prime want" and makes up an essential part of the social and intellectual development of humans (Eggleston, 1982, p. 122). Eggleston asserts that there is a long-standing principle in Marxist education thinking that young people need to be tuned into the basic requirements of *production*, that they should understand the social and economic significance of these requirements and that they should be aware of the links between academics and production. Work experience and labour training underwent

consistent and significant change throughout the decades of the mid 20th century not just in the USSR but also in many Eastern European schools (Eggleston, 1982). He claims that there had been a continuing commitment to the notion of combining instruction with work training. This was a fundamental Leninist principle following the Marxist belief that productive labour was an important element of human development. Basically, work should be an essential part of education. This, effectively, is the same theory put forward by the many education departments in all of the countries discussed above. So there is little new as far as the *value* of work experience is concerned.

In Russia today, work experience occurs predominantly in the form of a vocational track that students take at approximately age 15 years. At the end of compulsory schooling in Russia students can choose to follow a vocational study programme that prepares them for the world of work and involves up to half of the school year in a work placement. The Ministry for Education and Science of the Russian Federation specifies that the ratio of *Theoretical Education* to *Practical Training* is one to one. Other students, who follow what is referred to as *Secondary (Complete) General Education*, choose a more academic programme in preparation for entry to a higher education institution.

The Russian Federation schools system has, however, experienced considerable difficulties. In 1999 an analysis of educational reform needs underlined the issue of declining educational quality in the country along with untrained staff and inadequate facilities (Canning, Moock & Heleniak, 1999). In the early 2000s the numbers attending secondary education were in decline. Students were leaving school early due to issues of quality and access with half the population believing that the overall quality of education was lower than it was in Soviet times (La Cava & Michael, 2006).

Not unlike many of the education systems discussed above, originally the work experience element in education was predominantly the domain of the less academically able student. This was certainly the case in the former USSR but in more recent times greater attention is being paid to a broader based vocational training incorporating more technical and scientific training. It seems the nature of work is simply changing with jobs becoming more sophisticated and more influenced by technical innovation. This has implications for the sort of work experience required or indeed desired by students today.

3.7 Lessons from other countries

In each of the countries discussed in this chapter the common thread is clearly the value placed by State Departments of Education and schools on allowing and encouraging students to participate in workplace learning. The benefits of work experience discussed for each country are very similar. The key common advantages are testing career ideas, developing personal transferable skills, exposure to experiential learning, provision of knowledge to make informed choices about pathways to work and generally enhancing the student learning experience.

There has been significantly more research carried out on the effects of work experience on student learning in all of the other countries than there has been in Ireland to date. Numerous reports have been commissioned in the UK, our nearest neighbour, resulting in the development of work experience programmes across all of the member countries. This has culminated in a very comprehensive set of guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Skills there for schools and a comprehensive separate set for employers. Similar reports have been conducted and guidelines made available to schools in Australia, Canada and a host of other countries. Work Experience at Senior Cycle (1998) is a set of guidelines for Irish schools that offers useful advice regarding the operation of work experience

programmes in schools. It emphasises the importance of advance preparation of students, advice on monitoring students while on placement as well as the all-important debriefing on return to school. The publication was funded by the DES and supported by the various Second Level Support Services and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). We have yet to address the issue regarding the lack of formal research into work experience in Ireland on the part of the state. A recent longitudinal study of 6th Year students in Ireland heard students clearly state that what is missing from the Irish school experience is for schools to "provide more work experience" (Smyth, Banks & Calvert, 2011, p. 187). The students added, however, that it must be meaningful experience.

All of the countries discussed, including Ireland, have legislation in place to protect young people at work. In the Irish context, that protection is in the form of the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996. This act offers protection for all young people under the age of 18 years engaging in any kind of work within the Republic. It is not specifically tailored for the many young people involved in work experience programmes. However, it does have several references to work experience, such as, derogations for employers allowing them to take on students during term time, to engage them at a younger age and for longer hours, when that work is part of an approved programme of work experience.

Most of the countries discussed above have legislation catering specifically for the protection of students, schools and employers participating in work experience schemes. Unfortunately this is not the case in Ireland. Work experience, with legislative support in place, is on a much stronger footing than it otherwise would be. In the UK, for example, there is the Education Work Experience Act 1973 (rationalised in the Education Act 1996), in Australia it is the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, in the USA there is the School to Work Opportunities Act 1994 and so on. Ireland is well behind in terms of drawing up appropriate legislation in this field. There is health and safety legislation to

cover all workers and workplaces. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) in Ireland produced a guide for teachers entitled 'Health and safety matters for students embarking on work experience: A short guide for teachers' (2008). These guidelines are useful but is that enough without a separate piece of legislation supporting the whole process and ensuring that all partners follow best practice when it comes to work experience and our young people? Ireland appears to be now, where the USA were in the 1990s, having a lack of systems connecting schools and workplaces.

In Ireland, work experience is associated with three programmes: Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Despite this, the overall participation level is significantly lower than in some of the other countries discussed. By work experience not forming part of the established Leaving Certificate, then that figure will remain lower for the foreseeable future. One of the highest participation rates is in the UK with 95 per cent of Key Stage 4 students participating in a work experience programme followed by around 50 per cent of final year students securing a second opportunity to venture into the world of work (DfES, 2002). In Australia that figure varies across states from between 66 per cent (Queensland) and 96 per cent (South Australia) (ACER, 2001). The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) programme, however, showed that the majority of Australian students in years 10 and 11 participated in a work experience programme. Canada has conducted several major studies across the provinces. Canada has been focusing on increasing overall retention rates to above 85 per cent by this year. The further development of experiential learning is seen as a significant aid to reaching that target. Many provinces are following the lead of British Columbia where work experience is being incorporated into the high school curriculum. The USA, with its early start on work experience in schools dating back to 1911, had already moved towards the general adoption

of work experience across the country by 1940. The work based learning programmes in the US still continue to gain significant momentum nationwide.

3.8 Conclusion

Work experience appears to have a broad appeal in the countries considered in this chapter. Though the terminology varies, the ultimate goals outlined for each country's programme of work experience are very similar. The education departments in each of these countries seem to have placed significant value on the experiential learning opportunities for students that lie outside the classroom and within the world of work. Much research has been conducted in the UK, Australia, Canada, and the USA. In Russia things are very different with some unrest within the education system. Numbers in education have been declining there due to the poor quality of education provision. While there is much in common between the approaches to work experience in the countries discussed in this chapter and the Irish situation, there is also significant catching up to be done by the DES in terms of legislation and the formalisation of work experience in secondary schools in Ireland.

Chapter 4: Key concepts relating to work experience

4.1 Introduction

A number of important concepts have emerged from the literature relating to the impact of work experience on the individuals who participate in such a programme. Career development theories (CDT) cannot be ignored when discussing work experience as a formal part of the education of our students. The overall effect of career development on our young people is very much long-term. While formalising it in secondary school has many beneficial effects, ultimately it is through career development that an individual creates a work identity (Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963) or what will be discussed later as a vocational identity.

Identity is a key component that is inseparable from any issue of practice relating to the life experiences of an adolescent. Participation in a work experience programme exposes the young person to a new community of practice where members engage with one another in ways that can be quite different to what the young person experiences in the normal school community. In school, the process of negotiating a way of *being* is well underway and continues to advance. This can be a protracted and complex process for a student and in some cases may be occurring without it being all that obvious to him or her. The world of work is a new field for students presenting new experiences in a new environment for which they need to develop new skills. By age 15, a student has developed what Gee (2001) calls a core identity. He acknowledges the existence of multiple identities which he says are "not connected to their internal states" but to "their performances in society" (p. 99). The image of a number of metaphorical satellites orbiting the planet that is one's core identity comes to

mind. They are separate from the core identity while, at the same time dependent on it for their very existence. A student's emerging vocational identity can easily be *sent into orbit* through the experiences gained during exposure to the world of work. This chapter will look at the career development theories that fit well with what is unfolding for young people who participate in work experience in Irish schools. It will also consider the issue of the student's identity and the emergence and development of a vocational identity through the opportunities presented by access to a work experience programme.

Other concepts that have emerged in relation to work experience include gender, social background and school subject provision. While these overlapping categories can be closely linked to identity formation and the development of a vocational identity in particular, it is worthwhile considering each of them briefly in terms of how they can affect subject choice in tandem with the experiences acquired during a work experience placement.

4.2 Career development theory

> *"In modern society practically every individual …must choose an occupation"*
> (Ginzberg, 1966, p. 3)

Over half a century later, this quote is still very valid. These are the opening words by Ginzberg in his widely known volume 'Occupational Choice' first published in 1951. This author describes the right of the individual to choose an occupation as one of the outstanding characteristics of our culture since the beginning of modern capitalism. Choosing an occupation is a complex process that has undergone many changes over time. Nonetheless, it is as important now to our young learners as it was in the 1950s or 1960s or at any stage in modern times. A key question here is: what has actually changed in education over the years or indeed even over the centuries? Yes, there have been significant advances in technology

and teaching styles and methods, but fundamentally, not much has changed at all. There have always been teachers either in the guise of parents, who, according to the Irish constitution, are still the primary educators of their children, or as engaged professionals, who dedicate their lives to imparting knowledge by one means or another to a generally willing and receptive young audience. An example of how young people have *changed* is exemplified in the following quote:

> The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect to their elders.... They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and are tyrants over their teachers.

This quote, surprisingly for many, is attributed to Socrates in the 5th century BC. Yet, on reading it, it could just as easily have been uttered in 1940 or in 2012. So things may not be as different as many may think.

Vocational Choice theories have been popular since the early part of the 20th century. Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma (1966) developed a theory of occupational choice that still has some validity today despite its criticisms. But what theory has not been criticised? Its main criticism is that it is over simplistic or too general (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Donald Super built on the work of Ginzberg et al. by adding more stages. He also dedicated most of his academic career to further developing and expanding his theories finishing with a segmental theory incorporating the self-concept, life span and life space. John Holland (1983) created a typology linking vocational choice with personality types. Personality traits have been linked with career choice since the 1900s. Holland (1985), however, took the position that people like to seek out *environments* that allow them to use their abilities and skills while working with like-minded people. He asserted that behaviour is determined by an interaction between personality and environment. Holland's cognitive and problem-solving model is widely used in careers counselling. Krumboltz, Mitchell &

Jones (1976) produced a theory of career choice called Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making (SLTCDM) built on the idea that people choose their careers based on their life experiences and influences. He saw an important role for genetic inheritance, environment, life experience and developed skills when it came to choosing a possible career. Due to the complex interaction of these four influencing factors, people begin to form particular beliefs that represent their own reality. Such beliefs, in time, influence their approach to developing new skills and finally affect their subsequent actions and aspirations (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). While SLTCDM attempts to explain the origins of career choice, Mitchell and Krumboltz developed the theory into what became known as the Learning Theory for Career Counselling (LTCC) which explains what careers counsellors can do to deal with the issues and concerns that can arise for people around career choice. The guidance counsellor, as they are commonly referred to in Ireland, is a key player in most schools offering work experience programmes. Jeffers (2006) describes the role of the guidance counsellor in WEPs as "extensive" and in some cases resulting in a "shift in priorities and even in role identity" (p. 411).

Finally, Lent, Brown and Hackett (1987, as cited in Savickas & Lent, 1994) developed what they called a Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) which has roots in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. Not unlike Krumboltz et al. (1976), they include issues like gender, culture, genetic endowment, life events and experiences. They propose that these aspects work together to reinforce career choice if it looks like success can be achieved in a particular field. Alternatively, one can be diverted if the barriers are too great. This constant change is central to the theory with vocational interests being shaped and reshaped by various influential factors.

These are just some of the more widely known theories of career choice that are in the literature. Each of them has something to offer in relation to adolescents who embark on programmes of work experience. In this chapter, both Ginzberg's (1966) and Super's (1957) theories will be explored further as they have many aspects that are still very relevant and applicable to the actions of Irish secondary school students participating in work experience. Holland's theory will be further outlined in the following section on vocational identity while elements of Krumboltz's (1996) LTCC and Lent, Brown and Hackett's (1987) SCCT will be drawn on in the concluding chapter of this study.

While moving towards developing a theory of occupational choice, Ginzberg et al. had to initially consider how individuals actually make decisions about the types of work they eventually choose. They came up with four specific variables through small scale empirical studies:

1) Reality Factors: These are concerned with the social and economic environments into which people are born. They claim that individuals must react to these environments when they commence the process of considering future occupations. In the TY Work Experience Programme, students' placements can be affected, significantly in some cases, by their social and economic backgrounds. Underprivileged children may have less access to certain organisations than their more middle class counterparts. Lack of contacts, confidence or interest can be issues for some of these children.
2) The Educational Process: Ginzberg et al. said that over time, the more desirable occupations in our society can only be filled by those who have spent significant time in education and training. So now we ask: who has the possibility of acquiring the necessary training and who takes advantage of it? Recent figures from the Irish

DES confirm that retention numbers (the number of students remaining in school until their terminal examinations) in our schools are at an all-time high, and rising. The average retention rate to Leaving Certificate is 90.2 per cent, up almost 9 per cent over the past 11 years (Irish Government News Service, 2012). Record highs of 94.17 per cent occurred in Co. Kilkenny closely followed by Co. Roscommon at 93.96 per cent. They are currently among the highest retention rates in Europe. This included what are known in Ireland as DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) which cater for students from under-privileged backgrounds. DEIS schools showed an improvement in retention from 68.2 per cent to 80.1 per cent for those students who entered the second level system between 2001 and 2006. This increases the opportunity for all young people to take advantage of the education and training required to access various occupational and educational possibilities.

3) The Emotional Determinants: Regardless of environmental factors, choices ultimately are made by people who in turn are influenced by powerful needs and desires. The extent of these needs and desires may determine the educational and occupational outcomes.
4) Values: Ginzberg et al. (1966) said that though, traditionally, individuals in society will endeavour to maximise their economic position in life, there are also those who will readily forego the opportunity to make large amounts of money in exchange for a type of work or mode of life that they would prefer. Many students opt to work in placements with children, those with disabilities, the elderly and so on, as that is perhaps where their vocations may lie.

Though Ginzberg et al. did not succeed in developing a general theory of occupational choice based on these variables, they are nonetheless worthy of consideration in today's world when contemplating how young people, in particular, make decisions around career choice. Ginzberg et al. eventually pursued what they refer to as the *genetic* approach to the study of occupational choice. The idea was to study the emotional and intellectual development as the child passes through various stages of life through to adulthood. The focus was on *how* young people make career decisions rather than *why*.

In time they came up with a model which, despite its criticisms, served well for many years and parts of which still have significant application to the field of occupational choice. According to Ginzberg et al., the process of occupational choice occurs in three main stages:

1) Fantasy Stage: This period lasts from early childhood up to about age 11. Young people think about which careers they might like to do in the future. They imagine themselves in those roles. Many students in TY admitted to having childhood career ideas.
2) Tentative Stage: Children make initial or tentative choices as they progress through the following phases:
    a) Interest (11-12 years): Choices made based on likes and dislikes.
    b) Capacity (13-14 years): The individual becomes aware of the need to be realistic.
    c) Values (15-16 years): Evaluate choices based on goals and values.
    d) Transition (17-18 years): Transitional stage where the student is looking towards work or college as the end of secondary schooling approaches.
3) Realistic Stage: Young people begin to crystallise careers of real interest. They proceed through the following phases:

a) Exploration: Exploring subject areas in an attempt to resolve occupational choices.
b) Crystallisation: This is the time over which the individual considers all of the various factors influencing occupational choice and is finally able to commit.
c) Specification: Alternatives are reviewed with a view to finding a field of specialisation and a specific career objective.

Students who participate in school based work experience tend to fit the Tentative Stage in the Ginzberg model. They may experience all or some of the phases therein in any particular order. Subsequent to work experience, they may make subject choices influenced by their placements and continue into the senior academic cycle where they use what they have learned to help them navigate the *Realistic Stage* as outlined in the Ginzberg model.

Though these stages of the theory last until about 18 or 19 years of age, Ginzberg, later in his career, stated that he believed occupational choice to be a life-long process where people continue to search for satisfaction in what they decide to do for a living. The subjects chosen by the students will take them to their terminal examinations. For many, it will lead them on to further education where they will continue to pursue particular studies in preparation for an expressed career or vocational interest. Slaney (1980, as cited in Slaney, 1988) conducted a brief study of expressed vocational interests as part of his major study of career indecision. He reported that:

> expressed interests were relevant because they have been found, repeatedly and consistently, to have predictive validity relative to chosen college majors or actual career choices that equals or exceeds the predictive validity of very widely used inventoried vocational interests (p. 61).

According to Slaney it appears that most college students have expressed vocational interests. However, he makes the point that many are unsure of their choices and will, during college, seek career counselling regarding their choices and perhaps even change their choices during their undergraduate years.

Donald Super (1957) built on the work of colleague Eli Ginzberg. He saw weaknesses in the latter's theory which he wanted to address and did so by extending the development stages from three to five with different sub-stages therein.

1) Growth (Stages: Fantasy *4-10 years*, Interest *11-12 years*, Capacity *13-14 years*)
2) Exploration (Stages: Tentative *15-17 years*, Transition *18-21 years*, Trial *22-24 years*)
3) Establishment (Stages: Trial *25-30 years*, Stabilisation *30-40 years*)
4) Maintenance (*40-64 years* The individual maintains abilities and skills)
5) Decline (*65+ years* Interest and ability declining; prepares for retirement)

Super began his research on occupational choice in the 1940s and continued with it up to and beyond his own retirement. Like Ginzberg, Super's focus was on a developmental model where occupational choice was based on development across the life-span. Previous theories such as Trait Factor Theory, dating back to the 1900s and usually associated with vocational theorist Frank Parsons, ignored the longitudinal perspective from which one can observe the ways in which individuals adjust their vocational choices and move between occupations which meet their changing needs, abilities and desires. The continuation of Super's model up to preparation for retirement is significant but due to the focus of this research on Transition Year students the interest here will be in the first two stages, Growth and Exploration, which deal with the appropriate age group. One of his most significant contributions to career development theory was his emphasis on the role of the self-concept. His recognition of the idea that the self-concept changes over a person's life as a result of his/her experiences is fundamental to his theory. The work experience programme in TY offers young people a taste of adult life and the world of work. When carefully managed,

this gives the student a substantial experience which can have an immediate impact on decisions they make regarding their futures quite soon afterwards. His work in the sixties amplified the idea of a *vocational self-concept*. Super differentiated his idea of vocational self-concept from vocational identity claiming that the former is subjective while the latter is more objective. In the fifties, Super identified maturation as the key process in adolescent career development (Savickas, 1997, as cited in Allison & Cosette, 2007). The former DES Second Level Support Service (SLSS), now part of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), states that the key purpose of Transition Year is to promote maturity:

- Maturity in studies by making students more self-directed learners through the development of general, technical and academic skills
- Maturity in relation to work and careers by developing work-related skills
- Personal maturity by providing opportunities to develop communication skills, self-confidence and a sense of responsibility
- Social maturity by developing greater 'people' skills and more awareness of the world outside school
- Maturity that will help the student make a more informed choice of subject for their Leaving Certificate studies *(SLSS, 2007)*

The maturity acquired during Transition Year, coupled with the work experience programme, assists students in the realisation that they must make occupational choices at some point. Transition year appears to be as good a place to start as anywhere. So begins the process of planning for the future. Super (1974, as cited in Savickas, 2001) coined the word "planfulness" meaning "an awareness that educational and vocational choices must be made eventually and an inclination to prepare to make these choices" (Savickas, 2001, p. 52). Student attitudes to future careers play an important role in preparation for such

"planfulness" and will be discussed in more detail in the analyses chapter later. During the Growth stage of Super's model, educators can help develop students adaptive attitudes to work while concomitantly building positive self-esteem "preparing them to become planful explorers and knowledgeable deciders" (Savickas, 2001, p. 53). During the exploration stage students engage in what Super (1963, as cited in Savickas, 2001) refers to as exploratory behaviour which involves "action and reflection that increase self-knowledge about work values, vocational interests, and occupational abilities as well as produces a broad fund of occupational information and knowledge about the world of work" (p. 52). This ties in very neatly with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model discussed earlier.

In 1980 Super developed his Rainbow Model which he intended as a segmental theory and not a fragmented theory, a criticism that used to irritate him. The model consisted of a number of segments including maturity, career adaptability and life stages. What started out as *Career Development Theory* evolved into a *Developmental Self-Concept Theory* and towards the end of Super's life and career, a *Life Span, Life Space Theory* (Allison & Cossette, 2007). The diagram in Figure 2-1 shows Super's Rainbow Model emphasising the integration of the various life stages with the six major life roles. He refers to the life stages as life-span and the life roles as life-space.

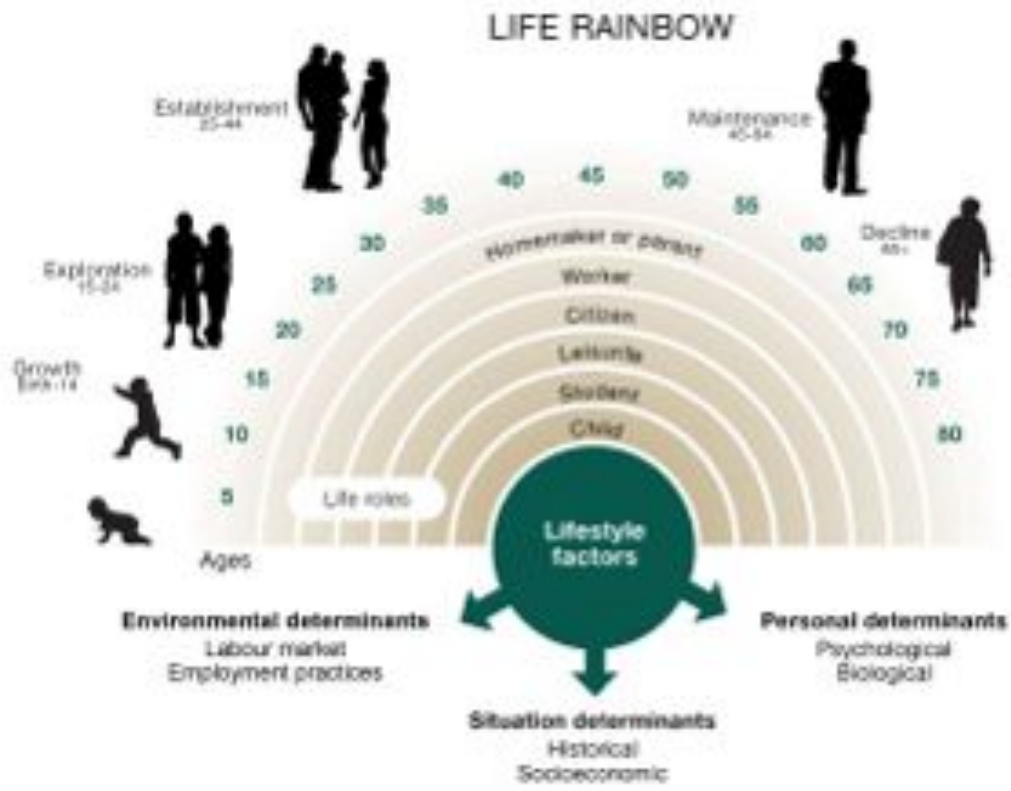

Figure 4-1 Donald Super's Life Rainbow Model (1990)

Super (1963, as cited in Allison & Cossette, 2007) defines self-concept as "a picture of the self in some role, situation, or position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships". This is very closely linked to the next concept to be examined: identity.

4.3 Identity

The literature presents a myriad of different conceptions of identity. It is no longer seen as a single entity that is developed over time through childhood and adolescence and eventually achieved in adulthood (Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009). These authors assert that the plural is now often used to highlight the idea that one person may enact many different identities across a developmental trajectory or indeed, in various different contexts. When someone acts and interacts in a given context, others recognise that person as acting and

interacting as a particular "kind of person" or even as several different "kinds" all at once (Gee, 2000). But the kind of person that one is recognised as can change at any given moment while at the same time not denying the existence of their core identity.

Transition year students tend to be at age 15 years on average and are, therefore, young adolescents still exploring and constructing their own identities in a very intensive way. Though they are neither familiar with the terminology around identity formation nor the processes involved, they are very much *in* the process of finding out who they are, and to what beliefs they will subscribe in the course of their lives. The Transition Year Programme (TYP) is very different from what students experience in the first three years of Irish post-primary education. Etienne Wenger (1999) suggests that our educational institutions are largely based on the assumption that learning is an "individual process" (p. 3), with a beginning and an end. Consequently our classrooms are organised in such a way that the students focus on the teacher and what he or she has to deliver in an environment removed from the distractions of the outside world. He describes the associated assessment within this system as a struggle of "one-on-one combat where knowledge must be demonstrated out of context" (p. 3) and where any form of collaboration is considered cheating. In the TY programme, students step outside of this practice for a more participative and experiential type of education. When talking about students going to school, Wenger refers to "the agenda of the imposing institution" (p. 6). This aptly sums up the exam led curriculum, discussed in Chapter Two, that students must deal with in the three years preparing for the Junior Certificate Examination. However, in spite of the curriculum, the most personally transformative learning takes place as a result of membership of the various *communities of practice* to which they affiliate themselves, not just in the classroom, but also in the playground, peer group, neighbourhood and family (Wenger, 1999). Transition Year

facilitates such learning by offering students the opportunity to follow an entirely different programme which is, to all intents and purposes, designed by the school, based on DES guidelines, but with the needs of the students themselves at the centre in most cases. Jeffers (2008) describes the *domestication* of TY by schools where each school can put its own unique shape on the programme. He highlights the positive in this development saying that "TY can be viewed as a national programme with sufficient flexibility to enable genuine accommodation to the specific circumstances of individual schools, playing to the strengths of teaching teams and geared to the developmental needs of students" (p. 385). Jeffers, however, cautions that the same helpful flexibility can be less favourably used by schools to "justify a narrow selectivity that ignores key features of the programme" (p. 386). Students following the TY programme, generally, are afforded the opportunity to operate within the school, but also in the wider community and, of course, in the workplace. This opens so many other communities of practice in which to engage, experiment, contribute, and further develop their sense of self, along with their sense of agency.

The entire TYP is designed around participation. Education places students on an "outbound trajectory toward a broad field of possible identities" (Wenger, 1999, p 263). The TYP presents many opportunities for students to engage with and to help themselves in the negotiation of their actual identities. The programme, in tandem with the regular curriculum, is a chance for students to participate in areas such as drama, music, enterprise, career investigation, ICT, international travel, art and design. For Wenger, it is more important that students be exposed to different experiences that give them the opportunity to take control of their own learning than it is to cover large amounts of material. This is the basic concept underpinning the Transition Year Programme.

Such engagement and experience in a year without the usual pressure of examinations, gives students a chance to think about *who* they are and *where* they may go with their lives. They get the time and space to consider their future or *possible* selves. With the timely opportunity to participate in the workplace they can begin to consider their possible selves in terms of a career. The practices in which students engage have a significant influence on the production of their identities. The extent to which students participate in the programme very much determines the outcomes for them. This is the constant mantra of every Transition Year Coordinator in Ireland to both the parents, and of course, the students themselves who decide to pursue the programme in the first place.

Non participation can also play a role in identity formation (Wenger, 1999). In other words, we can define ourselves to some extent by the practices that we choose *not* to interact with. Though the TYP is now very well developed and students are very clear on what the programme entails, there are still those who sign up without the necessary commitment to full participation. As a result they are more likely to exclude themselves from some activities or, when it comes to their work experience, make a less than full effort to secure a meaningful placement. In the case of those who participate fully, the experience may launch them on a specific, pre-conceived career trajectory or, conversely, divert them in an alternative direction. For those who did not make the effort, they can simply discover what that route in life has in store for them. Either way there is substantial learning to be unearthed.

Vygotsky claimed that work or *labour* is the activity that changes the development of our mental functioning in different ways to that of other primates (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Vygotsky (1930, as cited in Penuel & Wertsch, 1995) aligns himself with Engels stating that

"in a certain sense...labour created humans" (p. 85). Similarly, Penuel & Wertsch, while outlining Erikson's three domains of *fidelity, ideology*, and *work*, assert that these are important domains of identity formation.

As teenagers explore their identities they usually commit to a group of people and a set of beliefs that make sense to them and in which they can place their trust (Erikson, 1968). He refers to it as a process of active seeking and searching. He cautions adults about the need for sensitivity during this period of experimentation as it is through this process that adolescents will actually regenerate the virtues and ideals of previous generations. The terms by which these commitments to other people, and to sets of beliefs, are defined and significantly mediated by ideology according to Erikson. During the seeking and searching, the individual has to try to understand what is right and wrong for them as they attempt to define *who* they are and *how* they see others and the world before them. Through this process an individual can fashion an identity and subsequently provide hope for what Erikson calls an anticipated future. A career provides a trajectory, which Wenger (1999) would argue need not necessarily be linear, by which the roles and expectations of childhood are reified in the choice of career that is right for the individual and that is perceived or recognised by others as a true prospect for success (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). The consideration of different occupations can help reify such anticipation and offer the young person a chance to see themselves as "having a coherent identity in terms of a career" (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995, p. 88). A vocational identity is the key to a social identity (Eggleston, 1982). He says that "work is the central instrument of social control in modern societies" (p. 4). Without the experience of work an individual may struggle to create an appropriate social identity. The construction then, or at least laying the foundations to build

a vocational identity, must be considered an essential ingredient in the development of a coherent overall identity.

4.4 Vocational Identity

Work Experience is about affording young people the opportunity to sample or *taste* the world of work. I use the word *taste,* and have done in previous chapters*,* with great purpose. White (2011) defines taste as "understanding learned from experience" (p. 30). This definition is based on the use of the word in Psalm 34.8 'Taste and see that the Lord is good'. In Hebrew *ta'am* translates as *taste* and also as *reason*. In English we use the word taste to mean *experience* too. Work experience is about learning from experience. In Switzerland they have a system, developed in the late seventies, called *Schnupperlehre* which means a *taste of* or, more literally, a *sniff* of learning which happens in the workplace. The Irish Work Experience Programme, as part of the Transition Year Programme (TYP), is designed for that very purpose. It is an opportunity for students to explore vocational possibilities that may be a good fit for them. Through such exploration they may begin to build on any pre-existing ideas of what they want to do with their lives in terms of future career. Eggleston (1982) said that traditionally the learning of occupational roles began in very early childhood as children actually saw their parents work in the home, in workshops or on the farm. Similarly, Miller et al. (1991) describe the mix of tasks performed in pre industrialised society in the home and in the local economy by men, women and children. These included "a range of agrarian skills and skills relating to animal husbandry as well as domestic manufacture and repair" (p. 56). Industrialisation changed all of that and in time work became separated entirely from the household. Education soon followed a similar fate and it too became separated not just from the home but also from the world of work.

In early, labour intensive industrialisation the concept of individual identity rarely came to influence production (Eggleston, 1982). Young people slotted into roles which Durkheim labelled "mechanical solidarity" where "the role was transcendent and the individual subordinate" (Eggleston, 1982, p. 6). Today, however, things are very different. Young people no longer want to be simply cogs in the machinery of a *system* but want to have real meaning and position themselves fruitfully in a modern society. Hence, the importance of developing an appropriate vocational identity. Today, careers are witnessed very differently through print media, television and information technology. Modern work experience can help adolescents affirm and build on their developing vocational identities. On the other hand it may also be the case that it transforms their ideas by the rejection of options that they may have once believed were appropriate for them. Following a work placement, such options may be discarded as having no real potential.

John Holland believes that vocational interests are an expression of personality (Hogan & Blake, 1999). Vocational identity can be defined as the "possession of a clear and stable picture of ones goals, interests and talent" (Holland, 1985, p. 5). He defined six personality types: *Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising,* and *Conventional* (RIASEC). Holland first published his typology theory in 1959. It describes how people interact with their environments and how this interaction can influence their vocational choices. At the core of Holland's typology theory is that career choice and development are representative of one's personality. People express themselves, along with their values and interests, through the choices they make in relation to careers (Patrick, Eliason & Thompson, 2005). Personality measures, usually designed from an observer's perspective, tell us about a person's characteristic behaviour (Hogan & Blake, 1999). In contrast, Hogan and Blake add

that personality, from the view of the actor, is concerned with the *identity* of that person incorporating their "aspirations, hopes, dreams and fears" (p. 53).

The link then, between identity and vocational identity, is a strong and interdependent one. For many people *who you are?* is quite often determined by *what do you do?*

Gee (2001) develops a socio-cultural view on identity built around four perspectives on what it actually means to be a seen as a particular "kind of person". The second of these perspectives is referred to as "institutional identity" or the *I-Identity.* This is closely linked to the notion of vocational identity. As well as the individual developing their working self over time, that identity is strongly influenced by the "authority" that justifies the position. It is the "authority", along with its "laws, rules, traditions and principles" that effectively "author" the position that one holds (Gee, 2001, p. 103).

There is no doubt that making career decisions is a typically stressful activity. Making an effective career decision is a "cognitive and emotion based process that requires an individual to use a variety of personal and psychological resources" (Symanski, 2000, as cited in Strauser, Lustig and Cyftci, 2008, p. 23). Symanski & Hershenson (1998) identify four phases in career development. The first is the development of a *work personality* which allows an individual to meet the interpersonal demands of the work environment. The second of these is the development of a *vocational identity* which they describe as a process through which individuals become aware of their own career interests, goals and skill-sets. The third phase is when people partake in effective career decision making through the process of identifying suitable work environments where they can express their vocational identity. And finally, the fourth phase is where people develop their ability to find a job in which they may secure employment (Symanski & Hershenson, 1998, as cited in Strauser,

Lustig and Cyftci, 2008). All of these phases are applicable to the student working towards the development of his/her vocational identity.

Up to recent times schools seem to have had little or no effect on helping young people to achieve a vocational identity. Becker (1963, as cited in Eggleston, 1982) suggested that schools make little impact other than to legitimate the differences that are brought about by home and community. Schools reinforce "social and cultural reproduction processes" but do little to change them (Bourdieu, 1972, as cited in Eggleston 1982). Since the introduction of work experience programmes in the seventies and the early eighties, schools are now taking a much more active role in helping students develop a vocational identity. It takes more than simply *talking* about work. Young people need to *participate* in the world of work. The provision of such experience is an urgent social need (Eggleston, 1982). In the early days of work experience the tendency was to place students predominantly in lower order positions. This certainly gave the students the opportunity to have a full field experience of the workplace and the chance to encounter working adults in a variety of contexts. Thirty years later students are finding themselves in more sophisticated positions such as pharmaceutical laboratories, primary/secondary school classrooms, veterinary surgeries, electronics and IT services environments and many other refined work settings. While the placements can give students a better sense of real work, it cannot offer normal pay and security of employment which would, in reality, be essential components in the achievement of one's true vocational identity. Society tends to put a value on one's worth within the working community and such value is often determined, in the modern world, by the salary earned rather than on the contribution of the worker. This is a significant issue in terms of vocational identity. For many of the career choice theorists outlined earlier, values were an important factor when it came to career decisions. Economic return may offer the observer an objective means of

putting a value on one's position in society but for the actor the subjective alternatives like happiness, altruism, prestige, freedom from stress, leisure time and such like, offer an entirely different means of putting value on a career choice.

4.5 Key concepts relating to subject choice

While each of the concepts and individual theories discussed in the previous section are significant relating to vocational choice and work experience, they also have relevance when it comes to subject choice. Students have to make difficult decisions regarding school subjects when it comes to moving from the junior cycle to the senior cycle. For those who take the Transition Year option, this process is facilitated especially by the opportunity to participate in subject sampling and of course in work experience. The subjects chosen by students for their senior cycle can have a significant influence on both the educational and career options that are open to them (Thompson, 2005). According to Thompson students traditionally chose groups or combinations of subjects. A study by Lewis (1913, as cited by Thompson, 2005) in Britain showed that school subjects formed very definite clusters such as science or manual skills subjects. This tended to continue up to the late 20th century. Today, schools are offering a much broader range of subjects and students are starting to move away from many of the traditional clusters. In my past experience as a careers counsellor I noted many students were attempting to cover several different subject areas in an attempt to keep their career options open. Similarly in Australia, Fullarton, Walker, Ainley and Hillman (2003, as cited in Thompson, 2005) found "a general decline in traditional course types, with fewer students taking more than one subject from typical areas of specialisation" (p. 2). The subjects that are eventually chosen by students are very much part of the vocational development process. Along with many other aspects, this research pays considerable attention to the extent to which work experience may influence those

subject choices. But there are many other factors that influence this decision, most notably, how a student has related to a particular subject following three years of study during the junior cycle. In the Irish context, very little choice is available to students due to most subjects in that cycle being compulsory. Liking or disliking a subject can have a serious impact on whether or not a student chooses to continue with it for further study. For some subjects this is not an issue due to the mandatory nature of these subjects in the Irish senior cycle education system such as Irish language, Mathematics, and English. For the remaining subjects, decisions have to be made. Aside from the mandated subjects and the ones deemed desirable or undesirable by students from experience, other factors have a role to play. Gender, social background and school subject provision are among the most influential.

4.5.1 Gender

The issue of gender in subject choice has received considerable attention in some of the literature. In the last decades of the 20th century some research (Sharpe, 1976, Thomas, 1990, Whitehead, 1996, as cited in Francis, 2000) showed for example that *Arts* was a particularly female choice while males tended to opt for the *Sciences*. Francis (2000) had some interesting findings which conflicted with this previous research and suggested a shift in students' thinking about gender and ability at various subjects. Evidence from survey data in England suggested that the effect of gender differences on subject choices appears to be declining with time (Wikeley & Stables, 1999, as cited in Davies, Telhaj, Hutton, Adnett & Coe, 2004; Francis, 2000). Nonetheless, an additional source of gender difference was highlighted by van de Werfhorst, Sullivan, & Cheung (2003, as cited in Davies et al., 2003), following the suggestion that females were more likely to adjust the belief in their own abilities based on external evidence (Wilder & Powell, 1989, as cited in Davies et al., 2003). They claimed that some school subjects, perceived to be more difficult in which to acquire

high marks, may be less attractive to girls who adjust their self-efficacy based on test scores and grades attained.

While the gender issue in subject choice could well form a separate study, it is imperative that it be considered for the purposes of this research. The lack of consideration of females was one of the major criticisms of both Super's and Ginzberg's early vocational choice theories. In the case of Holland's typology, it was the gender bias that was criticised with girls scoring highest in three of the six categories (artistic, social and conventional). Holland's response was to blame society and its channelling of females into female dominated interests and positions. In the analysis chapters, gender will be considered regarding both work experience and subject choices.

4.5.2 Social background

Davies et al., (2003) describe how different school subjects may be associated with different career trajectories. Linking this with Eggleston's claim that young peoples' vocational futures are determined by their parents' circumstances, suggests the influence of family background on the aspirations, if any, of the child, can play a vital role in the direction followed by their schooling programme. This could be regardless of any evidence of the student's potential for achievement in education.

Children growing up in areas of high social and economic deprivation with high unemployment and low school retention rates may have a limited worldview based on their experience and a lack of value or significance on education (Connolly 2006). Students may choose subjects that they believe are right for "people like them" (Davies et al., 2003, p 6). They outline two other areas of influence from social background that are relevant to subject choice. Firstly, social background *advantage* may have a greater influence on one subject

area over another depending on the reading material that may be accessible in the home along with the knowledge possessed by the parents. Secondly, social background *effects* can operate through the peer group at any particular school. A significant body of research exists on the effects of the peer group on student achievements and these effects in turn, can influence subject choices (Davies et al., 2003). A student's choice, for example, can be influenced by the aspirations of the peer group or indeed by the school's expectations for that peer group in their school.

For this study, socio-economic background is intentionally not being singled out as a major issue. The student sample used for this research is a mix of all socio-economic backgrounds. The intention is to gather an overall impression of how students, in general, choose subjects following exposure to a work experience programme regardless of their backgrounds. Where socio-economic background presents as an issue in this regard, then it will be considered and discussed at that point. There is a significant body of research in relation to subject choice and occupational or vocational choice among various so called classes within society already in existence.

4.5.3 School subject provision

Schools can vary significantly in the provision of subjects and on how subjects are made available to groups with differing abilities. School managers often make decisions about which subjects they believe are most appropriate for the type of students that attend their schools (Davies, Adnett, & Turnbull, 2003). Likewise, Smyth and Hannan (2006) suggest that schools in Ireland have a tendency to make assumptions about the requirements of their student intake and these assumptions can affect the school's decisions on which subjects to offer. Subject provision by schools can also be affected by the way they set out their option

packages, the way they time-table subjects, the qualifications of current staff, the resources available to the school, and even based on the number of students in the school.

Despite the introduction of a National Curriculum in England in 1988, it appears that strong systematic biases have survived its intended homogenising effect (Davies et al., 2003). The area of school subject provision is clearly linked to the concepts of *gender* and *social background* outlined earlier, by what Davies et al. refer to as the persistence in some schools of underlying assumptions about what is a suitable match between the subjects for study, social background and gender.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the various occupational choice theories developed through the 20th century and applied them to the Irish context. Ginzberg and Super in particular developed some fascinating ideas that are still most applicable to how young people today make decisions regarding their future career paths. In Ginzberg's words: "almost everyone must choose an occupation" (1966, p. 3). Super put emphasis on maturation and the self-concept. For Lent et al. (1996) and Krumboltz (1996) issues like gender, culture and life events were significant. Gender, culture and school provision are the final issues discussed in relation to this research in the closing section following a discussion on identity and vocational identity.

The next chapter is concerned with the research design and explains how the students who participated in the research were selected. It outlines the data collection instruments, the pilot testing and the methods used for analysis. The chapter closes with a discussion on some of the limitations to the study and the ethical issues associated with research.

Chapter 5: Research Design

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the methodological approach used for this study. The initial focus is on the research questions used to investigate the effect of work experience on student subject choice, the emerging identity and, more specifically, the emerging vocational identity of the students in the Transition Year Programme (TYP). The rationale for choosing a mixed methods approach from the many research methods available to researchers in the social, health, and human sciences, is explained along with why it was deemed the most suitable design to help generate answers to the research questions. Subsequent to consideration of the intended population and the sample chosen therein, the data collection procedures are described. This is followed by an outline of the methods of analysis of the data gathered. The limitations of the study are stated along with strategies developed to help reduce their effects. Finally, there is a discussion on ethics in research including a report on how the researcher approached this issue.

5.2 Major Research Question:

To what extent does the Work Experience Programme in Transition Year affect the subsequent subject choices made by students?

This question is the foundation upon which this research is built. The study primarily explores the relationship between the work experience element of the Transition Year Programme (TYP) in Irish post primary schools and the subjects chosen by students thereafter as they progress into the senior cycle. The *subject choice* referred to here is the

process whereby students choose from a range of 15 to 32 subjects, depending on the school's curriculum, prior to commencing year one of a two year programme in preparation for the final Irish State Examination, the Leaving Certificate. This is commonly referred to as the *Leaving Cert* or the *Leaving*. The Leaving Cert is strongly linked with the third level courses chosen by students on completion of their second level education, therefore, any link between work experience and subject choice is significant and most relevant to the students' futures.

As the study progressed, the following sub-questions were also posed :

- What are students' attitudes to the work experience programme?
- What effect does work experience have on students' existing career ideas?
- What contribution does work experience make to the development of the student's emerging vocational identity?
- To what extent does it affect the student's overall identity?
- What other issues arise for students who participate in work experience?

The first sub-question was generated from the researchers previous experience in an earlier master's study outlined in Chapter 1.2. While the focus of that single school study was concerned with work experience and subject choice, it became clear that students were very willing to discuss how they felt about the work experience programme. Jeffers (2007), on behalf of the DES, conducted a detailed study of attitudes to TY in general, therefore, it seemed appropriate and timely, that this study should consider student attitudes to work experience.

The second sub-question was formulated based on Ginzberg's (1966) idea that children can have career ideas from early childhood. I noted, in the course of my previous research, that

many students claimed to have pre-existing career ideas prior to embarking on their work placements. This seemed a topic worthy of further exploration in the Irish context.

The third and fourth sub-questions were a response to the significant importance of identity, in all its forms, amongst young people. Vocational identity is just one facet of one's overall identity. It is, however, one of substantial importance as the young person navigates through adolescence preparing for entry to the world of work and adult life. It is an area closely linked to overall development including maturation and the self-concept which Super (1957), claimed changes over a person's life as a result of his/her experiences. Super proposed that the vocational self-concept developed as a result of observation of work and identification with working adults.

The final question was intended to allow for any further issues that would arise as the study progressed. Chapter 9.6 summarises the eventual responses to each of these questions.

5.3 Research Design

It was the discovery that *Constructivism* was established on the basis of reality being socially constructed that made it appear to be a most suitable approach for this particular study. People are very much an active part of the research process. Researchers, then, should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who actually live it (Schwandt, 2000). Constructivist research is carried out by much more interactive means, making the process more personal and allowing the data to be entirely traceable back to the source. Constructivists clearly reject the notion of one objective reality that can be known and argue that the goal of the researcher is to understand the many social constructions of knowledge and truth (Mertens, 2005).

5.3.1 Methods

The battle between quantitative and qualitative methods has been a long-running one, though it is not quite clear for how long this conflict has existed. There appears to be little sign of it before the 1960s in the general methodological literature (Oakley, 1999). This section considers both methods briefly, followed by an explication of the rationale behind the decision to use a mixed methods approach as declared in the title of this thesis.

Quantitative research is a scientific approach where the focus is on numerical data, measurement and proof. The purpose is to gather measurable evidence that allows the researcher to come to generalisable conclusions. Aliaga & Gunderson (2002, as cited in Muijs, 2004, p. 1) sum it up well saying "quantitative research is explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods". While experiments, observation and the use of archival material are some of the tools used in quantitative research, surveys and questionnaires are central instruments that are widely used within this method. Reality, in this paradigm, is considered to be made up of variable properties that can be measured and compared (Robson, 2002). This author divides these variables into *categorical*, such as, gender, school type, nationality; or *continuous* such as examination results, knowledge of some topic, self esteem. Tables 6.1 to 6.24 in Chapter Six offers details of the variables relevant to the data collected for this research. A key characteristic of quantitative research is that is seen as being objective in nature. The researcher remains at a greater physical and emotional distance from the study compared to one using flexible or qualitative methods (Robson, 2002).

Qualitative research attempts to understand the social world from the viewpoint of the respondents (Wildemuth, 1993). It is about finding richer meaning than can be achieved by quantitative methods. It also attempts to locate the observer in the world with the intention

of interpreting or making sense of the phenomena in question, based on the particular meanings attached to them by the key actors (Mertens, 2005). The main instruments used in qualitative research include individual in-depth interviews, observation, focus groups, case studies and existing documents. The true value of this non-experimental style of research is its close connection with the real world along with its cognisance of social and historical contexts in its description of what is actually happening on the ground (Kemmis, 1980). The general worldview then, in qualitative research, is quite subjective. This is one of the greatest criticisms of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers "are interested in inner states as outer expressions of human activity" (Hatch, 2002, p. 9). This author argues that because these inner states are not visible and observable, the job of the qualitative researcher is to rely on subjective judgments to help bring them to the surface.

Though qualitative methods are predominantly associated with the constructivist approach, I decided to use mixed methods to collect the required data for this investigation. This decision was mostly based on the supportive literature around this approach. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies "combines the rigor and precision of experimental designs and quantitative data with the depth of understanding of qualitative methods and data" (Rudestam & Newton 2001, p. 45). These authors add that the most common application of a mixed methodology is to access a large number of participants using a standard instrument, or series of instruments, and then to conduct interviews with a subset of the original sample to derive a richer understanding of the phenomenon in question. This seemed like a most suitable fit for what this research was setting out to achieve. Denscome (2008, p. 272) offered the following advantages of using a mixed methods approach saying it can:

a) increase the accuracy of the data

b) provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study than would be yielded by a single approach, thereby overcoming the weaknesses and biases of single approaches
c) aid sampling (to explain this he suggests perhaps the use of a survey to screen potential interview participants)

Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) assert that many mixed methods writers view this form of research as a methodology and therefore focus on the philosophical assumptions, while others emphasise the techniques, or methods, of data collection and analysis. The authors use the words "clean" and "concise" when mixed methods research is seen as a method, and then "complex" when viewed as a methodology. Ultimately, they define mixed methods research as:

> a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases of the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 5).

Conversely, the literature also points out that there exists a major reluctance to adopt the mixed method approach from the scholars with strong epistemological commitments to either quantitative or qualitative research. This is because they view the underlying assumptions of the approaches as "fundamentally incompatible" (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 47). Much of the literature encourages the researcher to think clearly about the research topic and then apply the methods that make the most sense in the attempt to answer the research question in hand. Cohen, Manion & Morison (2011) quote many authors (Howe, 1988; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Erkican & Roth, 2006) who argue against the

constant polarisation of research into either qualitative or quantitative approaches. By contrast, Fred Kerlinger, a quantitative researcher, claimed that qualitative data does not actually exist and that everything can be reduced to either a 1 or a 0 (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Selecting a mixed methods design for this research initially proved to be a daunting task, particularly on discovery of the sheer number of mixed methods designs that are available to researchers. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003b, as cited in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) claimed to have found almost 40 different types of mixed methods designs in the literature. Creswell & Plano Clark reduce the broad range of designs to what they refer to as the "four major types of mixed methods" (p. 59). The first of these designs, and the one selected for this research, is the *triangulation design* which they propose is the most common and well-known approach. The rationale behind this design is to gather different, but nonetheless complementary data on the same issues in an effort to understand the research problem in hand. The researcher's goal is to collect large amounts of data, commonly by means of a quantitative survey, to begin to piece together an overall image of *how things are* with the participants. This data can subsequently be compared and contrasted, or indeed expanded, with the more in-depth qualitative data collected by whatever means. Triangulation is generally accepted as the employment of two or more research methods. Methodological triangulation is one of four forms of triangulation put forward by Denzin (1970). For this research data was gathered using a quantitative survey and semi-structured, individual, qualitative interviews. This multi-method approach was intended to help provide a more complete set of findings than could have been arrived at through the administration of one of these methods alone.

The triangulation design can be described as a one phase design where the researcher conducts the quantitative and the qualitative research methods in more or less the same time period. Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) state that this single phase timing is the reason this method has often been referred to as a *concurrent triangulation design*. The data then, in this method, is collected on separate occasions but within a relatively short time scale. For this research two separate instruments were used to collect the quantitative and the qualitative data with just a number of weeks elapsing between both processes. All of the data collection was completed within a three month period. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher in each of the three schools used, in March and April 2011. The qualitative interviews were conducted with the students during the months of April and May of the same year.

Based on the decision to use both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data, a multiple design incorporating both fixed and flexible elements proved useful. A *fixed design* requires tight pre-specification prior to reaching the main data collection stage (Robson, 2002). It generally fits well with a quantitative strategy. A *flexible design*, however, evolves during data collection which suits the sort of data gathered by qualitative methods. Such data normally tends to be non-numerical. The expectation for this research was that the richest data would be gathered by a combination of both.

In the quantitative/fixed design element of the research, the strategy was non-experimental as there was no intention on the researcher's part to change the situation, the circumstances, or the experience of the research participants (Robson 2002). The intention was to gather background information and discover any effect, in the participants' opinions, that a particular programme, in this case the work experience programme, may, or may not have

on decisions made by them afterwards. Of the many approaches in survey research the *cross sectional design* which "involves the examination of several groups at one point in time" (Mertens, 2005 p. 172) appeared to be an appropriate fit. The groups used for this research are outlined in section 5.4 below.

The qualitative aspect sought a more in-depth understanding of the effect that the work experience programme had on the 5th Year subjects chosen by the students afterwards. This was accomplished by gathering open-ended information through interviews with the students. It also considered the on-going development of the students' identities with particular emphasis on their emerging vocational identity as the students began to contemplate their future studies and possible career paths. Qualitative methods, such as used in this study, are a very interactive way of generating, or constructing knowledge by listening to, interpreting and understanding the multiple perspectives of the students' real life experience. The flexible design aspect of the research was intended to gain "an understanding of the constructions held by the group being surveyed" (Mertens, 2005, p. 231). For this research, the *group* were students who had participated in the Work Experience Programme in Transition Year and had subsequently moved on with the selection of a range of school subjects for on-going study as they prepared for their terminal examinations. In this way the students surveyed were representative of a particular population so that the results could be generalised to such a population (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). People are the subjects of the social sciences and people, to say the least, are complex, conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meanings to what is going on around them (Robson, 2002). Generalisability is defined by Mertens (2005, p. 4) as "the researchers ability to generalise the results from the sample to the population from which it was drawn". This author adds that the ability to generalise the

research findings depends on how representative the sample used is of the population. I would argue that the sample used for this research is a reasonable representation of the senior students attending second level education in Ireland. The findings then from the qualitative interviews are easily transferable to the students of any school. Strauss & Corbin (1990, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 242) argue the replacement of the term generalisability with "explanatory power" regarding the research itself and its application to the wider context. The responses from the students participating in this research can be carefully utilised by outside readers or users to explain trends and choices made by students around the country relating in particular to subject choices along with their vocational and personal development. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 242) do caution that when considering generalisability there is always the risk that regardless of the similarity between the context of the research and the wider context, the same kinds of people "may act differently in different - or even the same - contexts".

There is more to using mixed methods than simply collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. They need to be somehow mixed to offer a more complete view of the research problem than either one can offer individually (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). A variant of the triangulation design is the *convergence model* (Figure 3.1) which would be the traditional model of a mixed methods triangulation design (Creswell, 1999). I collected the two types of data separately and then, through comparison and contrast, combined or *converged* the different results during the interpretation stage, in an effort to be able to draw convincing and well substantiated findings in relation to the phenomenon of work experience and its potential influence on the subject choices made thereafter by students.

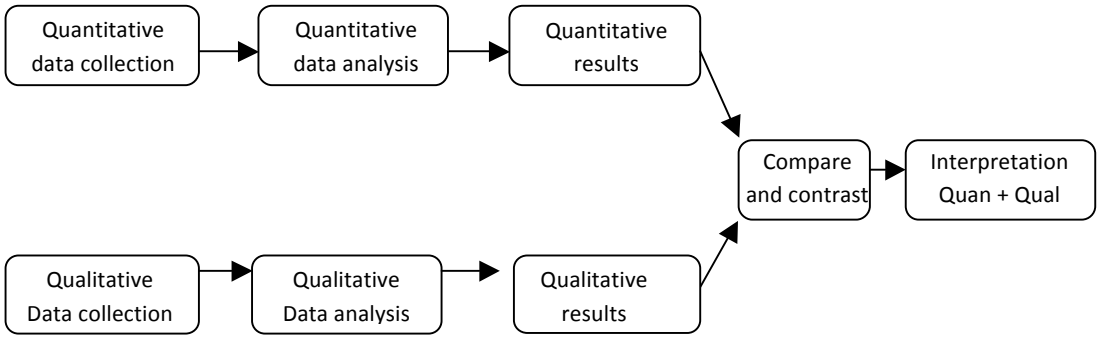

Figure 5.1 Triangulation design: Convergence Model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007)

Every method has its weaknesses. Historically, the support for mixed methods research has been based on the premise that its strengths offset the weaknesses of either quantitative and qualitative research alone (Jick, 1979, as cited in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The argument is that quantitative research is weak in interpreting the context in which people operate, that the voices of the participants are not heard, and that the researcher remains in the background with their personal biases left behind without discussion. Qualitative research compensates for these weaknesses. However the converse of the argument is that qualitative research can be seen as deficient because of the inherent personal interpretations, the bias that results from this, and the alleged difficulty in making generalisations to a large group because of the comparatively small number of participants used.

5.3.2 Sample

The population for this research consisted of Transition Year (TY) students in the Irish second level education system. The sample comprised of 323 Leaving Certificate, Fifth Year and TY students who were participating in, or had participated in the TY programme during their time in secondary school.

The use of a quantitative survey helped build an overall picture through the administration of the questionnaire to approximately forty subjects from each of three different sample groups, all of whom had participated in the Transition Year Programme. This was repeated in three different schools and the three sample groups used were as follows:

Group 1: Final year students in school studying for the Leaving Certificate.

Group 2: Students in Fifth Year.

Group 3: Students currently in Transition Year.

The latter group was quite significant allowing the collection of the freshest data from a cohort who had just finished their Work Experience Programme and who had just made their subject choices for Fifth Year.

5.3.3 Selection of the schools

The three schools are located in the south east of Ireland. The names of the schools and the students have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity, as promised to them, prior to the beginning of the research. The schools chosen were a *convenience sample*, which is defined for the purpose of this research as a non-probability sampling technique where the subjects are chosen due to their close proximity and convenient accessibility to the researcher (Castillo, 2009). Convenience samples are commonly used because they allow the researcher to gather data pertaining to trends relating to the particular study thus avoiding the complications associated with the use of a randomised sample. The most common criticism of this technique is the risk of sampling bias and the suggestion that the sample is not representative of the entire population. This study is about researching the phenomenon that is work experience and the effect it has on the students who participate in it. It is not about the search purely for statistical representation which would require simple or stratified random sampling from the whole population nationally.

The three schools selected for this research belong to what is known as the Voluntary Secondary School (VSS) sector. Voluntary Secondary Schools form the majority of schools in Irish education. These schools are Catholic schools under the trusteeship of various religious orders. Though the schools are generally owned and operated by the trustees, they are funded largely by the State through the Department of Education and Skills (DES) with the exception of whatever fund-raising is conducted by each individual institution to help with the day to day running of the school. The Boards of Management operate under the same Articles of Association with a common Catholic ethos and under the guidance of the same national management advisory body, the Joint Managerial Body (JMB). As well as forming the largest sector in Irish secondary education, the Voluntary Secondary Schools, according to the Department of Education and Skills database section, rank as the largest providers of Transition Year in the country making this school model most suitable for the conduct of this research. The VSS sector, it should be noted, caters for students from *all* socio-economic backgrounds.

The decision not to use the second largest sector, that is, schools under the control of the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) was due to the fact that many of the VEC schools, as the name would suggest, have a strong vocational emphasis on the education they provide. Students, from a young age, would have chosen particular subjects such as woodwork, engineering and technical graphics in preparation for specific careers. I believed that this could potentially skew the results based on the fact that many of the subjects in the curriculum are specifically chosen to prepare students for direct entry to the world of work, or into appropriate training programmes or apprenticeships. Furthermore, none of the Vocational Schools in the area where the research was conducted, were offering the Transition Year Programme. The focus of this research was to look at any effect an early

introduction to the world of work might have on the subjects and subsequent career paths chosen by students learning in a more academically driven environment.

The 323 students were selected from not just three different schools, but also from three different types of schools. One third of these were from an all-boys school, one third from an all-girls school and one third from a co-educational school. To reach the 40 student target in the Transition Year group, the co-operating Principals in the schools agreed to gather at least two class groups to complete the questionnaire. The recommended maximum class size for Transition Year is 24. Allowing for normal absenteeism on any given day, along with the unavailability of students on other tasks in or out of school, the number assembled on each day was expected to be close to the number required by the researcher. For the fifth and sixth year groups, the request to Principals was to gather students from as many class groups as necessary to reach the required 40 participants. In each year group during the data collection phase, the numbers were within two or three students above or below the required number. This was acceptable and the final number of questionnaires collected was 323. The shortfall was simply due to an insufficient number of students in the desired classes of some schools on the day the questionnaire was administered.

The schools are situated in three different towns of similar size and population. Choosing the three schools involved particular criteria developed by the researcher:

- The school had to be catering predominantly for the students in its catchment area: This was to ensure a good representation from the local area.
- The school had to have approximately 500 students or more: This number guaranteed an adequate participation rate as 40 students with TY experience from each year group was required.

- Transition Year, with a work experience element, had to be operating for more than three years in the school: This was to ensure that there were students in each of TY, 5th Year and 6th year that had participated in a Work Experience Programme.
- The school had to have a wide mix of students from all socio-economic backgrounds: The intention here was to examine the effect of work experience on subject selections by students from all backgrounds.
- The three schools would consist of one all-boys, one all-girls and one co-educational: This was for comparative purposes.

The intention was to answer the research questions based on the data gathered from the student body without reference to their social or economic backgrounds. I believe there is a significant body of knowledge already out there in relation to education and the class divide. More specifically, Jeffers (2002) looked at Transition Year and Educational Disadvantage and reported that the flexibility of TY has the potential to develop schools in a way that would make them more relevant to the needs of disadvantaged young people. Perhaps on completion of this research there may be further attention required to other aspects of work experience in Irish schools which, overall, has been largely ignored and under-researched.

5.3.4 Quantitative Study Design

The aim of the quantitative study was to investigate students' perceptions of the work experience programme, both general and personal, using responses from the student perception part of the questionnaire. Additionally, I sought to examine if work experience helped clarify future academic and career decisions made by students. Furthermore, the study explored the possible effect of a range of biographical, academic, placement choice and self-perception factors on respondents' perceptions of work experience and its

outcomes. The intention was to discover the general responses from students in relation to specific elements of the Work Experience Programme such as:

- Why was the particular Work Experience placement chosen?
- What criteria were used to choose that placement?
- What effect did the experience have on the student's career interest?
- What were their attitudes to work experience?
- What was the effect, if any, on subject choices?
- How do students feel about themselves, their careers and their possible futures?

A detailed quantitative survey facilitated the collection of answers to these questions. A survey can be defined as a means to "gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 256). Two main attractions of using a survey, cited by Cohen et al. (2011), are its appeal to generalisability and its ability to make statements which are usually supported by large banks of data. Conversely, they describe the survey as an unsuitable means to portray the uniqueness of a situation, the interpersonal dynamics therein, explanations of why a situation occurred or the behaviours of the actors involved.

Questionnaire surveys are widely used by researchers and have been described as useful instruments for data collection by Cohen et al. (2011). For this research, the questionnaire presented as a most appropriate means to collect the quantitative data required. It offered the following advantages:

- Economical and efficient
- Could generate useful biographical, explanatory, descriptive and numerical data

- Could be easily piloted and subsequently revised as necessary
- Would generate data that could be readily processed statistically

This collection of predominantly closed-ended information (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) combined with some open ended information, was achieved by use of a ten page questionnaire (see Appendix D). The questionnaire was divided into five parts:

Part One: gathered biographical data including age, gender and year group. It also asked students to state their dream career, if they had one, and what they might anticipate to be their actual future career. There was an optional question asking them to explain any disparity between the two. The purpose of this section was to be able to use the data gathered to build a basic biographical profile of the students involved and to generate variables to allow for comparison and contrast. The question on a dream/actual career was designed to uncover any connection with childhood career ideas and the reality of the adult world of work that students had just experienced. This development was an integral part of the Occupational Choice theories of both Ginzberg (1966) and Super (1957).

Part Two: was concerned with the subjects studied in the junior cycle and also required students to list the subjects chosen for their senior cycle. Students were asked to give reasons for their choices by use of a pre-determined list of options with the opportunity to write any additional reasons in a space provided. Students were asked if they had any definite career in mind with space provided to expand where the answer was affirmative. Finally students were asked to estimate their CAO points in the terminal Leaving Certificate exams. This section was designed to give the researcher an idea of the academic abilities of the participating students along with the subject areas of interest to them. It would also

prove useful in terms of checking if students' ambitions were braced by the academic ability to realise their goals. The question around CAO points was to gauge the students intention to maintain their course of study or indeed to see if they intended working themselves harder to achieve new or existing goals.

Part Three of the questionnaire asked students about their time on work experience. They were requested to list their placements and their job descriptions. They were also asked to describe how they chose their placement with a pre-determined set of options but again with a write-in space provided for additional possibilities. Finally students were asked if, in their opinion, work experience was worthwhile, if it reinforced their intention to pursue that particular career possibility or, if it directed them away from that occupational choice. In the event of an affirmative response to the last question, space was provided to explain what the reason(s) may have been. This part of the questionnaire was to elicit details on the types of placements chosen by students and the motivation behind such choices. The pre-determined options were based on the most common answers provided in my previous study of this topic in the aforementioned single school research conducted in 2007.

Part Four consisted of a series of statements about attitudes to work experience using a five point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". A write-in section was provided at the end for any additional comments students would like to make. The statements for this part of the questionnaire were prepared and revised on a number of occasions during the three year period prior to data collection. The intention was to ascertain what students thought about the entire process. The number of statements posed grew over time following the piloting of not just the questionnaire itself, but also the piloting of the interview questions in the qualitative part of the research. Students presented as very willing

to discuss all elements of their placement and what it meant to them. The statement in Part Four, by way of example, regarding being more careful when choosing a placement, came about because of the pilot interview. The participating student talked about the carelessness he witnessed on behalf of some of his classmates around their placement choices. This provoked the inclusion of that statement making an interesting topic for analysis within the large group. The write in section proved useful generating some additional attitudes not included in the ten statements forming Part Four.

Part Five offered students the opportunity to express their feelings about themselves, their educational aspirations and their early career ideas. Again a Likert-type scale was used as in Part Four with an option to express additional opinions. This part of the questionnaire came about after the inclusion of the concept of identity and vocational identity in the build up to the commencement of the research proper. The original research question devised in 2008 did not include identity. This came about very quickly as I discovered the substantial link between the development of career ideas and the importance of personal and vocational identity in that process, as discussed in Chapter 4.3 and 4.4.

5.3.5 Questionnaire response rates

An attraction of the questionnaire as a data collection instrument, is that it can be administered without the presence of the researcher (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) The response rate to the questionnaires distributed was 100 per cent as, on this occasion, the researcher went to each of the schools and personally administered the survey. As outlined in Chapter 5.10, students were given every opportunity to withdraw, even after the appropriate consent forms were completed. None of the students in any of the schools chose to take advantage of that option.

Following the quantitative survey, qualitative interviews were used to collect, or generate, further data. The word *generate* may be a better choice than *collect* because many qualitative researchers would reject the notion that the researcher can be a neutral collector of information (Mason, 1996). The researcher is seen as actively *constructing* knowledge using particular methods derived from their own epistemological standpoint.

5.3.6 Qualitative Study Design

"The social and educational world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 219). As outlined in in the overview of qualitative research in 5.3.1 above, the qualitative element of this research is concerned with finding that richer meaning than can be unearthed by quantitative methods alone. Some of the most popular methods used in qualitative research are participant observation, interviews, existing documents, case studies, accounts and notes (Cohen et al., 2011). For this study, the decision was to use individual semi-structured interviews. This popularly used technique (Cohen et al.) was chosen because it is an effective way to gather facts, identify feelings, explore past and present behaviours and elicit reasons and explanations (Silverman, 1993). This was the type of richness that I wanted to generate alongside the background, biographical and numerical data gathered from the quantitative element of the research. Semi-structured interviews have been described as thematic and topic centred where the researcher uses topics, themes, or issues that he/she wishes to cover rather than a structured list of questions (Mason, 1996). The semi-structured interview offered more flexibility especially when dealing with areas as broad as subject choice and identity. The standardised wording of questions can constrain and/or limit the naturalness and relevance of the questions posed and, equally, the answers given (Patton, 1980). Nonetheless, it is prudent that the interview stage be prepared with a

script (Kvale, 2009). In the case of a semi-structured interview that script can be seen as more of a guide which includes an outline of the topics being examined along with a series of questions. The interviewer, however, with consideration for the interviewee before him, determines how closely to stick to the guide and to what extent new directions may be followed (Kvale, 2009). Statistics, which can be derived from more quantitative methods, have their uses but, it is the insights gained from interviewing that make the findings so much richer. They "put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses" (Bell, 1991, p. 91).

The interview protocol (see Appendix E) was developed over a two year period prior to the data collection process. The questions were generated with the overall research questions in mind (see 5.2 above). They were also influenced, to an extent, by the questions in the quantitative questionnaire and underpinned by Occupational Choice Theory (Ginzberg, 1966; Super, 1957; Krumboltz, 1996; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1987; Holland, 1985;) and Identity Theory (Vygotsky, 1930; Erikson, 1968; Gee, 2000). The interview questions were reviewed and revised a number of times, especially following the piloting phase. The intention was for the questions to be open ended allowing for any necessary reordering, expansion, pursuit of new avenues, or probing (Cohen et al., 2011).

5.3.7 Sampling Design for the Qualitative Component

The sample for the face to face interviews was randomly selected from those who completed the quantitative survey. The reason for a random selection was to allow each student equal opportunity for selection and the chance to express their ideas on what the process meant for them. To choose respondents based on how they completed the quantitative questionnaire could tempt the researcher to choose those that may support the researcher's theories. In the co-ed school it was necessary to stratify the population in order to balance the number of males and females. Random samples were then made from each stratum so that a

proportional number of participants would be represented in the final sample used for data collection (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The random selection was carried out using a simple widget on a website entitled *RANDOM.ORG*. The questionnaires for each of the groups from each of the schools were numbered from one to forty. The end figure was then entered into the widget and the numbers for each of the students to be selected for interview were generated by the computer. *RANDOM.ORG* claims to offer *true* random numbers to anyone wishing to conduct a simple lottery. The randomness comes from atmospheric noise, which the web site creators suggest is better than the pseudo-random number algorithms typically used in computer programs. Generally, most random numbers used in computer programs are *pseudo-random*, which means they are a generated in a predictable fashion using a specific mathematical formula. This is acceptable for many purposes, but it may not be random in the way one would expect if one simply wanted a result similar to that of dice rolls or lottery draws. Using a simple tool like the widget on *RANDOM.ORG*, all participants in the quantitative survey had an equal chance of being selected. Four additional names were drawn as back-ups for each group in the event of any of the original students drawn being unavailable on the days of the visits to the various schools.

5.4 School profiles

St. Monica's School for Girls

St. Monica's is a Catholic, all-girls school under the trusteeship of a religious order. The school had humble beginnings opening in a large house in the 1950s. It had about 50 students attending by the end of its third year. By the mid 1960s the school had over one hundred students enrolled and was going from strength to strength. St. Monica's was still operating from the large house, which had undergone some remodelling over time, funded largely by the Sisters with help from the local community. In the seventies the Sisters

commenced an extensive fund-raising campaign and began putting together the finance to acquire a site and erect a purpose built school which today accommodates almost 500 students.

The school has a strong Christian ethos based on the core values of love, honesty, tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect. Its written mission statement proclaims: "St. Monica's is a school community where everyone strives to be part of a healthy, working partnership where good relationships are fostered on a daily basis. We are committed to the complete development of each individual and aim to help them reach their full potential as active members of society".

The school to date has not been the subject of a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) by the DES. However, the TY programme in St. Monica's was formally evaluated by the Inspectorate in 2011. The introduction in the final report states: "The school ethos of commitment to the development of each student's maturity and full potential is lived out through many aspects of the TY programme". It goes on to confirm that a whole school approach to TY, in keeping with the DES Guidelines, was evident with school senior management taking an active part in the planning, development and promotion of the programme while displaying effective leadership regarding the programme and its implementation.

The school has one Principal and one Deputy Principal. There are 29 full-time teachers of which eight are male. The school also has three Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and an ancillary staff of eight, two of whom are part-time.

The school is located in a town of approximately 7,000 people and it is the only girls' school in the area. Since the closure of a small co-educational school in the 1990s, the only other school in the town is an all-boys school. This means that girls in the area have no choice

when it comes to secondary school with the exception of making an 18 kilometre journey to the next town which is somewhat larger and with a choice of eight schools of varying descriptions. The school's code of conduct is very well structured and very well adhered to by all members of the school community. As a result the school has a very good reputation and attracts students from outside of its catchment area. Almost all classes are of mixed ability with the exception of Irish, English, and Mathematics all of which have separate higher level and ordinary level groupings in 2nd Year, 3rd Year, 5th Year and 6th Year. Transition Year is entirely mixed ability. The school uniform is compulsory for all year groups and is worn with great pride and respect by the girls of St. Monica's. The main catchment area is within the town itself with approximately 25 per cent of its students coming from more rural locations of up to 20 kilometres away. The town has a good mix of local authority housing and private housing. St. Monica's then, as the only school for girls to attend in the area, has a broad mix of students from all socio-economic backgrounds. This was a significant criterion considered for the selection of St. Monica's as part of this research.

The school introduced the Transition Year (TY) programme in 1992. It was cautiously received by the school community but after three or four years it was made a permanent feature of the school's overall programme due to the hard work and commitment of the original co-ordinator. Transition Year in St. Monica's is optional with an uptake each year of approximately 60 per cent of the Junior Certificate cohort. The programme is generally over-subscribed therefore students must undergo and interview as part of the application process. The current TY Co-ordinator, a female who holds a post of responsibility (Programmes Co-ordinator), has been involved in the programme since its inception in 1992 and has been the co-ordinator since 1998. The school Principal believes the co-ordinator is very effective in her role and is very passionate about the programme which has evolved

significantly under her guidance over the years. The DES Inspectorate support the Principal's comment saying the co-ordinator is someone with "a thorough knowledge of the programme and all duties are carried out very effectively by her". The school was praised for having an appropriate overall written plan and predominantly well organised subject plans. The Inspectorate did recommend, however, some re-evaluation of certain subject plans and some restructuring of the overall written programme to include self-evaluation measures.

The Principal is a self-declared convert having been sceptical about the programme in the early days. Now, she has turned full-circle to become an admirer and believer in what she described as "a fantastic opportunity for the young girls in her school and any school that offers the programme for that matter". She said she has learned from the student body that they perceive work experience as "the best thing in TY", a finding that presented itself through the school's own annual feedback collection from the girls on the programme. She said she believes that all who participate in the TY programme benefit in one way or another just by being part of it. She was very confident in her belief that TY is best offered as an option and does not support the idea of TY being a compulsory programme. Her reasons were that students who apply for the TY option and who are successful in securing a place, are more committed to it. She saw the interview process as an added enhancement as the students believed they have already achieved success by virtue of overcoming what they may have perceived as an obstacle to getting on the programme. She said, based on discussions with other Principals, that some students, who are compelled to do TY, have a tendency to be somewhat *weary* in their approach to it and can be potentially uncooperative and even disruptive. They also have a propensity to hold back other, more enthusiastic, students on the programme. The Principal commented that her own records have shown the students who participate in TY perform better in the Leaving certificate examination than

those who do not. She added that she does not accept, from her own experience, that students who take the TY option do not settle back to study well at the start of 5th Year. She said they just have a different approach.

The Guidance Counsellor (GC) is very involved in the TY programme working closely with the co-ordinator on the work experience programme in particular. The DES evaluation recognised the GC as part of the core team along with the TY co-ordinator, the Principal and a language teacher. She uses her timetabled classes to meet the students on a weekly basis beginning in September with preparation for finding a placement. The students are expected to seek their own place of employment but the GC and the co-ordinator are on hand to assist any of the girls that appear to be having difficulty. The inspectorate report states that in St. Monica's, "Work experience provides a vocational element to the TY programme and working in an adult environment plays an important part in the development of students' experiential learning". The report commends the school acknowledging that the students are well prepared for work experience by the GC with support from the co-ordinator and senior management. The first placement takes place in November for a period of two weeks. They can choose a single placement for that duration or alternatively two placement of one week's duration each. The majority of students choose two placements. The second work experience slot in the school calendar is in February and is for just one week. The Principal said that the additional week of work experience was added as a direct response to requests from the girls for further access to work place learning. Regarding the issue of work place availability, the school has not experienced any serious difficulty in the local area, according to the Principal. Many of the girls apply to workplaces in the neighbouring towns and occasionally even further afield.

The co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor work together on the debriefing and feedback

sessions with the girls when the placement part of the programme is complete. This debriefing process is mentioned in the inspector's report where it states that "students are encouraged to reflect and provide feedback on their work experiences while employers are requested to evaluate students' work". It adds that parents receive meaningful feedback on student progress across the entire programme. In general, the inspectorate evaluation is very positive with the only recommendations for improvement being concerned with self-evaluation, assessment procedures, and additional meetings within subject departments on one hand, and among and whole school staff to share best practice, on the other.

Grattan Street College for Boys

Grattan Street College is an all-boys school again under the trusteeship of a religious order. This school has been in operation for over one hundred years providing a Catholic education to the boys in the area in the name of the school's patron saint. Grattan Street College is very proud of its Catholic ethos operating under the core values of peace, friendship, love and community. The school is viewed by the entire school community as "a caring place". These were the words used by the school chaplain during a brief encounter on my first visit. In 2006 the DES conducted a Whole School Evaluation (WSE). In line with the chaplain's comment, the inspectors reported that "A respectful, safe, friendly environment exists" at Grattan Street College. There was a great sense of pride around the relationships that exist between teachers and students and this was evident in the manner in which the students interviewed, spoke about their teachers.

The school, like many others, started as a small affair but continued to grow steadily through the early part of the twentieth century. It operated mainly as a boarding school drawing students from all over the country. Following the major educational reforms in Ireland in the 1960s (discussed in Chapter Two), the school began to expand rapidly and its number of day

boys began to rise dramatically. At the same time, the boarding numbers began to decline slowly until the boarding section was completely closed in the early part of the new millennium. Today, however, the school boasts an enrolment of over 800 boys, all of whom are day students, from the local and surrounding area. The school has one Principal, one deputy Principal, 54 teachers (with males forming a narrow majority), 4 SNAs, and 14 ancillary staff.

Grattan Street College is situated in a town of approximately 9,000 people and is one of four schools in the town. It is in competition with one other boys' school in the area which has an enrolment of just 140 students. The vast majority of the boys choose Grattan Street because of its reputation for its excellent academics, effective discipline and its very strong sports record. There is a significant number of local authority housing estates in the immediate vicinity of the school mixed with a number of private estates. The school attracts students from all parts of the town and outlying rural areas. It even draws students from neighbouring counties. It has several members of the travelling community attending. The vast majority of travellers, according to the Principal tend to leave the school before age 16 despite their efforts to retain them. Like St. Monica's Girls School, Grattan Street College, overall, has a good mix of students from varied socio-economic backgrounds. The WSE report acknowledges this stating that "the school attracts students from socially and economically diverse backgrounds" and that the school "is mindful, at all times, of the personal and socio-economic backgrounds of the students". Based on the enrolment figures, it is clearly the popular school choice in that town.

The Transition Year was introduced to the school in 1993 and in its first year enrolled two class groups totalling approximately 48 students. The current Principal was one of two teachers at the time responsible for the introduction of the programme to the school and therefore has always been an advocate of TY. Transition Year is optional at Grattan Street

and is taken by approximately 65 per cent of the Junior Certificate cohort. The 2006 WSE report states that Grattan Street "offers a good TY programme which is evaluated regularly and with on-going modifications from year to year". The school sees the TY option as a means of aiding the transition of students from the Junior Cycle to the Senior Cycle. The Principal claimed that few of the boys coming out of the junior classes are prepared for 5th Year due to the on-going focus on the State examinations, for which they work hard in the previous three years. He welcomes the opportunity for students to trial new subjects, get involved in interesting projects, and experiment with new approaches to learning. The WSE report acknowledged and commended the diverse range of subjects on offer in TY but made the recommendation that more attention needed to be paid to employing more innovative teaching methods in the case of academic subjects that appear on the curriculum. It refers the school to the 1993 DES Guidelines for TY.

The Principal was very aware of the potential in TY for students to develop as individuals, build their self-esteem and increase their ability to set and achieve goals. He spoke about how the boys also improve their capacity to show initiative while concomitantly developing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The current co-ordinator has held the position for three years. He is working in close partnership with the school's Programmes Co-ordinator. They both conduct the interviews of students for places in TY as the programme is usually over-subscribed. Students' previous performance and behaviour are taken into account during the interviews.

During Transition Year students are able to access ten academic subjects and 14 developmental subjects, as they are referred to in the school prospectus. The school authority is very aware of the opportunity for the boys to learn both inside and outside of the classroom. The work experience programme enjoys a high profile as part of the overall TY programme. Students are expected to source their own positions with the school offering

help to those who struggle with finding a placement on their own. In extreme cases the school will even offer an internal placement but this was described by the Principal as "a last resort". Regarding saturation of work placements, the Principal said that despite the large number of students to be placed, there generally is not a major problem finding enough placements. He did, however, question the *quality* of some placements on the part of the boys who he said sometimes settle for less challenging placements or, perhaps, even choosing to work in their part-time jobs or, by way of example, with their parents on the farm. The WSE team's written report echoes the Principal's concern stating "the college is finding it increasingly difficult to find *substantial* [emphasis added] placements for the students".

Students are allocated two weeks for work experience. This may be a single placement for the two week duration or made up of two placements for one week each. The majority opt for two placements. Students are prepared in advance by one of the subject teachers and the co-ordinator. The guidance counsellor advises on work experience and subject choice according to the WSE report. There is no time specifically allocated on the school timetable for work experience preparation and implementation but it is dealt with during school time by the aforementioned staff. On return from placement there is similar time set aside to monitor the diaries kept by the students. The debriefing period is followed, and supported, by the assembly of a work experience port-folio which is used in the calculation of the level of certification for the end of year presentation. This was described as very good practice and was commended by the WSE team in 2006.

Grattan Street College also has a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme which, as described in Chapter Two, also includes a work experience component. It was interesting to note that the WSE report said that numbers in the LCA actually declined as a result of students being offered apprenticeships subsequent to their work experience. While this may

well be a positive for the students involved, the report goes on to say that "the college sees the reduction in numbers as affecting the morale of the remaining students and teachers".

In terms of teaching and learning the WSE report states that a variety of methodologies were observed from the more traditional style of teaching to the wide use of ICT and more independent learning through group and pair work. However, the Inspectors recommended that there should be provision "for greater opportunities for students to learn through investigation and acquire the skills to enable them to take greater responsibility for their learning". This would be in keeping with the philosophy of 1993 DES Transition Year Guidelines document.

St. Finnian's School

St. Finnian's School is a Catholic co-educational day-school, under the patronage of a religious order, and situated in a coastal town of approximately 8,000 people. The school is proud of its Christian ethos with a mission statement that incorporates the values of truth, respect, love, honesty and community. The school has a small number of religious members still working there. Like Grattan Street, it has been in operation for well over one hundred years and on a number of different sites. It has been at its current location for over 40 years so it is well established in the community. The school started out as an all-boys boarding school with very small numbers. Its growth was slow but steady over time. By the mid 1980s the school's population had reached around 270 students. A review of the school's policy on its student intake resulted in the school switching to co-education to meet the demand in the area for such a school and as part of a Department of Education request for rationalisation of the schools in the town. The change occurred in the late 80s and by the late 90s the school had 690 students with boys forming a narrow majority. The school phased out its boarding facilities during the 1990s for economic reasons. Today the school numbers are still approximately 690 students. The catchment area is quite broad with three main

feeder schools in the immediate vicinity and a significant number of smaller feeder schools in the outlying rural areas. It attracts students from up to 25 kilometres from the school. St. Finnian's has a very good reputation and is the largest school by far in the area. 70 per cent of it students come from the surrounding locality with the balance travelling from the greater hinterland and rural areas. Again it has a very broad mix of students from all socio-economic backgrounds. This is a key common factor shared by the three schools chosen for this research.

St. Finnian's has one Principal, one Deputy Principal, 43 teachers, six SNAs, and 14 ancillary staff. Like St. Monica's most classes are mixed ability with the exception of Irish, English, and Mathematics which are divided into higher and ordinary level for 2nd Year, 3rd Year, 5th Year and 6th year. The school was involved in a WSE in 2008. The report was very positive and the school was commended for its on-going development and planning efforts in close liaison with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). It was also highly commended for its care of all students including those with special educational needs. The report states:

> The care system exhibited in St. Finnian's is seen to be one of its most significant strengths. A whole school approach is implicit and, in keeping with the school's ethos, is accepted as part of the responsibility of every member of the teaching and non-teaching staff. (WSE, 2008)

The school was commended during the WSE for the use of varied teaching methodologies. In particular the report noted "the use of group and pairwork in a commendable number of lessons in most subjects". Further commendation was offered for the use of "active methodologies". The inspectors recommended the expansion and further development of such methodologies.

Transition year is entirely mixed ability and, like the other two schools, is an optional programme. The Principal believes that the TY programme should remain optional as it makes different demands of the participating students offering them alternative ways of learning. He said parents and students alike should have a choice as the programme may not be right for everyone. The WSE report describes the TY programme as "well documented and commendable for its annual evaluation by students, parents and teachers". The uptake by the Junior Certificate cohort is the highest of the three schools at 75 per cent. This increased from around 60 per cent in 2009 as the school relaxed its admissions policy for TY allowing additional students from within the school, from the wider community, and even from abroad, to take up places. Effectively the school still interviews students but endeavours to accommodate all applicants.

The Transition Year Co-ordinator has held the position in the school for seven years and is a post holder at the school. He is very passionate about the programme and, according to the Principal, has been responsible for growing the programme to what it is today. The school offers TY students what it refers to as 23 core subjects and 19 modules. The Principal of the school is a former TY co-ordinator and has always supported the philosophy underpinning the TY programme since its inception by the current Deputy Principal at the school in the early 1990s. He said that the opportunity for students to leave the school environment and work in various capacities in the community is a valuable one. He spoke about the voluntary work undertaken by the students outside the school as well as the work experience programme.

Work experience is actually timetabled for TYs in St. Finnian's with students having one period per week to prepare, organise and follow up on the process throughout the entire school year. Part of the TY core team includes a work experience co-ordinator who has responsibility for guiding students through the process from finding a placement to final

debriefing. Students also have access to the Guidance Counsellor each week who helps the work experience co-ordinator with the various tasks as required. Again students keep a diary during the process and this contributes points towards their final certification level at the end of the year as well as their work experience certification. Students receive a certificate at one of three levels: pass, merit or distinction for the overall work experience module. They spend two weeks on placement and they are instructed to secure just one placement for the two week period. Some exceptions are made, depending on the circumstances, and a small minority of students are allowed take two placements of one week's duration each. Finding places did not present as a problem in this town. This was explained by the Principal as being due to a very good working relationship with the local business community and an agreement with other schools regarding the timing of each school's work experience programme. The Principal added that the comments from the employers are consistently positive. He also pointed out that the single placement makes it easier for the students to find a willing employer in the first place. The WSE inspectors stated in the final report that the school has well developed links within the community. It highlights how local businesses demonstrate a "high level of good will towards the school and this is evidenced by their co-operation in the organisation of Transition Year work experience" as well as other school activities.

Recommendations for on-going improvement at St. Finnian's in the final WSE report included: timetable review; maximisation of the use of teaching hours available to teachers; on-going review of school policies with some administrative "tightening up" (this was clarified as publication dates, review dates, names of those responsible for generating the policy); review of middle management duties; general audit of curricular provision; the continuation of the development of the active teaching methodologies, group work and pair

work. However, the recommendations, which were largely constructive, were significantly outweighed by the overall positive comments from the WSE team.

5.5 Measures

It was intended to examine if students used their work experience to help make concrete decisions about the career area sampled by them. The particular subjects they eventually choose for Leaving Certificate may, or may not, prepare them for direct entry into the workplace after second level education. Equally, the choices made may or may not influence their selection of third level courses in their endeavour to realise any career aspirations they had developed thus far.

Reliability refers to "the ability of a measure to produce consistent results" (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 82). This research was relatively straightforward and was confined to a very particular group of participants, that is, school-going adolescents. The answers to the questions in the questionnaire issued would be the same regardless of who administered it as they were predominantly objective in nature. These questions were very factual and, regardless of any intervention, the answers would be very unlikely to vary. Those of a more subjective nature were clear and in no need of explication, therefore, were easily answered by the students through the use of a Likert-type scale. The questions were seeking opinions on an experience by the students. Though those opinions could be more subject to change, subsequent to specific intervention, the researcher had no intention of any such intervention. Moreover, the responses would be tested anyway through the data gathered in the qualitative element of the data collection process. The term *dependability* is used as a parallel standard for reliability in its description in the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2005). This is

because some change is anticipated in this paradigm. It is this notion of change that makes the post-positivist concept of *stability* inappropriate.

The intention during this study was to try and ensure that the results were accurate and if they really correspond to or adequately capture the actual state of affairs. *Validity* is the accepted term used to refer to such accuracy of a result (Robson, 2002). The questions posed in the survey have already been described as quite factual. The answers from the respondents were equally factual. An example of this is where the students were asked to list their preferred subject choices for 5th year. This is something they had completed some weeks prior to being surveyed and at a point when their change of mind period had passed. Though students are encouraged, in most schools, to remain with their initial choices, it was found that there is usually an opportunity later to review and perhaps make some final changes. This usually applied to the incoming Fifth Year cohort at the beginning of the new school year. On average it was a minority of students who would find themselves making such last minute change. The group from the previous TY cohort and even two years previous, in the case of the 5th and 6th years surveyed, had well finalised their choices. For that reason they were already deeply committed to those subjects and were following their chosen programmes of study.

Other questions posed in the questionnaire related to the reasons for the choices made regarding their work experience, how that experience worked out for them, whether or not they believe it influenced the subject choices made by them, what inspired them to choose their particular placement and whether or not they enlisted help to secure their placements.

The researcher is the data collection instrument and as such should describe him/herself in terms of closeness to the topic and his/her own values (Mertens, 2005). Having served as a Transition Year Co-ordinator and being part of the development of the programme in my own school, it was relevant and appropriate that the readers were made aware of that involvement from the outset as detailed in Chapter One and in Chapter 5.9. It was during this experience that subject selections by students and their prior work placements began to show a potential link. This led to casual discussion with students, both one to one and in small groups, to assess the importance of that possible connection with a view to further development of the Work Experience Programme. If the WEP could have a significant effect, then it would be prudent to ensure that the programme in place, in any given school, offered students the best opportunity to choose suitable and appropriate placements.

5.6 Data Collection Procedures

The quantitative element of this research was dominated by gathering data concerning the participants who were involved in the work experience programme as part of Transition Year. The questions in the questionnaire were specifically concerned with fundamental issues such as gender, educational profile, placement choice factors, and experiences while on placement.

Each of the three groups outlined earlier were taken on a group by group basis for the administration of the quantitative questionnaire which was no longer than ten pages. The design of the questionnaire facilitated its completion in approximately twenty minutes per group. In advance of completing the questionnaire, students were informed that there would be a random selection of students who would be asked to agree to be interviewed. A probabilistic sampling approach was used in the random selection of the participants in an

effort to ensure that each individual in the population had an equal chance of being chosen for interview.

For the qualitative part of the research, a smaller number of participants were randomly selected, as outlined in Section 5.3.7 above, to provide the in-depth information required to help support, build upon and understand the initial quantitative findings. The qualitative interviews were semi-structured in design allowing more flexibility during the interviews to elicit as much rich data as possible.

The interviews, with each individual student, were conducted by the researcher himself. Consideration was given to working with small focus groups of five or six students at a time. The purpose of using a group interview or *focus group* is to encourage a variety of opinions on any of the topics that were introduced by the researcher. The aim of a focus group is not an attempt to reach consensus or to find solutions to a problem, but "to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue" (Kvale, 2009, p. 150). Focus groups can facilitate *horizontal* interaction over *vertical* interaction while also constituting as social spaces that have the ability to decrease the influence of the researcher in controlling both the topics discussed and the interactional flow (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). However, after significant consideration the decision was made not to proceed at that point with the focus groups as there was potentially enough data to be collected through the individual interviews along with the quantitative questionnaires. The researcher remained open to the use of focus groups at a later stage if it was deemed worthwhile or if it was going to scaffold or compliment the data collected in any way.

In terms of the individual interviews, the asymmetry of the power relation in interviewing can be easily overlooked. It was imperative during this research, to remain aware of this differential and to make every effort to minimise its effect. DeRoche and Lahman (2008) used a number of strategies to reduce the uneven power relationship including:

- maximising participant control of the interview
- allowing the participant to control the tape recorder
- using appropriate verbal and non-verbal language during the interview for the youth's developmental level.

A digital recorder was used to record the interviews. Students were informed during the distribution of the quantitative surveys that a random sample would be selected for the qualitative interviews. In each of the schools used for the research, the students presented as being very open to the possibility of being interviewed. Prior to commencing each interview the students were reminded again of the use of the digital recorder and in each single case the response was very positive and accepting. The technology, along with the idea of being recorded, was very comfortably received. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. It is almost impossible to reproduce the full flavour of the interview experience in a written format. The interviewer needs to attend to "the emotional tone of the interaction" (Kvale, 2009, p. 130). The reason Kvale gives for this is so that readers can better understand what is said, bearing in mind that they did not witness "the lived bodily presence of the interview" (p. 130). Field notes, which can assist in recording body language, tone of voice, pauses, repetitions, and facial expressions were used throughout the interview process and were added to the transcripts. Field notes can be written *in situ* or indeed, away from the interview setting (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The vast majority of any field notes recorded were completed during the interviews but on occasion,

additional notes were written after the student had left the interview room. Kirk and Miller (1986) recommend that expanded notes should always be recorded as soon as possible after the initial observations. Cohen et al. (2011) describe field notes as "the results of observations" (p. 235). During the interviews, students made a whole range of gestures from facial expressions to burst of laughter, sometimes nervous laughter, which helped to further understand what they were communicating in a non-verbal manner. Such gestures could not be remembered without field notes which proved to be a useful aid to remembering the flavour of each individual experience as the interviews were subsequently transcribed, replayed or re-read during the analysis period.

The most appropriate time of the year to conduct both the quantitative and qualitative surveys for this study was between March and May for the TY cohort. This was the time by which the students had completed their WE placements and their subject selection applications for the following year. The same restriction did not apply to the fifth and sixth year students. The data collection however did also take place at the same time for those cohorts as it was more convenient to do so while access to the schools was available. It became clear during the interviews that the timing was quite appropriate for the sixth year students as they were in the process of serious consideration of their 3rd level ideas which involved subject choice once again at this crucial time in their young lives.

Though the focus in this section is on the data collection procedures, it is important to point out that based on the predominantly qualitative nature of this research, analysis started early to help identify new issues or themes that could emerge from the interview process. This allowed for the development of new questions and varied strategies in data collection. Such overlap is not unusual with qualitative methods.

The researcher must consider the quality of the data collection strategy being employed. The advice is to set up indicators that assist in proving that the knowledge generated from the research is both believable and trustworthy. *Credibility* is the interpretive parallel to *validity* (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, as cited in Mertens, 2005). The rationale supporting credibility, according to Mertens, is the extent to which the researcher's portrayal of the respondents' opinions correspond with the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs. Credibility can be enhanced by using relatively simple techniques such as, for example, triangulation.

Unlike the post-positivist approach which is strictly objective in nature, values are made explicit in constructivism. The concept of objectivity is replaced by confirmability. It is imperative to confirm that the data, and the interpretation of that data, are "not figments of the researcher's imagination" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 359). They recommended the use a *confirmability audit* to trace the data to their original sources. This can help provide a chain of evidence confirming the synthesisation of data to reach particular conclusions.

Researchers need permission to collect data from individuals and from particular sites (Crewell & Plano Clark, 2007). For this study the initial permission for access was sought from the school Principals as the individuals in charge of the sites. Each Principal was sent a letter (Appendix A) requesting access to their schools along with a detailed outline of the study and copies of the questionnaires and the interview protocol. The letter was followed by a personal phone-call to discuss any issues or concerns that may have arisen. Additional calls were made to arrange the actual school visits. The schools were extremely co-operative and willing to participate.

5.7 Pilot Testing

Pilot testing of questionnaires with a small sample, similar to the intended group of respondents, is always recommended (Mertens, 2005). The pre-test of the questionnaires for this study helped ascertain that the questions were clear, simple, concise, and unambiguous. It was important to make it clear to the pilot group that the purpose of the session was to note their reactions to the questions and to listen to their comments thereafter. They were asked if, in their opinion, anything had been omitted that they deemed important. They were afforded the opportunity to highlight any difficulties they may have had with the structure of the questionnaire or the layout and style of the questions. Following the pre-test it was imperative to analyse the feedback from the group and a number of adjustments proved necessary to improve the questionnaire and the individual questions as deemed appropriate.

Similarly the semi-structured interview was piloted and reviewed. The pilot gives the researcher an opportunity to improve or develop the questions but also an opportunity to practice "the art of second questions" (Kvale, 2009, p. 138). Kvale explains the importance of *active listening* which involves listening not just to what is said but also, *how* it is said. The challenge for the researcher is deciding which elements of the interviewee's answers need to be followed up with further questions. To do this effectively requires the interviewer to have an ear for the interview theme, knowledge of the interview topic, sensitivity towards the social relationship of an interview, and clarity in what he wants to ask about (Kvale, 2009).

A pilot interview was carried out with a Fifth Year student who had completed the Transition Year Programme in 2010 and who had progressed to his senior cycle studies with the subjects chosen on completion of the Transition Year. The questions posed were designed to discover whether or not the work placement had an effect on the subjects chosen but also to examine other aspects such as:

- Why was their particular placement chosen?
- Was assistance sought in choosing that placement?
- The potential effect of the placement on career choice
- The value of the Work Experience programme
- The personal impact of the placement on the student
- Other factors that may have influenced subject choice

(See interview protocol in Appendix E)

The interview was also intended to elicit data regarding the emerging identity of the student involved and also on his emerging vocational identity. The choice of occupational goals can actually ground the young person's hope of an anticipated future which may allow them to see themselves as having a coherent identity in terms of a career (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). The participant interviewed was 17 years old and though the data to be gathered was not of a sensitive nature, it was deemed to be prudent, for the purpose of this pilot, to seek informed consent from his parents. The interviewee was chosen by simply drawing a name from a group of former Transition Year students already used to pilot the questionnaire, who expressed their willingness to participate in an interview process.

Using a grounded theory approach, the interview transcript was coded on a line by line basis. Line by line coding is the first step in coding for many grounded theorists and is an extremely useful tool allowing ideas to occur that may otherwise escape ones attention if reading the data in search of general themes (Charmaz, 2009).

5.8 Data Analysis Procedures

In mixed methods data analysis, the researcher has to go through several steps for both types of data gathered. The data needs to be prepared for analysis, explored, analysed, represented

and validated (Crewell & Plano Clark, 2007).

5.8.1 Quantitative Data

The field of quantitative data analysis is complex and specialised and it is recommended that advice should really be sought from an expert in the field (Langdridge, 2002). Ronald Fisher (1938) in his Presidential Address to the First Indian Statistical Congress said: "To consult the statistician after an experiment is finished is often merely to ask him to conduct a *post mortem* examination. He can perhaps say what the experiment died of". In 2009 a statistician was consulted for initial guidance on how best to proceed with this research. His main advice was to collect data in a way that would facilitate its input to a Microsoft Excel spread-sheet. This would allow for easy transfer at a later date to a statistical software package such as SPSS. It was for that reason that most of the questions in the questionnaire had a Likert-type scale provided to facilitate student responses.

The use of analytical software is something that should be considered at the design stage of any project. The data collected need to be analysable, therefore, care had to be taken to ensure that the questionnaire developed would elicit valuable and worthwhile data. A negative, regarding the use of computer packages, is the ease at which one can generate "elegantly presented rubbish" with the readily available analytical software that exists (Langdridge, 2002, p. 393). The researcher collated the questionnaires separating them according to the three class groups per school giving a total of nine bundles. The raw data was then transferred to an Excel workbook under the appropriate headings for each question asked in each of the five sections of the survey. The further assistance of the statistician was engaged to transfer the raw data to the SPSS programme and to run the various analytical tests. All analysis was conducted using SPSS version 19. All tests were performed at the 5 per cent level of significance i.e. a p-value less than 0.05 was considered significant. Some

variables in this analysis were created through the author's interpretation of write-in responses and the translation of string data into numerical variables. Details of these and of all explanatory variables are included in Appendix G. The analysis of the data was conducted in three distinct phases. These were:

a) Graphical and numerical summary of response variables

b) Testing for effect of explanatory variables on response variables individually

c) Multivariate Regression Testing for effect of explanatory variables

Part A was conducted using bar charts and frequency tables. Part B was conducted using tests for comparing groups (both parametric and non-parametric) and simple linear regression. Part C was conducted using hierarchical multivariate regression models (both linear and logistic).

5.8.2 Qualitative Data

In the case of qualitative data, particularly interview data, the analysis is almost inevitably interpretive and is a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the de-contextualised data (Cohen & Manion, 2000). However, these authors suggested that there is a need to maintain the holism of the interview. They simplify analysis into the following general categories (p. 368):

- Generating natural units of meaning
- Classifying, categorising and ordering these
- Structuring narratives to describe the interview contents
- Interpreting the interview data

Though these categories are very general in nature they offer a solid starting point and for this research, served as a useful guide in the initial process of analysis.

A Grounded Theory approach was used to analyse the gathered data. Grounded theory methods were originally developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss during their research of people dying in hospitals in the 1960s (Charmaz, 2009). There are many versions of grounded theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), but most of the definitions contain the most fundamental element which is that theory is generated systematically from the data (Glaser, 1996). It is similarly defined as "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed" by Strauss & Corbin (1994, as cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 598). I searched for some time to find a method of analysis that would work for this research and eventually, I decided that a grounded theory approach had the most to offer in terms of managing the data, breaking it down and understanding it. In her preface of the third edition of *The Basics of Qualitative Research*, Corbin (2008) explains that the book is not intended to offer a recipe for conducting qualitative research. Instead she says, "it presents a set of analytical techniques that can be used to make sense out of masses of qualitative data" (p. x). She encourages researchers to use the procedures in their own way. It was that sentiment that set me on a course to begin analysing the large volume of data gathered with a selection of grounded theory tools.

The major advantage of grounded theory is its "inductive, contextual, and process based nature" (Charmaz, 2006; Orlikowski, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990 as cited in Diaz Andrade, 2009, p. 46). Diaz adds that these characteristics are particularly useful and a good fit for research in the interpretive genre. The questions for the development of this thesis were originally inspired by my personal experiences with Transition Year students and as such required an inductive approach to the subsequent research. Inductive research, particularly in the early stages, tends to be more open-ended and exploratory in its approach. Such exploration is evident in grounded theory which consists of "simultaneous data

collection and analysis with each one influencing and focusing the other throughout the research process" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 508). From the piloting of the interview questionnaire through all of the interviews subsequently conducted, the analysis was on-going. The transcription of the interviews was a time-consuming activity but a most beneficial exercise in terms of the opportunity to listen again to what the students had to say, to get close to the actual data, and then to physically commit their words to paper. This process facilitated an interpretive analysis of the participants' real lived worlds along with the processes determining how these worlds were constructed by them (Charmaz, 2009). Charmaz points out that some researchers advocate coding from notes as opposed to transcribed interviews. She maintains, however, that coding full transcripts "offers ideas and understandings that you otherwise miss" (p. 70) while bringing one to a deeper level of understanding. This proved to be the case in my experience. I valued the opportunity to be able to read and re-read the transcripts throughout the process. On some occasions, I also re-listened to many of the recorded interviews which, in association with my field-notes, helped me to capture more meaning that could otherwise have been lost.

The commencement of early analysis helped focus further data collection as issues and questions emerged. While the main questions on the semi-structured interview protocol did not change, the focus varied somewhat during the months over which the interviews were conducted. Charmaz (2009) describes intensive qualitative interviewing as fitting grounded theory particularly well. She cites: "Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet direct, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted" (p. 28). While many researchers choose interviewing as a single method, Charmaz (2009) adds that it also compliments other methods including surveys. She suggests that sometimes the first question prepared by an interviewer might be enough for an entire interview if the stories "tumble out" (p. 29). For this research, the interview questions were carefully

generated based on the main research questions presented in Chapter 5.2 and on some of the variables elicited by the quantitative questionnaire. They were carefully reviewed after the pilot test with all necessary, though minor, changes applied. Some experts suggest that an interview schedule may not even be necessary and in this way a freer flowing, conversational type interview is facilitated. Nonetheless, I chose to use an interview schedule for this study. It helped to maintain the focus of the interviews and allowed me to concentrate on what was being said by the students. It also offered the security of structure and this, coupled with a series of sub-questions, made it easier to remain on task and to always have another question ready to pose in the event that further exploration of an emerging notion or theme was required.

Once the first of the data were available to work with, it was time to ask the big question posed by Glaser (1978): What is happening here? At first, and I expect, like many other researchers, I wondered about what the data had to say. On first consideration it seemed impossible to see anything happening at all. I used line-by-line coding to break down the data into manageable pieces. This initial coding, for many, is the first step in the coding process and involves naming each line of the written data (Glaser, 1978, as cited in Charmaz, 2009).

Table 5.1 shows an example taken from the transcript of a 5th Year girl (Jan) interviewed at St. Monica's school for girls:

Interview Transcript	*Codes*
Student: Ahmm…I don't know, I really enjoyed it like…it's kinda, you go into a different mode. It's like you're a different person and you just take it on and one teacher kept saying to me…oh you've such a presence like, when you walk around… the students wouldn't know what age you are. They told me on my first… the first thing I did was I had to teach a full class like and I had no idea and ahmm…she told the students that I was in 3rd Year in UL, and your're on teaching practice and I was like…they all didn't cop it that I was the same age as them like it was really funny. Ahmm..I found it really, really rewarding. And then the second work placement I did was I went to a law office in like, just on Main St. in town and like I always thought I'd be kinda good at it because I'm really like, I love all that kind of organisational stuff and I'm really like…I'm into debating and stuff as well so I thought it would be like using my assets or whatever…but it just completely turned me off it. I would never,	Enjoying the experience Becoming a different person Being told she has a great presence Students not knowing her age *(Teenagers wanting to be older?)* Being asked to teach a full class on 1st day Introduced as a 3rd Year college student Students not figuring she was their age (Facial expression suggested she liked that) Feeling rewarded Trying a law office placement Having high expectations of placement *(Where did that come from originally?)* Describing herself as organised, a good debater Being completely turned off by the experience

never work in an office after it. The woman, the secretary, she was just horrible like and I didn't even get to do anything…I was just photocopying and stuff so…oh it just completely turned me off anything to do with business and law or anything like.	*(Strong criticism…grounds for this?)* Never wanting to work in an office again Not liking menial tasks Switched off business and law *(Did she give it adequate consideration?)*

Table 5-1 5th Year girl interview segment including a sample of coding

The initial task of breaking up the data into component parts (Charmaz, 2009) was very useful in figuring out what the data were simply saying in the first instance, and secondly, seeking out the detail and the nuances therein. Though going through each interview line-by-line was a protracted process, it was the beginning of the learning curve regarding the worlds of these young people who had freely and openly shared their experiences and feelings with me. The resultant fragments were examined in an effort to find meanings and new understandings of what was being said by them. This was facilitated by on-going free-writing, or memoing, to tease out ideas and ask questions of the fragmented data. Memos are very simply defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 117) as "Written records of analysis". They add that a level of analysis begins once the researcher sits down to write a memo due to the fact that the writing process causes him/her to think about the data: "It is in thinking that analysis occurs" (p. 118). As the researcher proceeds with the analysis, each fragment can be compared with others for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This, they add, allows for the grouping together of ideas or incidents that are conceptually similar.

The initial or open coding paved the way for the second major phase which was the *axial* coding of the data. These codes are "more directed, selective, and conceptual than word-by-word or line-by-line coding" according to Glaser (1978, as cited in Charmaz, 2009, p. 57).

Charmaz explains that subsequent to the "fracturing of the data" by the initial coding process, "axial coding is Strauss & Corbin's (1998) strategy for bringing data back together again in a coherent whole" (p. 60). For this research, coloured highlighter pens were used to mark words or phrases with similar meanings or references. For example, in Table 5-1 above, the yellow highlighting was foregrounding units that referred to the student's identity. The magenta colour was applied to comments referring to student learning about self. The green highlighting was concerned with the student being steered away from a previous, possible career interest, while the blue colour was connecting ideas relating to adult life and the world of work. The example above is obviously presented in isolation and for that reason, is somewhat out of context. However, during the research process, there was constant comparison with the entire interview as well as the many other interviews that had already been completed. This constant comparison was also influential on the direction of those interviews yet to be undertaken at the time. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, p. 600) explain constant comparison as how the researcher "compares the new data with existing data and categories, so that the categories achieve a perfect fit with the data".

The final stage in the process was the *selective* coding of the data. Selective coding is where a core code is identified and its relationship with other codes is explicated (Ezzy, 2002, as cited in Cohen et al., 2011). For this research, the result was the emergence of a number of different categories helping to organise the data into manageable, meaningful units. In the introduction to Chapter Four, I used the metaphor of a number of satellites orbiting a planet to describe the core identity and the many other identities that one can possess. Here I draw on that same metaphor relating this time to the core category of the students formulating their vocational futures surrounded by the many factors or sub-categories that accompany it such as pre-existing career ideas, experience of adult life or being diverted from a particular career. Once the point of saturation was reached, there were ten categories or *variables* that

emerged from the data. “Saturation is reached when no new insights, properties, dimensions, relationships, codes or categories are produced even when new data are added” (Cohen et al. 2011, p. 601). It was reaching this point that caused the final number of individual interviews to be 32 instead of the originally intended 36. These ten variables are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

A simple summary of the entire process, based on the introduction to Chapter Eight of Corbin & Strauss (2008) is as follows: First of all, the data is broken into manageable segments. Secondly, through interpretation, the data is carefully examined and explored for the most important ideas emerging from them. Thirdly, conceptual names are allocated that best represent those specific ideas from the data.

5.9 Limitations of the study

This study was confined to a specific age group (students approximately aged 16 to 18 years old). The study does exclude schools from the Vocational sector as outlined earlier in 5.4.1. A significant limitation was that, apart from the Work Experience Programme, there are many other factors that can influence decision making by students at this age. TY students, for example, tend to be more *mature* than their third year counterparts who have to make similar decisions around subject choice if they choose to move directly to Fifth Year (as did 20 to 30 per cent of the Third Year cohort in the schools used for this research). There are also many other factors in the Transition Year programme that can affect decision making such as:

- exposure to Social Studies classes which form part of the TYP
- projects outside of school like Enterprise Competitions and Social Innovation Programmes

- access to additional Career Guidance, a popular TY module in many schools
- access to international exchange programmes
- exposure to new, previously untried subjects

A checklist to ascertain involvement in any activities, such as those listed above, was employed with the intention of reducing the effect of this particular limitation.

There is very limited research in the area of subject choice and work experience in the Irish context. This constrained the opportunity to compare and contrast this research with previous work.

Occasionally, students can potentially make poor choices when it comes to choosing their WE placement. For instance, some academically weaker students, who chose the TYP, seemed to have had lower career aspirations and as a result might have chosen less challenging work placements. In such cases the WE was more of a chore, or even a necessary evil, and as a result did not offer a great deal in the form of rich data for the researcher.

My background in education has involved working closely with students participating in the TY Programme. I acted as TY Coordinator for four years in a mixed secondary school and served as a Guidance Counsellor at the same time. I also introduced and coordinated the TY enterprise programme for many years. I have always been a passionate supporter of TY, something that continued during my time in senior management at the school for eight years. The main point here is that none of us are neutral observers. What we can see during the research process is influenced by what we bring to the study (Charmaz, 2009). She adds that "we are not passive receptacles into which data are poured" (p. 15). Our own values and beliefs are important and are always present. In research, an astute awareness of these values and beliefs is necessary to help keep our own biases in check. Such acknowledgement

facilitates the potential for researchers to remain aware and to be "reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it" (Charmaz, 2009, p.15). This author also contends that the actions and statements of the participants tell us about their worlds. The students participating in the research for this thesis, were most willing to share their experiences and to talk about their worlds as they perceived them. The grounded theory method, according to Charmaz, "contains correctives that reduce the likelihood that researchers merely superimpose their preconceived notions on the data. Line by line coding, provides an early corrective of this type" (p. 51). During the analysis of the interview transcripts, the line by line coding undoubtedly sharpened the focus on what the students were saying and helped to keep the researcher tuned in to what was going on in their lived experience during their time on work placement.

Currently, there does not appear to be a programme that compares adequately with the Irish TYP anywhere else in the world. The TYP is "pioneering in an international context with no comparable educational intervention existing in similarly standardised systems" (Smyth et al., 2004, p. 7). Smyth et al. make reference to the "Seconde" in France which does have some similarities, as an orientation year, to the TYP. They add though, that the French system differs considerably due to nationally prescribed coursework in core academic subjects as well as national evaluation in some subject fields. The absence of suitably similar programmes elsewhere does restrict the possibility of international comparison and is a clear limitation within this research. There is much to compare to in terms of Work Experience Programmes, many of which are quite similar, however the WEP is just one element of the TYP. A positive here, of course, is that others can look towards the Irish model and draw from it based on the huge success the TYP has experienced in this country. It is a programme that appears to be somewhat underestimated by those who look to other education systems for inspiration.

5.10 Ethics in research

Ethics in research is something that needs to be considered from the outset and should be an integral part of the planning and on-going development of the work (Mertens, 2005). Cavan (1977) defines ethics as "a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others". I believed from the beginning that the nature of this research was not going to impinge on the rights of the participants or be, in any way, ethically sensitive. Notwithstanding that, I consulted with the University Code of Research Conduct (2010) and became familiar with the requirements therein. A key opening statement in the document is that the central mission of the University is "to promote excellence in the practice of research" (p. 1). This document led to careful consideration of all aspects of the research. The area being investigated was concerned with a very public activity on the part of the students, namely, their subject selection process. This is something conducted in every school, in a very open way, where students are expected to make choices in the hope that the school has the resources to accommodate each individual's wishes as fully as possible. Generally, discussion takes place between the students and their TY co-ordinators, teachers, guidance counsellors and parents. The students who were to participate in the research were going to be, on average, 16 years old or older. With this in mind, I proceeded to communicate with the ethical approval authority at the University. Section 4.3 of the University's code explained the procedure as follows:

> Non-clinical research involving human participants (including behavioural experiments, interviewing and surveying) must be approved by the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC), or, in the case of undergraduate projects, a departmental/school ethics committee approved by SREC.
> (University Code of Research Conduct, 2010, p. 3)

The application was submitted to SREC in January 2011 outlining the intended area of study

for this research. In March 2011, following some initial clarification, a final response was received from the Chairman stating that the committee could see no ethical impediment to the research and that approval had been granted.

Researchers cannot expect to gain access and acceptance to a school as a matter of right (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). These authors add that the researcher needs to demonstrate that "they are worthy, as researchers and human beings, of being accorded the facilities needed to carry out their investigations" (p. 81). Official permission was sought from school Principals in writing (see Appendix A) and with a follow up phone-call, well in advance of the expected commencement date. Permission was readily granted in each case. This was facilitated by the fact that each of the Principals would have known me from attendance at regional Principals' meetings.

I used the templates provided by SREC to generate the informed consent form (Appendix C) along with the information sheet (Appendix B) outlining the research for all participants. With the consent and co-operation of the school Principals, these were issued to students in advance of the data collection. On the day of the survey, each group was further briefed by the researcher on the content of the distributed information sheet. Their anonymity, along with the anonymity of the school, were guaranteed and all students were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time before, during or after the research had commenced. Permission was sought from the parents of any students under 16 years of age. Those above that age were permitted to sign the consent form themselves.

5.11 Research Problem

Students enter the Transition Year (TY) with a reasonable knowledge of what lies before them. Many schools offer detailed information to students and parents in the year prior to

Transition Year. They know what programmes are on offer and have witnessed many other students before them embark on their Work Experience Programme (WEP) as well as the multiplicity of other modules that make up TY. As a result students are looking forward to the WEP element of the course and are generally excited by the prospect of trying life outside school whilst retaining the security of school as they know it.

All of the definitions of work experience outlined earlier, along with how the programmes are played out in different education systems, have much in common with each other. However, the concept outlined in the Australian Council for Educational Research (1999), that one of the purposes of work experience is *to develop and test career choices in the actual workplace,* is a key factor for this particular research.

This study aims to investigate the extent to which the experiences acquired by students during and after a WE placement affects the important subject choices they make as they move from Transition Year into the senior cycle to prepare for their terminal examinations in Irish second level education. The key concepts that have emerged thus far for consideration demonstrate the researcher's intention to examine the effects of the entire work experience process through a socio-cultural lens.

The students selected for this research were Transition Year, Fifth Year and Sixth Year students. These were the students who were exposed to the work experience option and who were in a position to talk about their experiences of that programme and their subsequent actions. These were also the students who were given the time and opportunity to seriously consider the world of work along with adult and working life.

The WEP itself is just one potential factor in decision making around subject choice and as such needs to be looked at not in isolation, but in association with some of the other factors that are now understood to be of considerable importance.

5.12 Conclusion

The key research questions to be considered are:

- Does work experience affect decisions around students' subject choices?
- What are students' attitudes to the work experience programme?
- What effect does work experience have on students' existing career ideas?
- What contribution does work experience make to the development of the student's emerging vocational identity?
- To what extent does it affect the student's overall identity?
- What other issues arise for students who participate in work experience?

This chapter details the methodological choices made regarding this research. It presents the main research question to be considered and the rationale behind the methods used to seek the answers. The research design chosen was intended to offer the most appropriate way in which to gather the required data to answer all of the research questions posed. The sample used for this research is outlined along with the response rates and the sampling design for both the quantitative and the qualitative elements of the research. Following an explanation of the measures and the data collection procedures used, the pilot testing process is detailed. The data analyses procedures for the mixed methods used are followed by the limitations of the study. The key research questions are posed in the final section. The next chapter deals with the analysis of the quantitative data.

Chapter 6: Quantitative Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the data generated by the quantitative survey that was completed by the students in each of the three schools selected for this study. The primary aim of the quantitative element of this research was to gain an understanding of the students' perceptions of work experience using their responses from a detailed quantitative questionnaire. It asked students about their experiences, both personal and general, while on placement as part of the schools' formal work experience programmes.

The questionnaire was divided into five distinct parts as outlined in Chapter 5.3.4. The responses from a final total of 323 completed questionnaires were collated and coded in a Microsoft Excel spread-sheet. A statistician was engaged to support the quantitative analysis and to conduct, and support the interpretation of, a battery of statistical tests.

6.1.1 Research Questions

The research questions, as already outlined in Chapter 5.2, are presented again below. Each of these questions is addressed, either fully or in part, by the data gathered through the quantitative element of this research.

- Does work experience affect decisions around students' subject choices?
- What are students' attitudes to the work experience programme?
- What effect does work experience have on students' existing career ideas?
- What contribution does work experience make to the development of the student's emerging vocational identity?
- To what extent does it affect the student's overall identity?

- What other issues arise for students who participate in work experience?

6.2 Data Analysis

The questionnaire was divided into five parts. Chapter 5.3.4 offers a full description of each of the parts which are summarised here as follows:

Part One: Biographical data and views about careers.

Part Two: Data on student academic performance (Junior Cert results) and subject choices, career orientations, expected Leaving Cert points.

Part Three: Data on work placements specifically on choice of placement and possible impact on career choice in the future.

Part Four: Data on perceptions of work experience with reference to subject choices and personal value of the experience.

Part Five: Attitudinal data regarding self perception, future career and educational choices.

The data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 19 and was carried out in three phases:

a) Graphical and numerical summary of response variables.
b) Testing for effect of explanatory variables on response variables individually.
c) Multivariate Regression Testing for Effect of Explanatory Variables

6.2.1 Data Analysis Tools

The research questions listed above have already been justified with reference to the existing literature and the policy context in Ireland. In this chapter, I offer an account of the analysis and a justification for the adoption of various statistical procedures. It is important to note at the outset, that the statistical methods chosen were selected in order to best address the above research questions and in this regard a number of possibilities emerged. At an early

stage of the quantitative work I had planned on only conducting a statistically descriptive account of data involving frequencies, averages and proportions - a task that was well within my competence technically. However, as I became more familiar with the data and realised the further potential of the data base, it was agreed that a deeper analysis would be most worthwhile. Having decided that further insights could be obtained by a more penetrating, inferential statistical enquiry, I studied various statistical texts specifically the classic, in-depth and accessible volume, *Introduction to the Practice of Statistics* by Moore and McCabe (1989). I also accessed the problem-oriented, applied text *Problem Solving: A Statistician's Guide* by Chapman (1995) which is geared to social scientists, and a basic text for beginners entitled *Statistics without Tears* by Rowntree (1991) all with a view to familiarising myself with some relevant techniques. As I do not come from a strong mathematical background, this involved considerable time and study. While I developed a knowledge of the inferential procedures (e.g. probability testing, analysis of variance, and principals component analysis) technically I felt I would benefit from some support from a statistician who, I hoped, would run some key procedures to test for significance of items such as, for example, the impact of work experience on subject choice. With the agreement and support of my supervisor, a post-graduate student of statistics, Ronan Fitzpatrick, was sourced to help me to run various procedures on SPSS and to assemble various tables and graphs. This formed the basis of several supervisory meetings, further reading and study in order to decide on the best procedures to apply in various situations and bearing in mind my overarching questions for the entire thesis.

Finally a number of areas were narrowed down that could form an interesting line of inferential analysis (described below). In the event, the post-graduate student, Ronan Fitzpatrick, offered a summary account of what he had done following our meetings which, in acknowledgment of his contribution and in the interests of transparency, I have

reproduced in Appendix J. However, I offer a detailed step by step account of the process below. To enhance logic and readability of the text, I describe the main statistical procedures in the chronology in which I applied them followed by the presentation and analysis of evidence.

6.3 Statistical Analysis: Preliminary and Inferential

6.3.1 Variables:

The coding process involved listing all the variables that were part of the questionnaire and allocating a code to each to enable later analysis. For instance, there were three codes for the variable, 'school' since there were three schools involved in the survey. There were obviously two codes for gender. More complex variables, like 'Dream' and 'Real' job (see questionnaire items) were split into many variables where a coding of 1 was allocated to 'sports sector', 2 for 'service sector' and so on as indicated in Appendix H. The variable 'Junior Certificate Score' and 'Leaving Certificate Expected Score' each had sub-divided levels and hence a range of numbered codes - again I show this in detail in Appendix H. This coding process enabled me carry out a basic statistical description of the data in the first place: Appendix G contains frequency tables for the variables and this constitutes an initial summary analysis of data and provides the first line of analysis for all sections of the questionnaire. The coding process described above also allowed for some inferential statistical work.

6.3.2 Some Initial Findings

A number of interesting points are noteworthy from this preliminary analysis (Appendix G):

1. For roughly half of the respondents their ideal or dream career choice coincided with their expected/real career choice and for roughly half, the opposite was the case.
2. The vast majority of all respondents expected to achieve in excess of 350 points in the Leaving Certificate suggesting a very positive attitude.
3. Over half (56 per cent) reported that their placement fitted well with their career aspirations, with one-fifth saying they weren't sure and a minority reporting a lack of fit.
4. Two-thirds described themselves as confident with 13 per cent describing themselves as not confident. This aligns with the finding that 70 per cent disagreed that they had low self esteem.
5. The vast majority (86 per cent) disagreed with the statement that their parents were planning their future career for them.
6. Eighty per cent expressed confidence in going to third level education, in line with the majority expressing the view that they were not planning to go straight into a job after school.

6.3.3 Response and Explanatory Variables and Principal Component Analysis

In statistical terms there are two common types of variables, both relevant to my study: response variables and explanatory variables. The response variables aligned with my research questions: they are called response variables because they were based on the perceptions and responses of the respondents to questionnaire items that were chosen to reflect the research questions. These were the variables that I was interrogating in the study and can be phrased in terms of eight questions as follows:

1) Had work experience been a worthwhile experience for the students? (Worthwhile)

2) Had work experience reinforced students' intentions to follow that career path? (Reinforced Career)
3) Had work experience been a personal highlight of Transition Year? (Highlight of TY)
4) Did students believe work experience had done nothing for them? (Did Nothing)
5) Were students happy with how they had chosen their placement? (More Careful)
6) Had work experience made students focus more on their future career choices? (Focus Career)
7) Did work experience help students choose their subjects for 5th Year? (Subject Choice)
8) Had time spent on work experience put students off certain careers? (Put Off)

These response variables were based on student responses to Likert-type items in Parts Four and Five of the questionnaire (see Appendix D). Clearly these variables were based on individual questions on the instrument. On some occasions, variables were amalgamated. For example, the statements *I believe my work experience reinforced my intention to pursue a career in the field that I had chosen for my work placement* and *I knew by the end of the programme that it was a possible career for me,* were actually measuring the same thing i.e. the same underlying variable.

Explanatory variables are simply those variables that I was interested in using to seek to explain the response variables such as gender, Junior Certificate performance, expected Leaving Certificate performance and so on as listed in Appendix H.

A frequency table for all these variables is provided in Appendix G. So for instance, it is clear from this table that boys and girls were evenly split which is what one might expect

given the matched size of the single sex schools and the inclusion of one co-educational school. The age profile is also what one might expect given the year groups surveyed: the majority of 63 per cent fell into the age category 17-19 years with the remaining 37 per cent aged 15-16 years.

Because some items were so similar I decided to collapse those items into one question, and therefore have one response variable, as indicated in Appendix G for the items on self esteem and confidence. In each case there was a positive correlation between the responses on those items, hence this is justified. The process is called principal component analysis (PCA). The purpose ultimately here was to reduce the number of response variables into a smaller set of uncorrelated components. This allows for a more focussed analysis: a few components are interpreted rather than very many variables which would become unwieldy (SPSS, 2012). The process involves correlating variables using Cronbach's Alpha to determine how closely related a set of items are as a group (SPSS, 2012). The conventional practice is that if the correlation exceeds 0.7 then it is assumed the variables in question are actually measuring the same underlying variable. Another process for determining related items is the calculation of what are called eigenvalues. Both procedures are fairly common approaches in statistics for establishing the relatedness of items. The purpose is to reduce the number of components to those that are not linearly correlated and to be able to list the components in order of their ability to account for the variance in the data, hence the term, principal component analysis (PCA).

Following the conduct of PCA on the response variables, I applied it to relevant explanatory variables from Appendix G. My reason for using PCA was to determine, with as much confidence as possible, the components or factors that were most influential in explaining my findings. I present and discuss these findings below. Firstly, I present the graphs of the response variables.

6.4 Results

Prior to summation, bar charts were generated for all response variables from Part Four of the questionnaire.

6.4.1 Graphical and Numerical Summary of Response Variables

The following charts represent the student responses to ten statements put to them in Part Four of the questionnaire. This section was concerned with their attitudes to work experience.

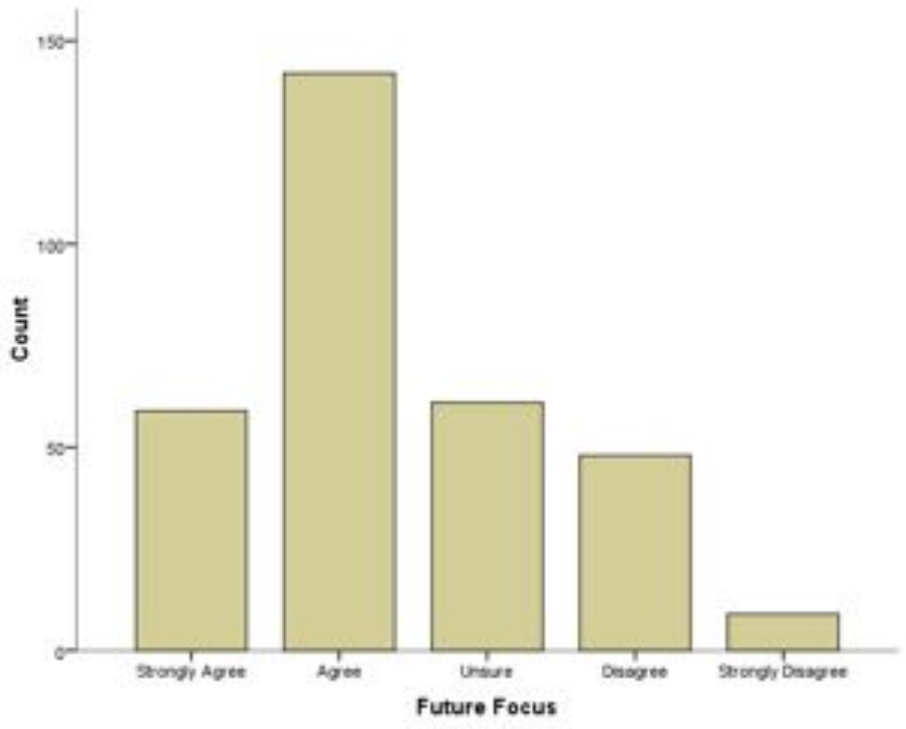

Figure 6-1: Bar Chart of Responses to Future Focus *(N = 319)*

Future Focus: this variable was based on the statement "My work experience helped me focus on my future career". The student responses to this statement were quite positive (Figure 6-1). 63 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed that their work placements

helped them to focus on their future careers with only 18 per cent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 19 per cent of those surveyed said they were unsure.

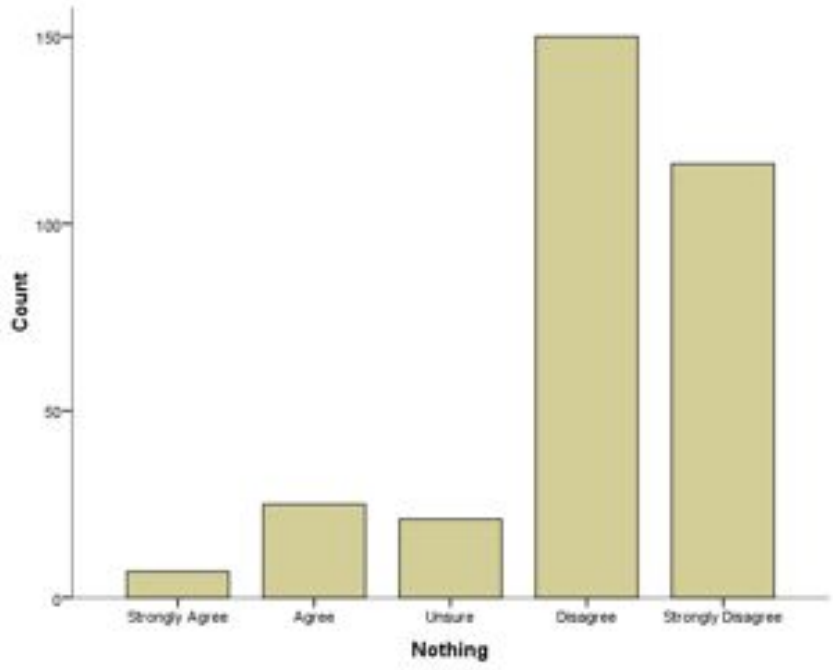

Figure 6-2: Bar Chart of Responses to Did Nothing for me *(N=319)*

Did Nothing: This was based on the statement "My work experience really did nothing for me". Student responses to this variable were broadly negative (Figure 6-2). Just 10 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. A significant 83 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with it, while just seven per cent this time remained unsure.

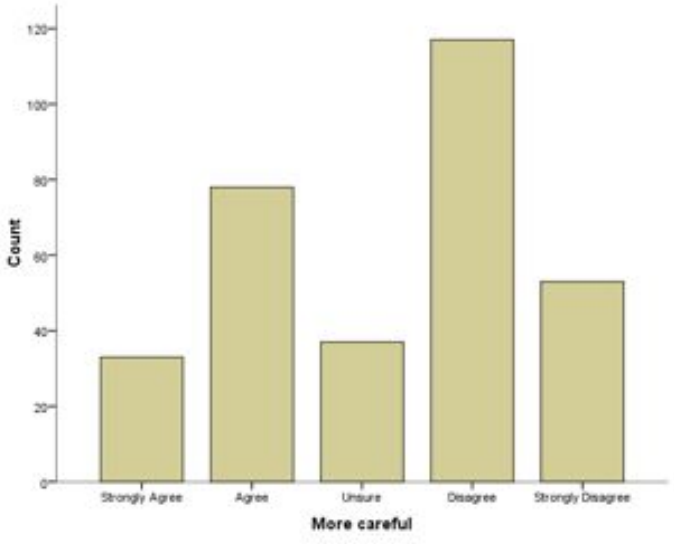

Figure 6-3: Bar Chart of Responses to More Careful Choice *(N=318)*

More Careful: Based on the statement "I should have been more careful choosing my placement". Students were marginally negative in their responses with 35 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that they should have been more careful (Figure 6-3). 54 per cent, however, disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement leaving 12 per cent of the students saying they were unsure.

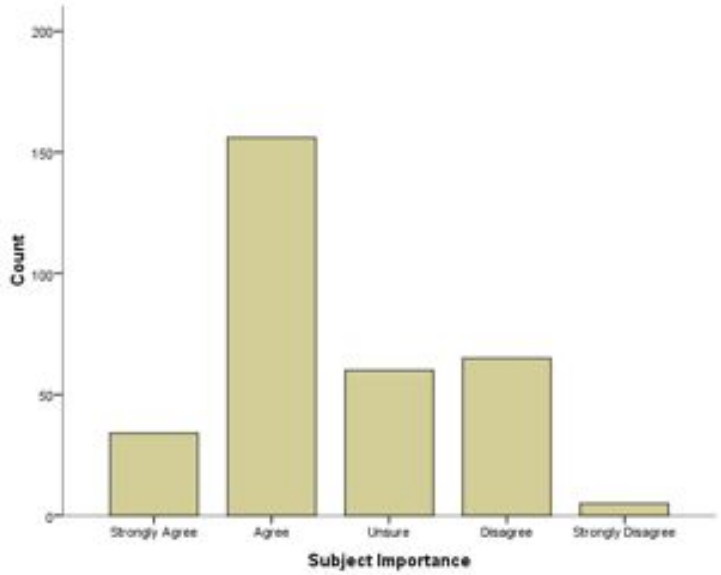

Figure 6-4: Bar Chart of Responses to Subject Importance *(N=320)*

Subject Importance: This was based on the statement "I discovered the importance/relevance of certain school subjects". A positive outcome here showed 59 per cent of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was the case (Figure 6-4). 22 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with a considerable 19 per cent claiming to be unsure whether or not they discovered the importance of certain subjects.

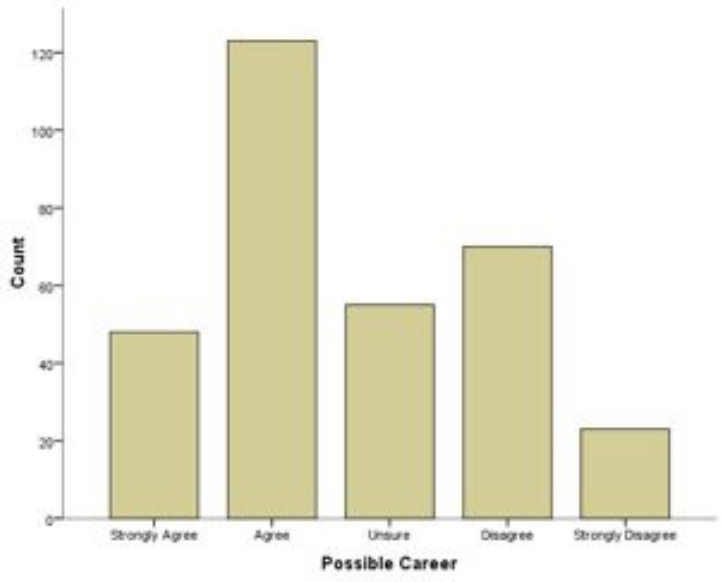

Figure 6-5: Bar Chart of Responses to Possible Career *(N=319)*

Possible Career: Based on the statement "I knew by the end of the programme that it was a possible career for me". Student responses here were generally positive with 54 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that their placement could lead to a possible career for them (Figure 6-5). 29 per cent said they disagreed or strongly disagreed while 17 per cent remained unsure.

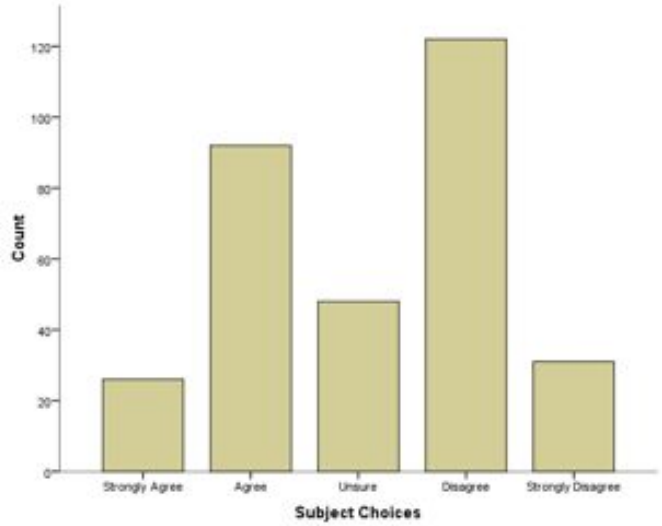

Figure 6-6: Bar Chart of Responses to Subject Choices *(N=319)*

Subject Choices: Based on the statement "My work experience helped me choose my subjects for 5th Year". A slightly negative outcome here showed 37 per cent of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement (Figure 6-6). 48 per cent of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with 15 per cent of them expressing uncertainty.

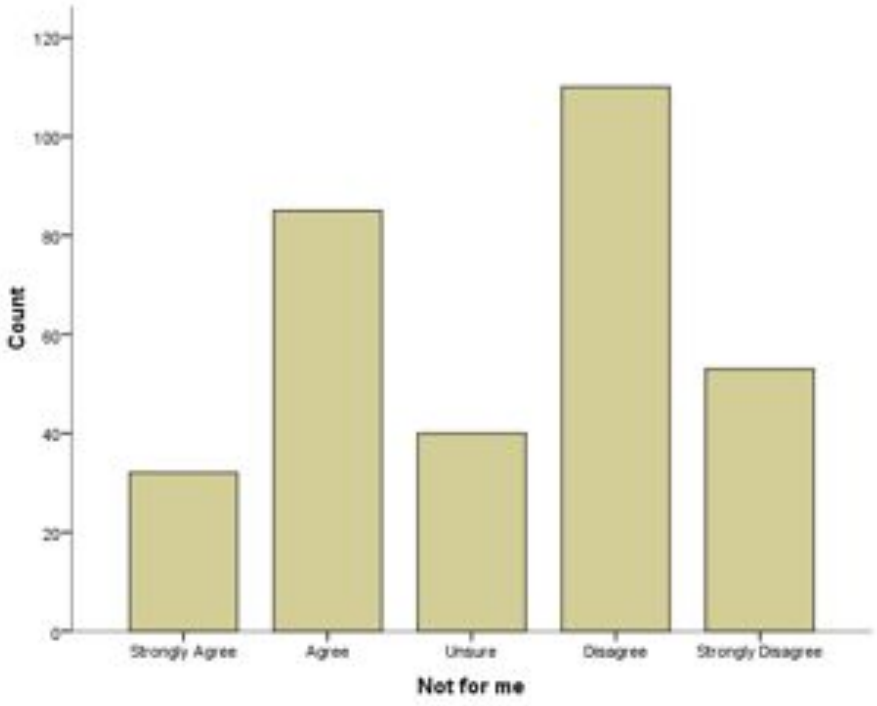

Figure 6-7: Bar Chart of Responses to Not For Me *(N=320)*

Not For Me: Based on the statement "My work experience placement put me off that particular career". Student response to this variable were marginally negative (Figure 6-7). 37 per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they were put off by their work placement. 51 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with 12 per cent of students being unsure.

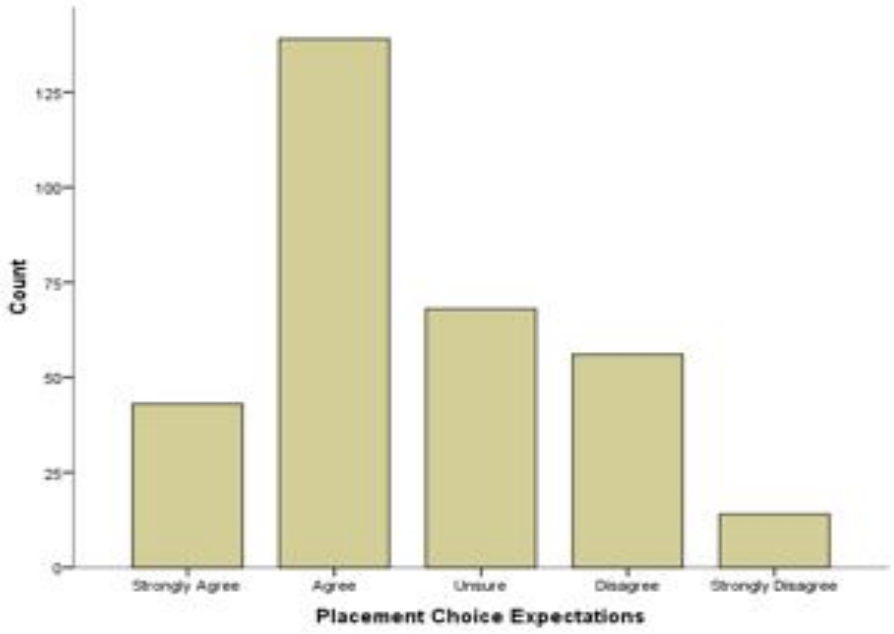

Figure 6-8: Bar Chart of Responses to Placement Choice Expectations *(N=320)*

Placement Choice Expectations: Based on the statement "When I chose my work placement, I was happy that it fitted well with my career hopes and aspirations". The response to this statement was broadly positive (Figure 6-8) with 57 per cent of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that their work placement was an appropriate choice for them. Just 22 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed while 21 per cent claimed to be unsure.

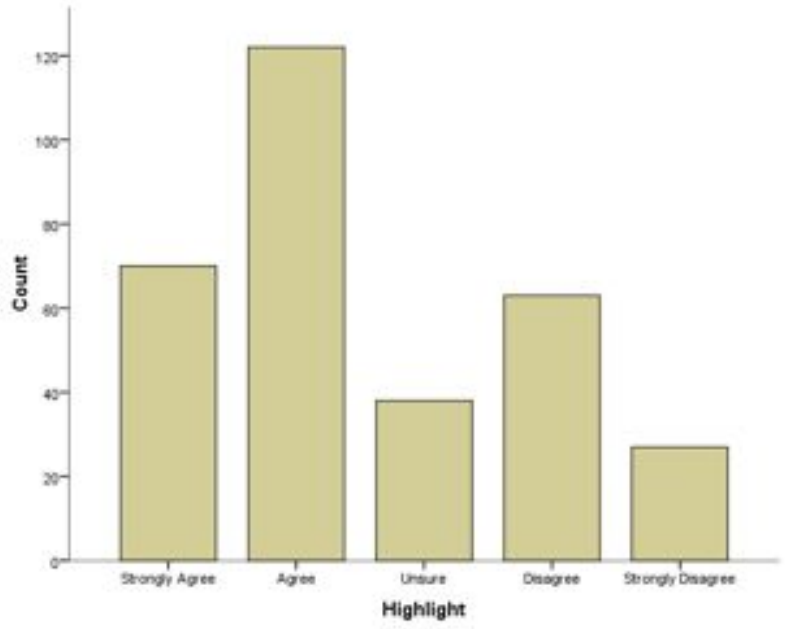

Figure 6-9: Bar Chart of Responses to Highlight of TY *(N=320)*

Highlight: Based on the statement "Work experience was one of the highlights of Transition Year". Student responses here were quite positive (Figure 6-9). 60 per cent of the students said they agreed or strongly agreed that work experience was a highlight of their TY while 28 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. 12 per cent of students were unsure on this occasion.

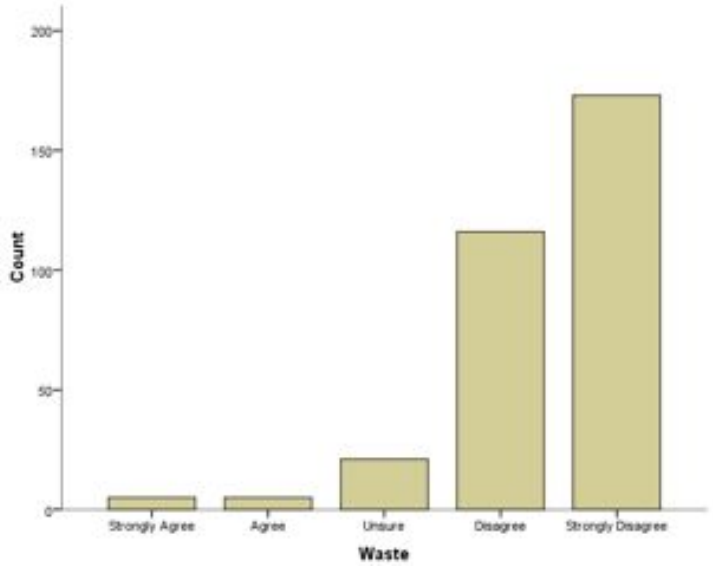

Figure 6-10: Bar Chart of Responses to Waste of time *(N=320)*

Waste: Based on the statement "Work experience is a waste of time". Student responses were very strongly negative (Figure 6-10). Just three per cent of students agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that work experience was a waste of time. 90 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed and just seven per cent were unsure.

The following charts represent students' summated responses to statements from Parts Three and Four of the questionnaire. In Part Three of the questionnaire students were asked if they believed their work experience reinforced their intention of pursuing a career in that particular field. The responses to that question were amalgamated with a similar question in Part Four which asked if their placement choice could be a possible career for them. This summated variable was labelled "Reinforced Career". The categorical PCA analysis proved this variable to be legitimate. A summary bar chart (Figure 6-11) was produced:

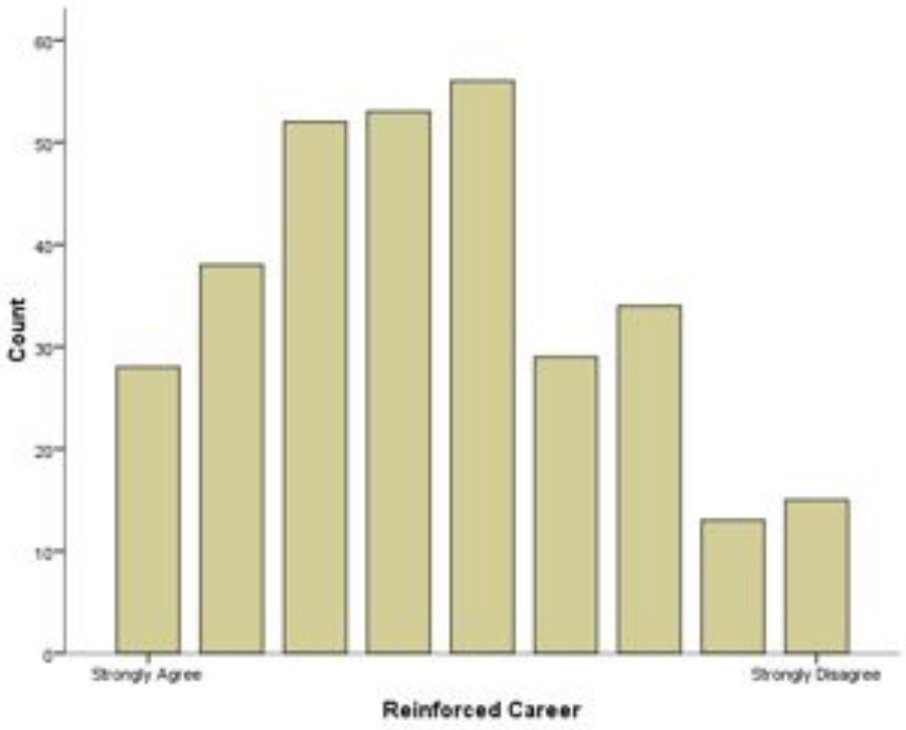

Figure 6-11: Bar Chart of Responses to Reinforced Career *(N=323)*

Student responses to this amalgamated variable proved to be positive with 54 per cent of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that their career choice was reinforced.

A second amalgamated variable was created from two questions in Part Four of the questionnaire asking students if they believed work experience did nothing for them and if they considered work experience to be a waste of time. In this case the categorical PCA also proved legitimate and a further summary bar chart (Figure 6-12) was produced:

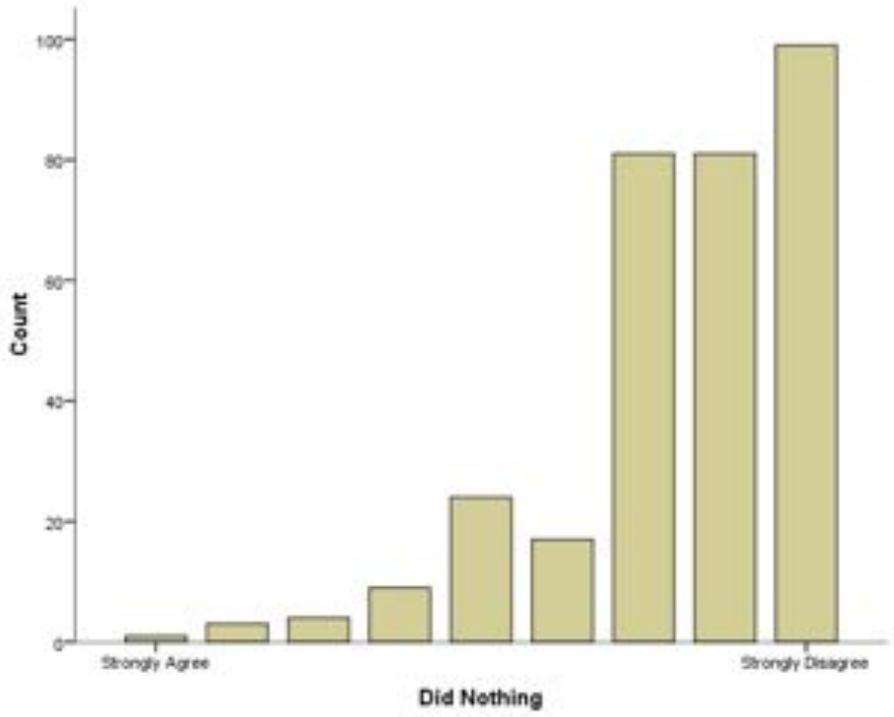

Figure 6-12: Bar Chart of Responses to Did Nothing *(N=323)*

Student responses to this amalgamated variable were strongly negative. Only 5 per cent of students agreed with this leaving the vast majority of students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the suggestion that work experience did nothing for them or indeed wasted their time.

In Part One of the questionnaire, students were asked if they had a Dream Career and immediately afterwards what they believed may be their actual career. They were asked to explain the difference if one existed. To facilitate analysis the responses were broken down by industry (Figure 6-13).

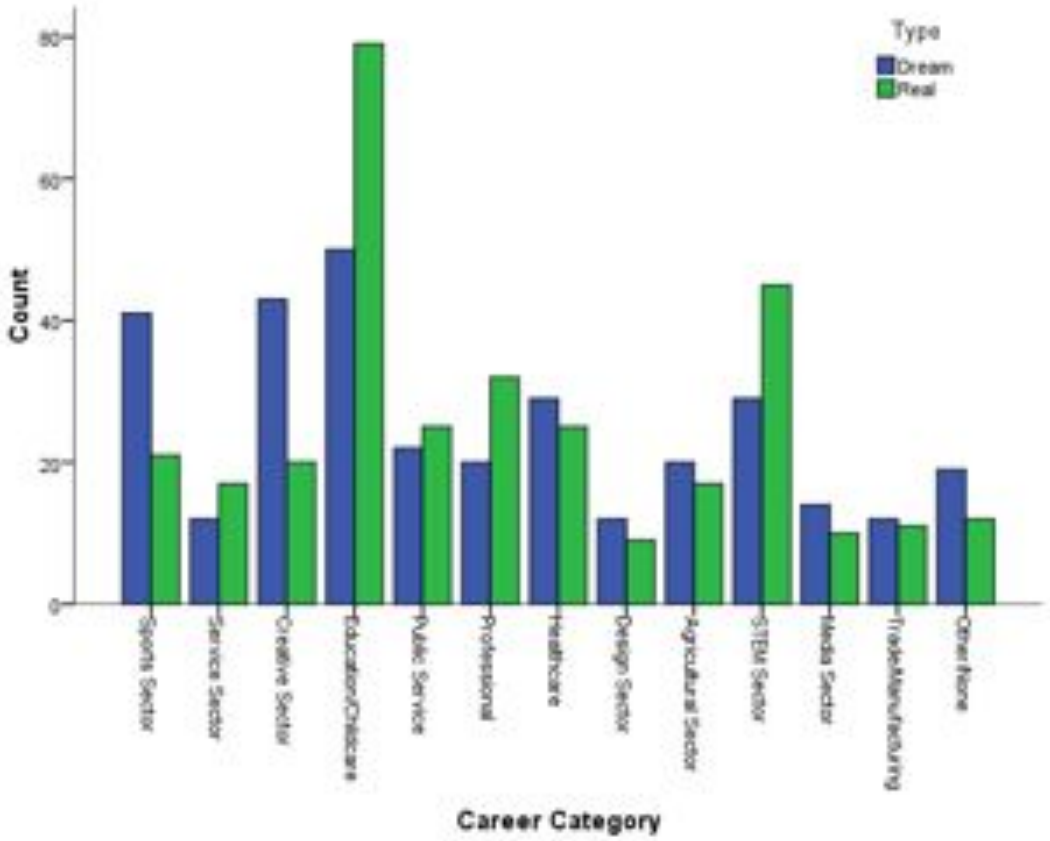

Figure 6-13: Bar Chart of Students' Dream and Realistic Jobs *(N=323)*

A significant drop in the Sports and Creative sectors between dream and realistic career choices is evident in the breakdown. The career areas attracting the greatest number of students were the Education/Childcare, STEM and Professional sectors.

It was appropriate then to examine why, in some cases, students' dream and realistic career choices were different. Not all students recorded a difference therefore the following bar chart (Figure 6-14) shows the reasons only for those who indicated that a disparity existed:

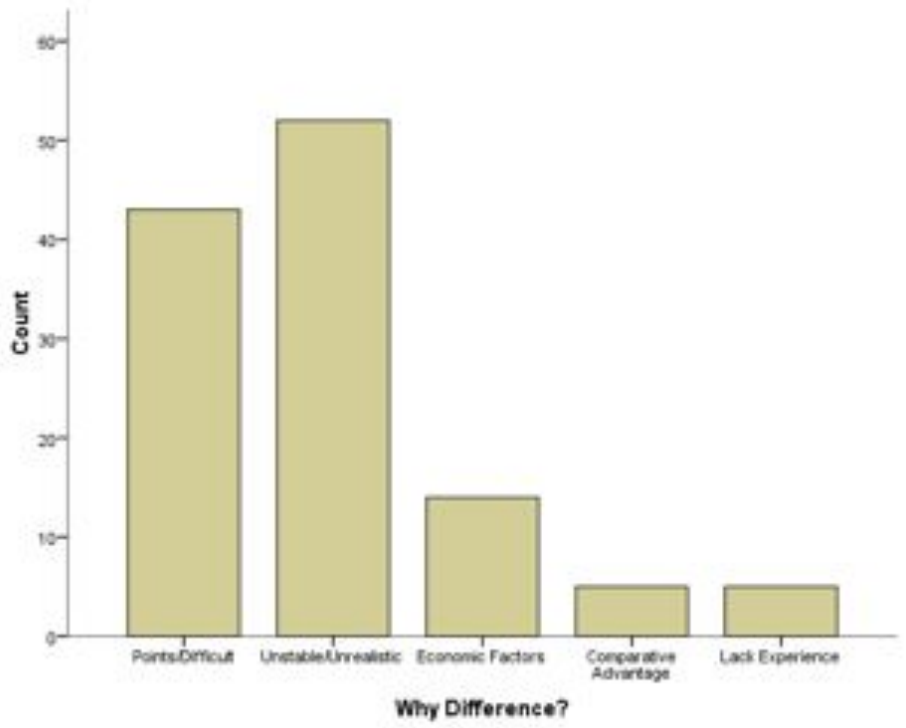

Figure 6-14: Students' Reasons for Difference between Dream and Realistic Careers *(N=119)*

37 per cent of students indicated a difference between dream and realistic careers. Of that group 75 per cent cited high points, the difficulty of the job, the unstable or unrealistic nature of that career path or current economic factors, as the key reasons for their responses.

Part Three of the survey gathered data on the types of placements chosen by students and also why they made such selections. Analysis of the responses showed the Services sector and the Education/Childcare sector to be the most popular placement choices (Fig. 6-15). While Education/Childcare already proved to be popular in the career choices above (Fig. 6-13), the emergence of the services sector was in contrast to its performance as a dream or realistic career in that same bar chart.

52 per cent of those surveyed had a second work placement during Transition Year. Most of these were clustered in the girls' school with the majority of the balance at the boy's school. The trends for the second placement (Figure 6-16) were broadly the same as for the first placement.

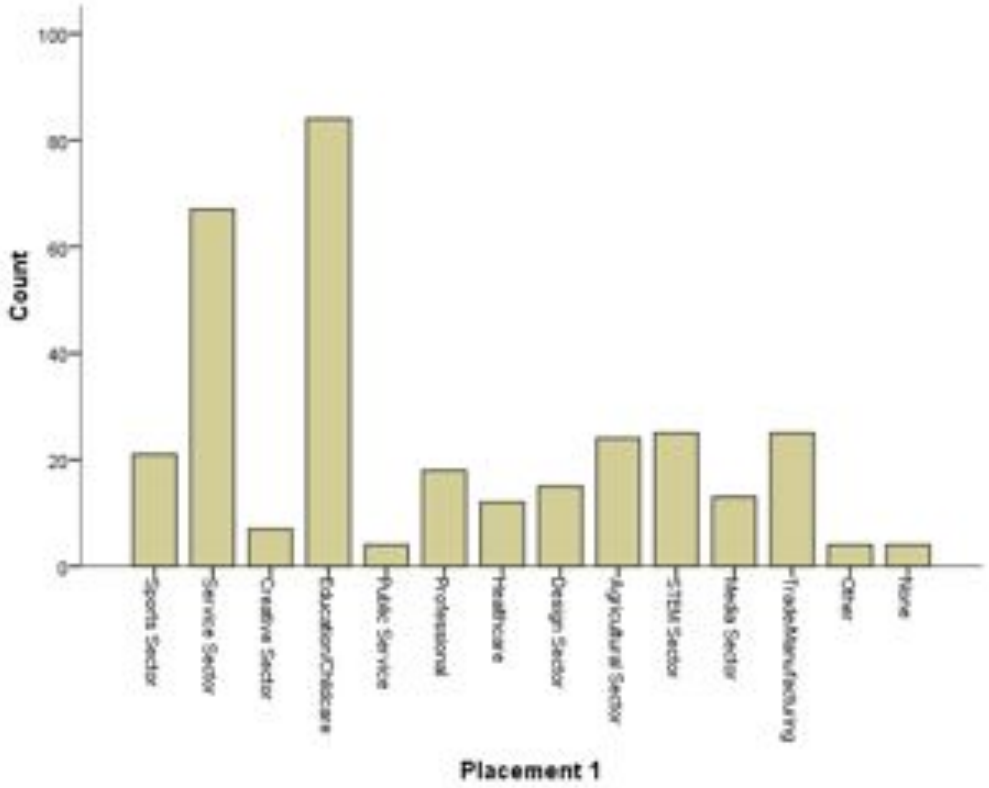

Figure 6-15: Bar Chart of Students First Work Placement *(N=323)*

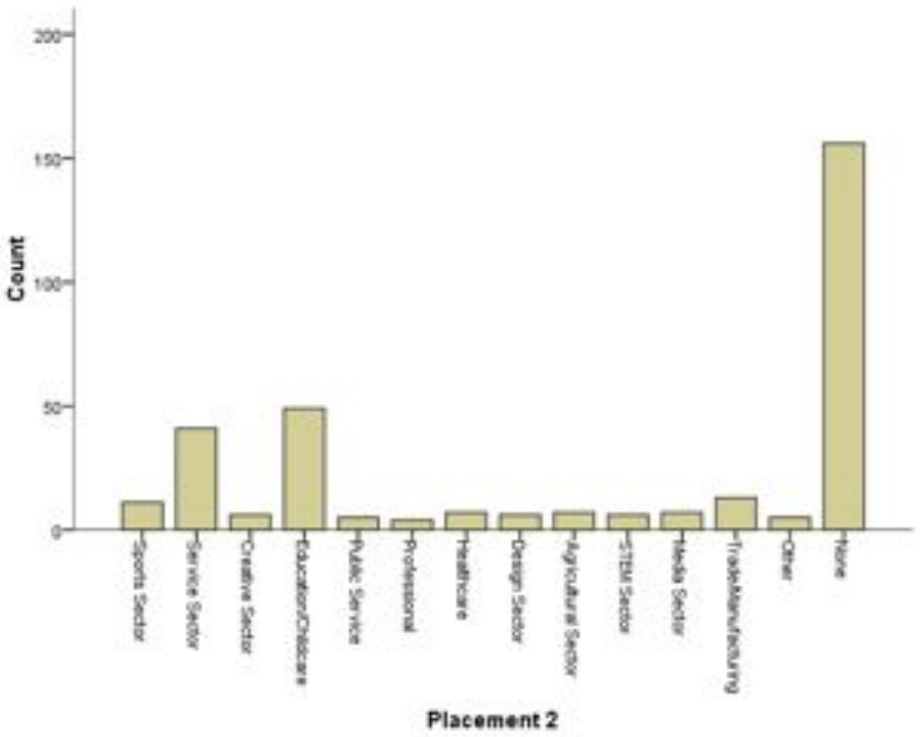

Figure 6-16: Bar Chart of Students Second Work Placement *(N=168)*

Analysis of why students chose their particular work placements (Fig. 6-17) showed that a significant majority of students (66 per cent, 205 students) claimed to have chosen their placement due to a genuine interest in that opportunity. All of the other reasons were each selected by less than 30 students with 29 students claiming "it was all they could find" as the next highest category.

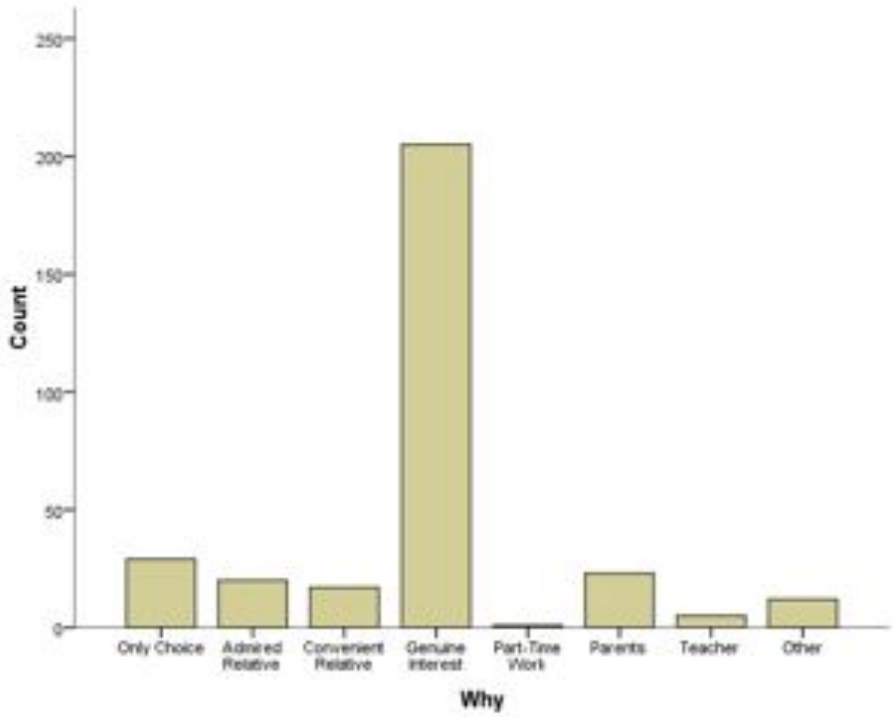

Figure 6-17: Bar Chart of Why Students Chose Work Placements

Some students were actually put off their chosen career subsequent to their experience while on placement. 37 per cent of students fell into this category. The most common reasons recorded (Fig. 6-18) were that the placement was boring, was generally un-enjoyable, gave the wrong type of experience (e.g. they were not doing the work they were interested in), the placement was too difficult, and that they had no initial interest in the placement.

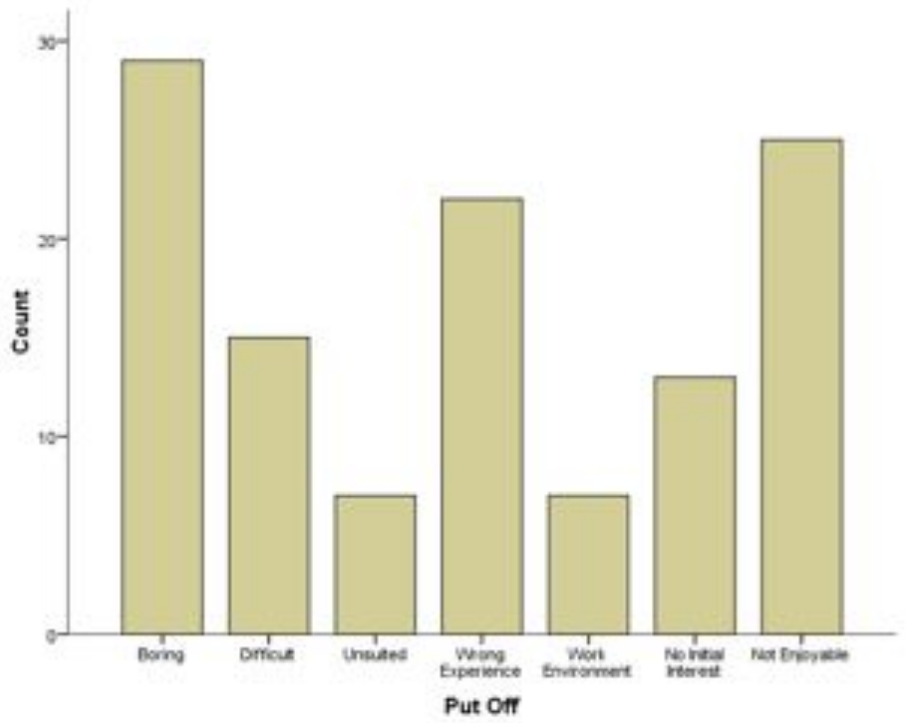

Figure 6-18: Bar Chart of Reasons for Students Dissatisfaction with Work Placement

6.4.2 Testing for the Effect of Explanatory Variables: Looking at Explanatory variables Individually.

Once the process of statistical summation was completed, an investigation of the effect of the explanatory variables was conducted. Each variable was analysed in its original ordering, that is, a low score indicated a high level of agreement while a high score indicated a low level of agreement with the statements presented to the students in the questionnaire.

As already noted, the inferential statistical aspect of the research involved seeking to understand the impact of the explanatory variables on the response variables. As is clear from the questionnaire, my data was mainly categorical (based on responses to categories in

a Likert-type scale). It was not, in the main, in the form of numbers in a continuous scale. Therefore the strict conditions set for the use of parametric statistics like t-tests (Moore and McCabe, 1989) were not fully satisfied. However, in practice, especially in the social sciences where it is often very difficult to meet the stringent criteria set, it is acceptable to apply such techniques while recognising their limitations in such contexts. Further, it is more acceptable to apply parametric tests in the case of a large data set such as the one I had. Smaller data sets are far more problematic in this regard.

To check, on the one hand, and to enhance the confidence in the analysis on the other hand, I also applied a number of non-parametric procedures like Mann-Whitney U – tests that are appropriate for the analysis of categoric data (Moore and McCabe, 1989). In such situations both parametric and non-parametric procedures tend to result in similar, if not always identical, findings.

To assess the impact of gender for instance – a binary, categorical variable – I used the conventional t-test with a significance level of 95 per cent. Significance levels refer to the confidence one can have in the finding. So if the test showed a difference that was significant (at the 95 per cent level) it followed that one could assume that should the test be repeated in similar studies one could be 95 per cent sure that the same result would occur, thus allowing one accept that it is a true difference between boys and girls for that variable and did not occur merely by chance. The Mann-Whitney U test is the corresponding non-parametric test for such categorical data. It works by establishing the ranks of the responses for each gender to generate a U statistic. A large U would indicate that one group had more higher ranked responses on the response variable than the other group and a correspondingly high probability value would feature.

As is clear from my questionnaire, several explanatory variables had more than two categories e.g. the school year. In these cases the two sample t-test would not be appropriate. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is appropriate in such circumstances (Moore and McCabe, 1989). This is a process that separates the between-group variance from the within-group variance and the ratio between both is expressed as an F statistic. The larger the F statistic the more likely it is that two of the groups are significantly different. Once again a confidence level of 95 per cent was applied. The corresponding non-parametric test is the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance (SPSS, 2012) This procedure is based on medians of the responses for each of the relevant groups and a H statistic is produced.

Some items on the questionnaire were variables based on continuous data e.g. expected leaving certificate points. These continuous explanatory variables were analysed using simple linear regression (Moore and McCabe, 1989). Basically this technique offers an estimate of the extent to which the response variable changes in line with the explanatory variable. It is expressed as a coefficient (β) and the significance is indicated. The higher the value of β the greater is the increase in the response variable with the greater is the linear relationship between the two variables and of course the greater is the confidence that one explains the other.

The eight response variables in 6.3.3 above were simplified for use in the numerical summary that follows:

1) Worthwhile (Based on Single Likert item)
2) Reinforced Career (Based on Two Summated Likert items)
3) Highlight of TY (Based on Single Likert item)
4) Did Nothing (Based on Two Summated Likert items)
5) More Careful (Based on Single Likert item)
6) Focus Career (Based on Single Likert item)
7) Subject Choice (Based on Single Likert item)

8) Put off (Based on single Likert item)

Response variable 1: Worthwhile (Had work experience been a worthwhile experience for the students?)

The first response variable examined was Worthwhile based on a single Likert item. The statement in the questionnaire was *"I believe my TY work experience was worthwhile"*. The individual analysis of binary explanatory variables effect on Worthwhile (Table 6-1) demonstrated that Gender and Placement Would Fit (When I chose my work placement, I was happy that it fitted with my career hopes and aspirations) had the most noteworthy effect on Worthwhile ($p<0.01$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests).

Table 6-1 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Worthwhile

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	-1.902	-2.143*	14-16 – 17-19 (-0.43,0.01)
Gender	3.301**	3.229**	Male - Female (0.14, 0.56)
Dream = Realistic Job	2.217*	2.115*	D =/=R – D=R Job (0.03,0.45)
Definite Career	-0.365	-0.830	Yes – No (-0.25,0.17)
Low Self Esteem	1.224	1.021	Agree - Disagree (-0.12, 0.52)
Placement Would Fit	[1]-5.685**	-5.884**	Agree – Disagree (-0.82,-0.41)
Early Career Idea	-1.854	-2.207*	Agree – Disagree (-0.43, 0.13)
Uncertain Future	1.070	1.171	Agree – Disagree (-0.14, 0.47)
Parents Plan Future	[1]1.918	1.956	Agree – Disagree (-0.07, 1.48)
Want College	-2.196*	-2.158*	Agree – Disagree (-0.71, -0.04)

* = $p<0.05$, ** = $p<0.01$, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

It showed males more likely than females to disagree with the statement that work experience was worthwhile. Those who believed their placement fitted their aspirations were shown to be more likely to find their work experience worthwhile. The next most significant variables (on both tests) were "Dream = Realistic job", where students whose dream and

realistic jobs were equal, were more likely to agree that work experience was worthwhile, and Want College (I really want to go to college after school) where students who agreed with this statement were more likely to agree that work experience was worthwhile. Two other variables were significant on the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test but not on the independent T-test. "Age" showed older students being less likely to agree that work experience was worthwhile and "Early career idea" (I have had definite ideas about my career since I was a young child) where students who believed this were more likely to agree that work experience was worthwhile. The remaining binary explanatory variables were not significant.

Further analyses on Worthwhile were conducted on categorical variables with more than two levels (Table 6-2). The individual analysis of non-binary explanatory variables on Worthwhile showed that school attended, school year in which students found themselves, and why they chose their placement, had a significant effect on this variable ($p<0.05$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests).

Table 6-2 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Worthwhile

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	7.656**	12.658**	Girls – Co-Ed (-0.81, -0.19)** Girls – Boys (-0.65, -.01)* Co-Ed – Boys (-0.14, 0.48)
School Year	4.468*	6.920*	TY - 5th Year (-0.58,0.04) TY – 6th Year (-0.70, -0.06)* 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.21, 0.43)
Why Chose Placement	28.343**	43.015**	No Choice–Existing Relationship (0.21, 1.09)** No Choice – Genuine Interest (0.65, 1.26)** Relationship – Genuine Interest (-0.06, 0.68)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Post-hoc analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the girls' school and both the co-educational and boys' school with the students attending the girls' school to be more likely than those in the other two schools to agree that work experience was

worthwhile. No significant difference between the boys' school and the co-educational school was apparent. In terms of school year, there was a significant difference between students in TY and students in 6th Year with TY students being more likely to consider work experience worthwhile. There was no significant difference between the 5th Years and the other two years. Post hoc analysis of why the placement was chosen showed a significant difference between those who believed they had "no other choice" and those who either chose their placement due to an existing relationship or out of genuine interest. Those believing they had no other choice were less likely to agree that work experience was worthwhile.

An analysis of the effect of continuous explanatory variables (Table 6-3) showed that students who performed well in their Junior Certificate Examinations were more likely to agree that work experience was worthwhile than those who performed less well.

Table 6-3 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Worthwhile

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	2.926**	-0.016**	0.038
Expected Leaving Cert Points	2.197**	-0.065*	0.013
High Self-Esteem	1.527**	0.034	0.004
Not Confident of College	2.646**	-.0110**	0.036

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

A one point increase in Junior Certificate "points" (based largely on Leaving Certificate CAO points system, see Appendix H for units) led to a decrease in Worthwhile of 0.016. It also showed that a single unit increase in a student being confident of going on to third level (a higher score meaning more confident of going to college) led to a decrease of 0.0110 in Worthwhile. In other words, students who were more confident of going to third level were more likely to agree that work experience was worthwhile.

Response variable 2: Reinforced Career (Had work experience reinforced students intentions to follow that career path?)

The second response variable examined was Reinforced Career, based on two summated Likert items. The statements in the questionnaire were *"I believe my work experience reinforced my intention to pursue a career in the field that I chose for my work placement"* and *"I knew by the end of the programme that it was a possible career for me"*. In this case the individual analysis of binary explanatory variables (Table 6-4) demonstrated that Gender, Dream = Realistic Job, Definite Career, Placement Would Fit, Early Career Idea and Uncertain Future had the most significant effect ($p<0.01$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests with the exception of dream=realistic job which was significant at 5 per cent level of significance on the non- parametric Mann-Whitney U Test).

Table 6-4 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Reinforced Career

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	-2.559*	-2.536*	14-16 – 17-19 (-1.12,-0.15)
Gender	3.282**	3.536**	Male - Female (0.31,1.25)
Dream = Realistic Job	[1]3.001**	2.536*	D =/=R – D=R Job (0.25,1.19)
Definite Career	[1]-2.643**	-2.944**	Yes – No (-1.10,-0.17)
Low Self Esteem	1.223	1.122	Agree - Disagree (-0.27, 1.16)
Placement Would Fit	-10.816**	-9.365**	Agree – Disagree (-2.66,-1.84)
Early Career Idea	-3.703**	-3.430**	Agree – Disagree (-1.38, -0.42)
Uncertain Future	[1]3.146**	3.038**	Agree – Disagree (0.33, 1.45)
Parents Plan Future	-0.708	-0.611	Agree – Disagree (-1.40, 0.66)
Want College	-0.006	-0.075	Agree – Disagree (-0.74, 0.74)

* = $p<0.05$, ** = $p<0.01$, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

Males were shown to be more likely than females to disagree that work experience had reinforced their intentions to pursue their work experience placement career path. Students were more likely to agree that work experience reinforced their chosen career path when their dream and realistic jobs were the same. Students with pre-existing ideas regarding

future occupations were also more likely to agree that their career ideas were reinforced following their work placement. Students who believed their placements fitted well with their career hopes and aspirations were more likely to agree that work experience reinforced their considered career path. The same applied to students who had ideas about their careers from a very early age. Some students expressed uncertainty about their future career paths and these were more likely to disagree that their career notions were reinforced subsequent to their formal work placement. Age proved to be significant at the 5 per cent level of confidence with younger students being more likely to agree that work experience had helped reinforce their career ideas.

Categorical variables with more than two levels were analysed (Table 6-5). School, School Year and Why Chose Placement were shown to have a significant effect ($p<0.05$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests) following the individual analysis of non-binary explanatory variables effect on Reinforced Career.

Table 6-5 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Reinforced Career

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	11.452**	22.150**	Girls – Co-Ed (-2.03, -0.66)** Girls – Boys (-1.65, -0.22)** Co-Ed – Boys (-0.2708, 1.08)
School Year	4.658*	8.881*	TY - 5th Year (-1.41, -0.03)* TY – 6th Year (-1.52, -0.10)* 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.79, 0.62)
Why Chose Placement	22.217**	35.501**	No Choice–Existing Relationship (-0.01, 2.01) No Choice – Genuine Interest (1.23, 2.67)** Relationship – Genuine Interest (0.10, 1.80)*

* = $p<0.05$, ** = $p<0.01$

Post-hoc analysis showed that for School, the difference between the girls' school and both the boys' and co-educational school was significant. The students from the girls' school

were more likely to agree with the statement that work experience did actually reinforce their intention to pursue the careers chosen for their work placements. No significant difference between the boys' school and the co-educational school was evident. Post hoc analysis of why the placement was chosen showed that there was a significant difference between students who selected their placement based on a genuine interest in that career and both students who chose it because of existing relationships (i.e. relatives or part-time work) and students who felt they had no choice. Those with a genuine interest were shown to be more likely to agree that their work experience had reinforced their intention to follow their work placement career. No significant difference was evident between those who chose their placement due to an existing relationship and those who believed they had no choice.

Analysis of the effect of the continuous explanatory variables (Table 6-6) showed that none of these variables had any significant effect on Reinforced Career.

Table 6-6 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Reinforced Career

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	6.244**	-0.011	0.004
Expected Leaving Cert Points	5.943**	-0.074	0.004
High Self-Esteem	4.977**	0.065	0.003
Not Confident of College	4.791**	-0.074	0.003

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Response variable 3: Highlight of TY (Had work experience been a personal highlight of Transition Year)

Response variable three was based on a single Likert item. The statement in the questionnaire was *"Work experience was one of the highlights of Transition Year"*. The individual analysis of binary explanatory variables effect on Highlight of TY (**Table 6-**) showed that "Dream = Realistic Job", Definite Career, Placement Would Fit, and Early

Career Idea had the most significant effect ($p<0.05$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests) on Highlight of TY.

Table 6-7 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Highlight of TY

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	-1.240	-1.365	14-16 – 17-19 (-0.47,0.11)
Gender	1.873	1.947	Male - Female (-0.013,0.539)
Dream = Realistic Job	2.810**	2.993**	D =/=R – D=R Job (0.12,0.67)
Definite Career	-2.414*	-2.673**	Yes – No (-0.61,-0.06)
Low Self Esteem	1.494	1.513	Agree - Disagree (-0.10, 0.74)
Placement Would Fit	[1]-6.103**	-5.875**	Agree – Disagree (-1.10,-0.57)
Early Career Idea	[1]-3.857**	-3.920**	Agree – Disagree (-0.81, -0.27)
Uncertain Future	1.417	1.441	Agree – Disagree (-0.11, 0.67)
Parents Plan Future	-0.531	-0.851	Agree – Disagree (-0.77, 0.44)
Want College	-0.886	-0.950	Agree – Disagree (-0.62, 0.24)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

Where dream and realistic jobs were the same, those students were more likely to agree that work experience was a highlight of Transition Year (TY). Similarly, students who already had a definite career idea, who believed the placement was a good fit, and those who had a career idea since early childhood were all more likely to agree that work experience was a highlight of TY. All remaining variables were not significant.

Categorical variables with more than two levels were analysed.

Table 6-8 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Highlight of TY

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	8.885**	15.836**	Girls – Co-Ed (-1.10, -0.29)** Girls – Boys (-0.71, 0.13) Co-Ed – Boys (0.01, 0.81)*
School Year	0.982	2.160	TY – 5th Year (-0.65, 0.17) TY – 6th Year (-0.54, 0.30) 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.30, 0.54)
Why Chose Placement	13.116**	35.501**	No Choice–Existing Relationship (0.27,1.50)** No Choice – Genuine Interest (0.49, 1.36)** Relationship – Genuine Interest (-0.48, 0.56)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

The individual analysis of non-binary explanatory variables effect on Highlight of TY (Table 6-8) showed that the two variables, School and Why Chose Placement, had a significant effect ($p<0.05$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests). A Post-hoc analysis demonstrated that for School, there was a significant difference between the girls' school and the co-educational school with the students in the girls' school being more likely to agree that work experience was a highlight of TY. Additionally there was a significant difference between the co-educational school and the all boys' school showing the students from the co-educational school being more unlikely to agree that work experience was a highlight of their TY. Post-hoc analysis of Why Chose Placement showed that a significant difference existed between those students who chose their placement because they had no choice and both students who chose it through existing relationships and out of genuine interest. Those who believed they had no choice were less likely to agree that work experience was a highlight of their Transition Year. No significant difference was found between those who chose their work placement through an existing relationship and those

who had a genuine interest in that career. School year was found to have no significant effect on whether or not work experience was a highlight of TY.

Continuous explanatory variables were analysed (Table 6.9)

Table 6-9 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Highlight of TY

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	2.893**	-0.004	0.002
Expected Leaving Cert Points	2.711**	-0.023	0.001
High Self-Esteem	1.815**	0.110**	0.028
Not Confident of College	2.448**	-0.010	0.000

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

The analysis of the effect of the continuous explanatory variables showed High Self-Esteem to have a significant effect on students' perceptions of work experience as a highlight of their TY. Students with high self-esteem were more likely to agree with the statement that their experience in the workplace was a highlight for them.

Response variable 4: Did Nothing (Did students believe work experience had done nothing for them?)

Response variable four was based on the summation of two Likert items. The statements in the questionnaire were *"Work experience really did nothing for me"* and *"Work experience is a waste of time"*. Individual analysis of binary explanatory variables effect on Did Nothing (Table 6-10) revealed that Gender, "Dream = Realistic Job", Definite Career, Low Self-esteem, Placement Would Fit, Early Career Idea, and Uncertain Future had the most significant effect (p<0.05 on parametric and non-parametric tests) on Did Nothing.

Table 6-10 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Did Nothing

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	1.754	1.909	14-16 – 17-19 (-0.04, 0.68)
Gender	[1]-3.414**	2.882**	Male - Female (-0.93,-0.25)
Dream = Realistic Job	-2.904**	-2.815**	D =/=R – D=R Job (-0.84, -0.16)
Definite Career	2.358*	3.157**	Yes – No (0.07, 0.75)
Low Self Esteem	-2.186*	-2.101*	Agree - Disagree (-1.09, -0.06)
Placement Would Fit	[1]-6.158**	-6.456**	Agree – Disagree (0.73, 1.39)
Early Career Idea	-2.274*	-3.020**	Agree – Disagree (0.05, 0.76)
Uncertain Future	-3.861**	-3.479**	Agree – Disagree (-1.41, -0.46)
Parents Plan Future	-0.125	-0.019	Agree – Disagree (-0.79, 0.70)
Want College	1.975*	1.671	Agree – Disagree (0.00, 1.06)

* = $p<0.05$, ** = $p<0.01$, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

Males proved to be more likely than females to agree that work experience was a waste of time. Students whose dream and realistic jobs were the same were less likely to agree that work experience was a waste of time. Equally, students with a definite career in mind, those who believed their work placement fitted their career aspirations, and those who had career ideas since early childhood all were less likely to believe that work experience was a waste of time. However, students with low self-esteem were more likely to believe that work experience was a waste as did those students who expressed uncertainty about their future careers. Want College (referring to students who wanted to go to college) was significant at the 5 per cent significance level in the parametric test but not in the non-parametric test.

An analysis of categorical variables with more than two levels was conducted. The individual analysis of non-binary explanatory variables' effect on the summated variable Did Nothing (Table 6-11) revealed that School, School Year and Why Chose Placement, all had a significant effect ($p<0.05$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests).

Table 6-11 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Did Nothing

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	6.319**	11.434**	Girls – Co-Ed (0.16, 1.17)** Girls – Boys (0.14, 1.19)** Co-Ed – Boys (-0.50,0.50)
School Year	4.755**	7.962*	TY - 5th Year (0.13, 1.13)** TY – 6th Year (-0.32, 0.71) 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.95, 0.08)
Why Chose Placement	22.047**	29.455**	No Choice–Existing Relationship(-1.89,-0.47)** No Choice – Genuine Interest (-1.91, -0.89)** Relationship – Genuine Interest (-0.81, 0.38)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Post-hoc analysis proved that for School, the difference between the girls' school and both the co-educational school and the boys' school were significant. The students from the all girls' school were more likely than the other two school types, not to agree that work experience was a waste of time. No significant difference was discovered between the boys' school and the co-educational school. For School Year, post-hoc analysis showed that there was a significant difference between Transition Year and 5th Year with TY students being less likely to agree that work experience was a waste of time. No significant difference presented between 5th Year and the other two years. Post-hoc analysis of Why Chose Placement did show a significant difference between the students who felt they had no choice selecting their work placement and both those who chose it through an existing relationship (i.e. through relatives or part-time work) and students who had a genuine interest in that particular field of work. Those who believed they had no choice were shown to be more likely to agree with the idea that work experience was a waste of time. For those who chose their placement due to an existing relationship or due to a genuine interest, no significant difference was apparent.

Analysis of the effect of the continuous explanatory variables (Table 6-12) showed High Self-esteem and Not Confident of College to have a significant effect on Did Nothing.

Table 6-12 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Did Nothing

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	7.351**	0.015	0.013
Expected Leaving Cert Points	7.907**	0.083	0.008
High Self-Esteem	9.409**	-0.140**	0.029
Not Confident of College	7.563**	0.113*	0.015

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Those with high self-esteem were less likely to agree that work experience was a waste of time, while those who were lacking confidence in their ability to go to college were shown to be more likely to agree that it was a waste of time.

Response variable 5: More Careful (Were students happy with how they had chosen their placement?)

Response variable five was based on a single Likert item. The statement in the questionnaire was *"I should have been more careful choosing my placement"*. The individual analysis of the binary explanatory variables effect on More Careful (Table 6-13) showed that Dream = Realistic Job, Placement Would Fit, Early Career Idea, and Uncertain Future had the most significant effect (p<0.05 on parametric and non-parametric tests) on this variable.

Table 6-13 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on More Careful

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	1.501	1.453	14-16 – 17-19 (-0.07, 0.52)
Gender	-1.603	-1.585	Male - Female (-0.51, 0.05)
Dream = Realistic Job	-2.185*	-2.214*	D =/=R – D=R Job (-0.59, -0.03)
Definite Career	[1]1.419	1.663	Yes – No (-0.08, 0.48)
Low Self Esteem	-0.359	-0.357	Agree - Disagree (-0.51, 0.35)
Placement Would Fit	[1]8.407**	7.665**	Agree – Disagree (0.85, 1.36)
Early Career Idea	2.944**	3.046**	Agree – Disagree (0.14, 0.72)
Uncertain Future	-2.830**	-2.695**	Agree – Disagree (-0.96, -0.17)
Parents Plan Future	-0.251	-0.155	Agree – Disagree (-0.71, 0.55)
Want College	[1]1.359	1.543	Agree – Disagree (-0.13, 0.73)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

Where students' dream and realistic jobs were the same these students were less likely to agree that they should have been more careful when it came to selecting their placements. Students who believed their placements fitted with their career goals and aspirations were less likely to agree that they should have been more careful with their placement choice. Students who had career ideas since early childhood were also less likely to agree that more care should have been taken with placement choice while those who were uncertain about their future were more likely to agree that they should have been more careful in their selection. All other variables were not significant.

Categorical variables with more than two levels were analysed (Table 6-14).

Table 6-14 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on More Careful

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	0.029	0.139	Girls – Co-Ed (-0.46, 0.38) Girls – Boys (-0.46, 0.42) Co-Ed – Boys (-0.38, 0.44)
School Year	3.786*	7.156*	TY – 5th Year (0.01, 0.83)* TY – 6th Year (-0.02, 0.84) 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.42, 0.43)
Why Chose Placement	17.092**	27.939**	No Choice–Existing Relationship(-1.33,-0.11)* No Choice – Genuine Interest (-1.50, -0.62)** Relationship – Genuine Interest (-0.86, 0.18)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

The individual analysis of non-binary explanatory variables effect on More Careful revealed that both School Year and Why Chose Placement had a significant effect ($p<0.05$ on both parametric and non-parametric tests). Post-hoc analysis showed that for School Year there was a significant difference between Transition Year and 5th Year. Students in transition Year were less likely to agree that they should have been more careful choosing their placements than their next more senior counterparts. There was no significant difference between 6th Year students and the other two year groups though the difference between 6th Years and Transition Year was almost significant with TY students being less likely to agree. A significant difference was highlighted between students who chose their work placements because they had no choice and both students who chose due to an existing relationship (relative or part-time work) and students with a genuine interest in that placement in the Post-hoc analysis of Why Chose Placement. Those who believed they had no choice were more likely to agree that they should have been more careful I their selection. No significant difference was evident between those who chose their placement due to existing relationships and those who chose out of genuine interest. School type had no effect on the variable More Careful.

Continuous explanatory variables were analysed next (Table 6-15).

Table 6-15 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on More Careful

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	2.802**	0.006	0.003
Expected Leaving Cert Points	3.014**	0.035	0.002
High Self-Esteem	3.715**	-0.070	0.011
Not Confident of College	3.218**	0.004	0.000

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

None of the continuous explanatory variables were shown to have any significant effect on More Careful.

Response Variable 6: Focus Career (Had work experience made students focus more on their future career choices?)

Response variable six was based on a single Likert item. The statement in the questionnaire was *"My work experience helped me focus on my future career"*. Subsequent to the individual analysis of binary explanatory variables on Focus Career (Table 6-16), it was shown that Gender, "Dream = Realistic Job", Definite Career, Low Self-esteem, Placement Would fit, Early Career Idea and Uncertain Future were the variables with the most significant effect (p<0.05 on both parametric and non-parametric tests).

Table 6-16 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Focus Career

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	-1.058	-1.265	14-16 – 17-19 (-0.37, 0.11)
Gender	[1]3.396**	3.186**	Male - Female (0.164, 0.62)
Dream = Realistic Job	[1]2.327*	-2.123*	D =/=R – D=R Job (0.04, 0.50)
Definite Career	-4.751**	-4.936**	Yes – No (-0.76, -0.31)
Low Self Esteem	2.013*	1.998*	Agree - Disagree (0.01, 0.70)
Placement Would Fit	-7.732**	-7.123**	Agree – Disagree (-1.05, -0.62)
Early Career Idea	-2.810**	-3.065**	Agree – Disagree (-0.57, -0.10)
Uncertain Future	4.303**	4.009**	Agree – Disagree (0.37, 1.00)
Parents Plan Future	1.414	1.158	Agree – Disagree (-0.14, 0.85)
Want College	-0.129	-0.004	Agree – Disagree (-0.38, 0.33)

* = $p<0.05$, ** = $p<0.01$, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

Regarding Gender, male students proved to be less likely to agree that work experience helped them focus on their future career. Students whose dream and realistic careers were the same were more likely to agree that their placement helped them focus on that career as a future possibility. Likewise, students with a definite career in mind were more likely to agree with that statement. Students with low self-esteem were more likely to disagree that work experience helped them with their future career focus. Both students who believed their experience fitted their career goals and aspirations and students who had career ideas from an early age were more likely to agree that their future career focus was facilitated by time spent on placement. The remaining four variables were not significant.

Categorical variables with more than two levels were analysed (Table 6-17). The individual analysis of non-binary explanatory variables' effect on Career Focus showed that the most significant effect ($p>0.05$ on parametric and non-parametric tests) on this variable was from School and Why Chose Placement.

Table 6-17 Table of Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Focus Career

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	3.365*	6.329*	Girls – Co-Ed (-0.69, -0.02)* Girls – Boys (-0.62, 0.08) Co-Ed – Boys (-0.25, 0.42)
School Year	1.263	3.380	TY – 5th Year (-0.55, 0.12) TY – 6th Year (-0.50, 0.20) 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.28, 0.41)
Why Chose Placement	20.871**	27.939**	No Choice–Existing Relationship(0.20,1.17)** No Choice – Genuine Interest (0.59, 1.28)** Relationship – Genuine Interest (-0.66, 0.16)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Post-hoc analysis of School showed a significant difference between the girls' school and the co-educational school with the students from the girls' school being more likely to accept that work experience helped with their future career focus. The students from the girls' school were also more likely to agree with that statement than the students in the all boys' school, though by a narrow margin. No difference was evident between the boys' school and the co-educational school students. Post-hoc analysis of Why Chose Placement presented a significant difference between students who chose their work placement believing they had no choice and both those who chose it through existing relationships (relatives or part-time work) and students with a genuine interest in their placement. Those who believed they had no choice were less likely to agree that work experience helped their future career focus. No significant difference between those who chose their placement through existing relationships and those with a genuine interest was apparent. School year attended by students showed no significant effect on Focus Career.

Continuous explanatory variables were analysed (Table 6-18).

Table 6-18 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Focus Career

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	2.391**	<0.001	0.000
Expected Leaving Cert Points	2.605**	-0.030	0.002
High Self-Esteem	1.976**	0.063*	0.013
Not Confident of College	2.619**	-0.029	0.002

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

In this analysis high self-esteem was shown to have a significant effect on Focus Career. Students who indicated possessing high self-esteem were more likely to agree that their time spent on work placement helped their future career focus.

Response Variable 7: Subject Choice. (Did work experience help students choose their subjects for 5th Year?)

Response variable seven was based on a single Likert-type scale item. The statement in the questionnaire was "*My work experience helped me choose my subjects for 5th Year*". The individual analysis of the binary explanatory variables effect on Subject Choice showed that Definite Career, Placement Would Fit and Uncertain Future were significant (Table 6-19).

Table 6-19 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Subject Choice

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	-1.647	-1.665	14-16 – 17-19 (-0.49, 0.04)
Gender	1.925	1.924	Male - Female (-0.06, 0.51)
Dream = Realistic Job	[1]1.820	1.755	D =/=R – D=R Job (-0.02, 0.50)
Definite Career	[1]-3.062**	-2.902**	Yes – No (-0.65, -0.14)
Low Self Esteem	-0.130	-0.130	Agree - Disagree (-0.42, 0.37)
Placement Would Fit	[1]-7.633**	-7.072**	Agree – Disagree (-1.17,-0.69)
Early Career Idea	-1.586	-1.642	Agree – Disagree (-0.48, 0.05)
Uncertain Future	3.726**	3.709**	Agree – Disagree (0.32, 1.03)
Parents Plan Future	-0.870	-0.910	Agree – Disagree (-0.81, 0.31)
Want College	-0.921	-0.851	Agree – Disagree (-0.58, 0.21)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

Both students with definite career ideas and those who believed their work placement was suited to their career hopes and aspirations were more likely to believe that their work experience influenced their 5th Year subject choices. Those who expressed uncertainty about their futures were less likely to agree with this. All other variables in this instance were not significant.

Categorical variables with more than two levels were analysed (Table 6-20)

Table 6-20 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Subject Choice

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	0.814	1.816	Girls – Co-Ed (-0.55, 0.22) Girls – Boys (-0.60, 0.20) Co-Ed – Boys (-0.41, 0.35)
School Year	1.437	3.217	TY - 5th Year (-0.37,0.39) TY – 6th Year (-0.64, 0.14) 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.20, 0.12)
Why Chose Placement	9.915**	19.083**	No Choice–Existing Relationship (-0.08, 1.07) No Choice – Genuine Interest (0.34, 1.17)** Relationship – Genuine Interest (-0.22, 0.75)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Why Chose Placement was shown to be significant. Where students made their work placement selections based on a genuine interest in that career, these students were more likely to agree that work experience influenced their 5th Year subject choices. School and school Year were not shown to have any significant effect.

The continuous explanatory variables were analysed (Table 6-21)

Table 6-21 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Subject Choice

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	3.428**	-0.004	0.002
Expected Leaving Cert Points	3.750**	-0.090*	0.018
High Self-Esteem	2.815**	0.047	0.006
Not Confident of College	3.328**	-0.026	0.001

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Following this analysis, Expected Leaving Certificate performance was revealed to have a significant effect on subject choice. Students who had high expectations of their performance in the Leaving Certificate Examination were more likely to believe that work experience had influenced their subject choice compared to those who expressed less confidence in their ability to perform in the terminal examination.

Response Variable 8: Put Off. (Had time spent on work experience put students off certain careers?)

This variable was based on a single Likert-type scale item. The statement in the questionnaire was "*My work placement put me off that particular career*". The individual analysis of binary explanatory variables effect on Put Off showed Dream = Realistic Job and Placement Would Fit to be significant (Table 6-22).

Table 6-22 Binary Explanatory Variables Effect on Put Off

Variable	T-statistic	U Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Difference Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
Age	0.337	0.275	14-16 – 17-19 (-0.24, 0.34)
Gender	1.376	1.351	Male - Female (-0.08, 0.48)
Dream = Realistic Job	2.295*	2.296*	D =/=R – D=R Job (-0.61, -0.05)
Definite Career	[1]0.213	0.427	Yes – No (-0.25, 0.31)
Low Self Esteem	-1.108	-1.123	Agree - Disagree (-0.66, 0.19)
Placement Would Fit	5.329**	5.199**	Agree – Disagree (0.47, 1.01)
Early Career Idea	1.528	1.637	Agree – Disagree (-0.07, 0.52)
Uncertain Future	-0.598	-0.669	Agree – Disagree (-0.52, 0.28)
Parents Plan Future	-0.137	-0.125	Agree – Disagree (-0.65, 0.57)
Want College	0.478	-0.851	Agree – Disagree (-0.33, 0.54)

* = $p<0.05$, ** = $p<0.01$, [1] = Non-Equal Variances (Welch) t-Test

Students whose dream and realistic careers were the same, along with students who believed their placement choices were a good fit for them, were less likely to believe that the career sampled by them was unsuitable. All other variables were not significant.

Categorical variables with more than two levels were analysed (Table 6-23)

Table 6-23 Categorical Explanatory Variables Effect on Put Off

Variable	F-statistic	K Statistic	95% Confidence Interval for Differences Cat. A minus Cat. B (Conf. Interval)
School	3.243*	6.310*	Girls – Co-Ed (-0.73, 0.10) Girls – Boys (-0.88, -0.01)* Co-Ed – Boys (-0.54, 0.29)
School Year	3.263*	6.064*	TY - 5th Year (-0.10,0.72) TY – 6th Year (0.01, 0.86) 5th Year – 6th Year (-0.30, 0.54)
Why Chose Placement	3.388*	6.457*	No Choice–Existing Relationship (-1.25, 0.02) No Choice – Genuine Interest (-0.89, 0.02) Relationship – Genuine Interest (-0.36, 0.72)

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Why Chose Placement, School and School Year were all shown to be significant. Students from the girls' school, St. Monica's, were less likely to believe they were put off a particular career as a result of work experience. There was no significant difference between the other school types. Students in Transition Year were proven to be less likely than students in 6th Year to agree that they had been put off a particular career following their work placement. No other significant differences presented. Students who believed they had no other choice when it came to their work placement were shown to be more likely to agree that they had been put off the job sampled by them than those who chose out of a genuine interest or through an existing relationship. However, these were both marginally insignificant. There were no other significant differences.

The continuous explanatory variables were analysed (Table 6-24)

Table 6-24 Continuous Explanatory Variables Effect on Put Off

Variable	Constant	β	R^2
Junior Cert Performance	3.320**	-0.002	<0.001
Expected Leaving Cert Points	3.293**	-0.013	<0.001
High Self-Esteem	3.229**	-0.003	<0.001
Not Confident of College	3.328**	-0.054	0.005

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

No continuous explanatory variable was shown to have a significant effect on Put Off.

6.3.3 Testing for the Effect of Explanatory variables: Looking at Explanatory Variables Multivariously

Reformatting of the response variables took place for the model based analysis. For multiple regression analysis of response variables re-ordering occurred so that low agreement with a statement carried a low score while high agreement carried a high score. Explanatory variables were also reformatted so that a low score equated to disagreement while a high score equated to agreement. As a result, positive co-efficient (β) values denote a high level of agreement while negative values denote a low level of agreement. In the case of response variables analysed with logistic regression, the reference category was Disagree while the decision category was Agree. A positive co-efficient, therefore, denotes a higher likelihood of agreement with the relevant statement while a negative co-efficient denotes a lower probability of agreement.

A number of variables used in the previous section had to be removed either because of redundancy, being skewed or because of concerns regarding variance inflation. These were: Definite Career, Low Self-esteem, Wants College, and Why Chose Placement. Continuous and categorical explanatory variables were handled differently for logistic regression. The categorical variables were:

- School (Girls, Co-educational, Boys)
- Gender (Male Female)
- School Year (TY, 5th Year, 6th Year)
- Dream = Realistic Job (No, Yes)
- Placement Choice Fitted (No, Yes)
- Early Career Idea (No, Yes)
- Uncertain About Future (No, Yes)

(Note: First category in each case is reference)

As is clear from the previous section, the analysis conducted involved an examination of the impact of the different variables at an individual level. A further analysis would allow an even more in-depth probing of explanations and influences and enhance further the confidence one could have in the findings of the study. In this regard it was decided to explore the nature of the impact of the explanatory variables on the response variables while taking into account the impact of all the other explanatory variables. In place of the simple linear regression analysis described in the previous section, the use of multivariate regression analysis was applied at this stage. Two types of multivariate analysis were applied: linear regression and binomial logistic regression (SPSS 2012). Multiple regression is an extension of linear regression and like the latter is expressed as a coefficient, β, and significance is tested using an F-test (see Moore and McCabe, 1989).

The process here involves a stage process where blocks of variables are added to the previous model to assess the change in the size and type of impact and to offer a prediction of the power of the new variables added each time. The advantage of this hierarchical procedure was that it allowed the clustering of variables according to key themes,

specifically biographical data and academic performance. The procedures allowed me to control for the effect of these on later, added variables.

A step by step description is as follows. First, biographical variables were tested in the model, that is, age, year and so on. Then, academic performance – expected and prior – and student expectation about future career were put into the model and assessed. Finally, students' perceptions pertaining to self esteem, likelihood of going to college, and placement were factored in.

Multiple regression was used in the case of variables that were based on the sum of one or more underlying variables while logistical regression was used in the case of single Likert-type scale items. To do this, five point scales were collapsed into binary scales e.g. 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were redefined as 'agree'. Other decisions had to be made here such as placing the 'not sure' category into the 'disagree' category a decision which inevitably reduces the contrast between the 'agree' and 'disagree' categories.

Another kind of regression analysis, binary logistic regression (see Bewick, Cheek and Ball, 2005) is a process that transforms the odds of an individual being in one category or another of the response variables, based on the influence of a particular explanatory variable, into a regression co-efficient, β. Throughout the presentation of results below, the β coefficient is indicated along with its significance value. An odds ratio is calculated in this procedure – if the number is equal to one, this would indicate that the variable had no effect on the response variable, if higher than one it would indicate the probability of a positive effect. For example, in my study, if an explanatory variable had an odds ratio of two, this indicates that a student would be twice as likely to Agree for every unit increase in that variable.

Response variable 1: Worthwhile. As Worthwhile was based on a single Likert-type scale item, the analysis was conducted using binary logistic regression (Table 6-25).

Table 6-25 Binary Logistic Model Output for Worthwhile

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Ref. Girls School			
Co-Educational	-0.708	-0.609	-0.925
Boys School	-0.151	0.022	-0.411
Age	0.301	0.024	0.022
Female	0.620	0.484	0.103
Ref. Transition Year			
5th Year	-1.134	-0.776	-0.958
6th Year	-1.872*	-1.563	-1.839
Dream = Realistic Job		1.004**	1.080*
Junior Certificate Score		0.070**	0.054*
Expected Leaving Cert Points		-0.200	-0.273
High Self Esteem			-0.064
Placement Choice Fitted Well with Aspirations			1.766**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			0.030
Uncertain about the Future			0.382
Going to College			0.291*
Constant	-2.189	-1.780	-2.277
Model p-value	0.024*	<0.001**	<0.001**
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test p-value	0.836	0.349	0.404
Nagelkerke R Squared	0.088	0.191	0.314

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Binary logistic regression output for Worthwhile revealed that School Year, "Dream = Realistic Job", Junior Cert Score, Placement Would Fit, and Going to College all had a significant effect on Worthwhile. All models proved significant. The Hosmer-Lemeshow test was not significant for every model. R^2 for the final model was 31.4 per cent. 6th Year students were shown in model one to be 0.154 times more likely than Transition Year students to agree that work experience had been a worthwhile exercise for them, accounting for all other terms in the model. 6th Year did not present as significant in models two and three. It had a p-value of less than 0.1 and its odds ratio remained stable. A similar, though non-significant, reduction was revealed for 5th Year compared to TY. Where students'

dream and realistic jobs were similar, they were shown to be 2.946 times as likely to accept that work experience had been a worthwhile exercise compared to those whose dream and realistic jobs were at variance, accounting for all other terms in model three. For each single point increase in performance in the Junior Certificate Examinations, there was a 1.056 higher odds of a student accepting that work experience was worthwhile, accounting for all other terms in model three. A one unit increase in Going to College led to a 1.388 higher odds of work experience being accepted by students as a worthwhile exercise. This was based on a nine point scale formed from the amalgamation of two Likert-type scale items where a higher score was equated to higher confidence of attending college.

Response variable 2: Reinforced Career. As Reinforced Career was based on the summation of two Likert-type scale items, the analysis was conducted using multiple regression (Table 6-26). In this instance, a higher score indicates that students believed their career choice was more reinforced.

Table 6-26 Multiple Regression Model Output for Reinforced Career

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
School	-0.145	-0.147	-0.328
Age	0.431	0.419	0.469
Gender	0.525	0.443	0.069
Year	-0.819*	-0.784*	-0.696*
Dream = Realistic Job		0.573	0.320
Junior Cert Score		0.006	0.004
Expected Leaving Cert Points		0.039	0.049
High Self Esteem			0.034
Placement Choice Fitted Well with Aspirations			2.025**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			0.533*
Uncertain about the Future			-0.254
Going to College			-0.093
Constant	0.369**	0.401**	-3.421
Model p-value	0.004**	0.003**	<0.001**
R Squared	0.052	0.049	0.295

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

There was a significant effect on Reinforced career by School Year, Early Career Idea and whether a student was uncertain about the future in the multiple regression output. All models were significant. R^2 for the final model was 29.5 per cent. In every model School Year proved to be significant with a one year increase in School Year leading to a decrease of 0.696 in Reinforced career, accounting for all other terms in model three. Students who believed that their chosen placement fitted well with their goals and aspirations were 2.025 times higher on the Reinforced Career scale than students who did not have career ideas since early childhood, accounting for all other terms in model three. Students who had career ideas since early childhood were 0.533 higher in the Reinforced Career scale that those who did not, accounting for all other terms in model three.

Response variable 3: Highlight of Transition Year. Highlight of TY was based on a single Likert-type scale item, therefore, the analysis was conducted using binomial logistic regression (Table 6-27).

Table 6-27 Binary Logistic Model Output for Highlight of TY

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Ref. Girls School			
Co-Educational School	-0.841*	-0.899*	-1.084**
Boys School	-0.123	-0.143	-0.391
Age	0.017	0.019	0.083
Female	0.345	0.279	0.141
Ref. Transition Year			
5th Year	-0.402	-0.340	-0.342
6th Year	-0.062	-0.012	-0.030
Dream = Realistic Job		0.643*	0.521
Junior Cert Score		0.001	-0.008
Expected Leaving Cert Points		0.027	0.006
High Self Esteem			0.179*
Placement Choice Fitted Well with Aspirations			0.916**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			0.702*
Uncertain about the Future			-0.149
Going to College			0.101
Constant	0.450	-.0113	-0.528
Model p-value	0.033*	0.078	<0.001**
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test p-value	0.827	0.236	0.992
Nagelkerke R Squared	0.062	0.092	0.218

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

This showed that for Highlight of TY, School, "Dream = Realistic job, Self-esteem, Placement Would Fit, and Early Career Ideas, all had a significant effect on whether or not work experience was deemed a highlight of Transition Year. Model two was not significant while models one and three were. The Hosmer-Lemeshow test was not significant for every model. R^2 for the final model was 21.8 per cent. Model three, for the co-educational school students, showed them to be 0.338 times more likely to agree that work experience was a highlight of the TY programme compared to the girls' school, accounting for all other terms in the model. Students whose dream and realistic careers were the same proved to be 1.903 times more likely to agree it was a highlight compared to those who had different dream and realistic careers, accounting for all other terms in model two. In terms of the 13 point high

self-esteem scale, a single point increase led to a 1.196 chance of students finding work experience to be a highlight of TY. Those students who believed that their work experience fitted well with their career goals and aspirations were shown to be 2.498 times more likely to agree work experience was a highlight compared to those whose placement was not a good fit for them, accounting for all other terms in model three. The students with career ideas since early childhood compared to those who did not have such ideas were 2.018 times as likely to agree with work experience being a highlight.

Response variable 4: Did Nothing. This variable was based on the summation of two Likert-type scale items and therefore was analysed using multiple regression (Table 6-28). The summation led to the creation of a nine point scale with a high score indicating that a student believed work experience did nothing for him/her.

Table 6-28 Multiple Regression Model Output for Did Nothing

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
School	0.118	0.109	0.200
Age	-0.289	-0.245	-0.280
Gender	-0.416	-0.341	-0.190
Year	0.403	0.350	0.385
Dream = Realistic Job		-0.464*	-0.299
Junior Cert Score		-0.013	-0.006
Expected Leaving Cert Points		-0.013	0.020
High Self Esteem			-0.145**
Placement Choice Fitted Well with Aspirations			-0.823**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			-0.160
Uncertain about the Future			0.561*
Going to College			-0.109
Constant	8.023*	8.569*	10.988**
Model p-value	0.020*	0.004**	<0.001**
R Squared	0.040	0.048	0.184

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

This analysis revealed that whether or not a student's dream or realistic job were the same, a student's self-esteem, whether or not a student had career ideas since early childhood, whether or not a student was confident of going to college, all had a significant effect on the response variable Did Nothing. All models proved significant. R^2 for the final model was 18.4 per cent. Where students dream and realistic jobs were the same then they were 0.464 units lower on the Did Nothing scale indicating that they were less likely to agree that work experience did nothing for them. Where student self-esteem increased by one unit, each student was 0.145 points lower on the Did Nothing scale meaning they were less likely to agree that work experience did nothing for them, accounting for all other terms in model three. Students who believed that their work experience fitted well with their career goals and aspirations were 0.823 points lower on the Did Nothing scale making them less likely to believe that work experience did nothing for them, accounting for all other terms in model three. Students unclear about their future proved to be 0.561 points higher on the Did Nothing scale, accounting for all other terms in model three. This meant that they were more likely to agree that their placement did nothing for them.

Response variable 5: More Careful. This was based on a single Likert-type scale item and thus was analysed using binomial logistic regression (Table 6-29).

Table 6-29 Binary Logistic Model Output for More Careful

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Ref. Girls School			
Co-Educational School	-0.566	-0.532	-0.431
Boys School	-1.124*	-1.127*	-1.079
Age	-0.216	-0.243	-0.287
Female	-0.888*	-0.838	-0.526
Ref. Transition Year			
5th Year	0.670	0.636	0.780
6th Year	1.483*	1.499*	1.665*
Dream = Realistic Job		-0.430	-0.279
Junior Cert Score		-0.003	0.003
Expected Leaving Cert Points		-0.052	-0.033
High Self Esteem			0.059
Placement Choice Fitted Well with Aspirations			-1.502**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			-0.351
Uncertain about the Future			0.594
Going to College			-0.075
Constant	3.353	4.582	6.164
Model p-value	0.011*	0.018*	<0.001**
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test p-value	0.600	0.130	0.309
Nagelkerke R Squared	0.077	0.092	0.244

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Binary logistic regression output for this response variable showed School, School Year and whether or not a student agreed that their work experience placement fitted well with their career goals and aspirations all had a significant effect on More Careful. The Hosmer-Lemeshow test was not significant for every model. R^2 for the final model was 24.4 per cent. In model two, students from the boys' school were 0.324 times more likely to believe that they should have been more careful with their placement choices than the students in the girls' school, accounting for all other terms in this model. 6th Year students were shown to be 5.287 times as likely to agree that they should have taken more care in their placement selection than the students in TY, accounting for all other terms in model three. For those students who claimed that their placement fitted well with their career goals and aspirations,

they were shown to be 0.223 times as likely to agree that they should have been more careful with their placement choice than those who did not claim so, accounting for all other terms in model three.

Response variable 6: Future Focus. This variable was based on a single Likert-type scale item and was analysed using binomial logistic regression (Table 6-30).

Table 6-30 Binary Logistic Model Output for Future Focus

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Ref. Girls School			
Co-Educational School	-0.033	-0.080	-0.296
Boys School	0.396	0.389	0.111
Age	0.148	0.199	0.315
Female	1.022*	0.998*	0.927*
Ref. Transition Year			
5th Year	-0.588	-0.601	-0.723
6th Year	-0.479	-0.529	-0.664
Dream = Realistic Job		0.327	0.113
Junior Cert Score		-0.001	-0.004
Expected Leaving Cert Points		0.076	0.086
High Self Esteem			0.159*
Placement Choice Fitted Well with Aspirations			1.416**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			0.273
Uncertain about the Future			-0.865*
Going to College			-0.039
Constant	-2.239	-3.698	-4.428
Model p-value	0.038*	0.068	<0.001
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test p-value	0.788	0.849	0.422
Nagelkerke R Squared	0.061	0.073	0.254

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

This analysis demonstrated that Gender, Self-esteem, whether or not students believed their work placement selection fitted their career goals and aspirations and whether or not students were uncertain about their futures all had a significant effect on their future career

focus. Model two was not significant while models one and three were. The Hosmer-Lemeshow test was not significant for every model. R^2 for the final model was 25.4 per cent. Model three showed female students to be 2.526 times as likely as male students to believe there placement helped them focus on their future careers, accounting for all other terms in this model. A single unit increase on the self-esteem scale showed students to be 1.172 times more likely to agree that their placement helped them to focus on their future career, accounting for all other terms in model three. Students who believed that their placement fitted well with their career goals and aspirations were shown to be 4.120 times as likely to agree that work experience helped clarify their future career goals as those who did not believe so, accounting for all other terms in model three. Those with uncertainty around their futures were 0.421 times as likely to agree that work experience helped them to clarify their future career focus, accounting for all other terms in model three.

Response variable 7: Subject Choice. Subject choice was based on a single Likert-type scale item, therefore, the analysis was conducted using binomial logistic regression (Table 6-31).

Table 6-31 Binary Logistic Model Output for Subject Choice

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Ref. Girls School			
Co-Educational	-0.073	-0.094	-0.272
Boys School	0.030	0.084	-0.181
Age	-0.416	-0.445	-0.463
Female	0.454	0.427	0.289
Ref. Transition Year			
5th Year	0.454	0.537	0.560
6th Year	0.584	0.632	0.682
Dream = Realistic Job		0.198	0.040
Junior Cert Score		0.019	0.016
Expected Leaving Cert Points		0.056	0.055
High Self Esteem			0.119
Placement Would Fit			1.247**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			-0.197
Uncertain about the Future			-0.666
Going to College			-0.003
Constant	5.949	4.499	3.623
Model p-value	0.311	0.144	<0.001**
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test p-value	0.365	0.222	0.478
Nagelkerke R Squared	0.033	0.058	0.177

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

Binary logistic regression output for this response variable showed Placement Would Fit to be the only significant term. Model three was significant while models one and two were not. The Hosmer-Lemeshow was not significant for every model. R^2 was 17.7 per cent for the final model. Students who believed that their placement fitted well with their career hopes and aspirations were shown to be 3.480 times more likely to agree that their work experience had influenced their subject choices for 5th Year than those who did not believe so, accounting for all other terms in model three.

Response variable 8: Put Off. Put Off was based on a single Likert-type scale item, therefore, the analysis was conducted using binomial logistic regression (Table 6-32).

Table 6-32 Binary Logistic Model Output for Put Off

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Ref. Girls School			
Co-Educational	-1.003**	-1.041**	-1.083**
Boys School	-1.239**	-1.257*	-1.243*
Age	-0.194	-0.114	-0.095
Female	-0.365	-0.331	-0.120
Ref. Transition Year			
5th Year	0.463	0.366	0.370
6th Year	1.176	1.047	0.888
Dream = Realistic Job		-0.194	-0.103
Junior Cert Score		-0.008	-0.012
Expected Leaving Cert Points		0.089	0.076
High Self Esteem			0.113
Placement Would Fit			-0.936**
Had Early Idea about Ideal Career			-0.426
Uncertain about the Future			-0.064
Going to College			0.123
Constant	3.174	1.933	0.484
Model p-value	0.005**	0.019*	<0.001**
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test p-value	0.207	0.751	0.625
Nagelkerke R Squared	0.085	0.090	0.171

* = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01

For this response variable, binary logistic regression output showed that School and Placement Would Fit were the only significant terms. All models were significant. Hosmer-Lemeshow was not significant for every model. R^2 was 17.1 per cent for the final model. The students in St. Finnian's, the co-educational school, were shown to be 0.339 times more likely than the students in the all girls' St. Monica's, to believe their work experience put them off particular careers, accounting for all other terms in model three. The students in the boys' school, Grattan St. College, were 0.289 times as likely as the students in the girls' school to agree that they had been put off careers, accounting for all other terms in model three. The students who believed their placements fitted well with their career hopes and aspirations were 0.392 times as likely to agree that work experience had shown that a career was not really for them, accounting for all other terms in model three.

6.4 Discussion

The bar charts in 6.3.1 above give a clear overview of students' general attitudes to work experience. Overall students' attitudes are quite positive. A significant majority (63 per cent) of students agree that their time spent on work experience helped them to focus on their possible careers with 54 per cent of students believing that the occupations sampled by them could, in actuality, be realistic career choices for them. Alternatively, 37 per cent of students said they were "put off" a particular career due to their time spent on placement. Such discouragement has its benefits too, with students finding new directions as a result of what might initially have been considered by them as a negative outcome. As outlined in Chapter 2.3, reflective practice subsequent to time spent in the workplace can lead to re-evaluation and reappraisal of earlier ideas just as it can lead to reinforcement. While a significant minority (37 per cent) in this survey agreed that work experience helped them choose their subjects for 5th Year, almost 60 per cent of students agreed that they discovered the importance and relevance of particular school subjects as a result of the time spent in the world of work. The majority of students expressed agreement that they chose placements that fitted appropriately with their career hopes and aspirations with just 35 per cent of students believing that they should have been more careful in their selections. Students were asked if they were happy with their placement choice before commencing work experience. 57 per cent agreed that this was the case. Those who believed they hadn't made a good choice and those who remained unsure are most likely the ones who, post placement, agreed that they should have been more careful in their selection. McElhaney (1998) stresses the importance of advance preparation with regard to experience based learning as discussed in Chapter 1.2. The vast majority of students agreed that there was value in work experience while a lowly 10 per cent agreed with the statement that work experience was a waste of

time. In fact, a significant 60 per cent of students declared work experience to have been not alone worthwhile, but actually a highlight of their entire Transition Year experience.

Figure 6-13 shows the difference between students dream and realistic careers. It is fascinating to note that the largest concentrations of dream careers are in the sports sector and the creative sector. Many students dreamt of being a professional sports person, movie star or music performer. Their realistic choice in many cases was quite different. One student, for example, recorded "Race Car Driver" as his dream job but under realistic job, was considering being a car mechanic. One of the girls in St. Monica's girls' school said her dream job was to be a professional music performer or rock star but for her realistic career she wrote music teacher. In many cases, dream and realistic job choices were the same but with somewhat less fantasy attached. An example of this was the boy whose dream job was to be a primary school teacher and this carried through for his intended realistic career. One of the girls in the co-educational school dreamed of being a speech therapist and intended to realise that goal after her third level studies. Students listed the unstable or unrealistic nature of the profession to explain the difference between their dream and realistic careers where an element of fantasy pertained. Dreams and fantasies are all part of what make a personality or as described in Chapter Two, an identity. Hogan and Blake (1999) describe personality, from the actor's perspective as being concerned with the identity of a person which incorporates their "aspirations, hopes, dreams and fears" (p. 53). Otherwise the main reasons for the difference were more practical, such as, the high Leaving Certificate Points required or the actual difficulty of the profession itself.

Forty eight per cent of the students participating in this research had one work placement only while 52 per cent had two or more placements. The majority of the multi placement students were in the girls' school with the remainder in the boys' school. Generally the number of placements is dependent on the school's work experience policy. In the co-ed

school students were only allowed a single placement. The boys' school encouraged two placements but choosing one only was acceptable. The girls' school allowed up to three placements. The results showed no significant difference in the types of placements chosen by the students in the multi-placement schools. Students would choose different types of placements for themselves but from the same general pool as shown in both bar charts (Figure 6-15 and Figure 6-16).

The more in-depth statistical tests on "Worthwhile" showed girls and generally younger students to be more likely than boys and older students to agree that work experience was a worthwhile activity. This enthusiasm is mirrored in Australia where research showed that girls were more likely to participate in work experience than boys (Fullarton, 1999). Evans and Poole (1992) found very high levels of value placed on work experience in Australia. The vast majority of students surveyed for this research in Ireland also agreed that work experience was very worthwhile with 85 per cent of those surveyed supporting this statement in the questionnaire. Positive attributes such as a desire to go to college, solid career ideas and aspirations, good academic performance, considered work placement selection, and a genuine interest in the career area chosen, led students to believe that work experience was worthwhile. For others, a lack of confidence in their own ability coupled with poor work placement choices led those students to be part of the minority who believed work experience was not of value to them.

Once again the girls led the charge in relation to the extent to which their considered career choices were reinforced by time spent on work experience. Age, too, proved to be a factor with the level of career reinforcement declining as students got older. This, of course, is closely tied to the school year in which students found themselves when surveyed. More than half of the students surveyed (54 per cent) believed that their career ideas were reinforced by work experience. This is a significant majority when compared to the 28 per

cent who disagreed with that statement leaving almost a quarter of those surveyed undecided. However, it was generally students who had pre-existing career ideas, similarity between their dream and realistic jobs, and good placement choices, who believed this to be the case. Pre-existing career ideas, is intended here to include those with ideas from early childhood which proved to be a significant variable in the regression model. The reasons supporting placement choices also proved to be of importance. 66 per cent of students chose their placement out of a genuine interest in that career and as a result were more inclined to feel their career idea had been reinforced by the experience. For those who believed they had no choice, or who took placements through an existing relationship, that sense of reinforcement of a career idea did not materialise for them. The students who had "no choice" were students who stated they could find nothing else or that their placement was arranged by a third party, usually a parent or teacher. In terms of existing relationships, students would take a placement arranged by a relative or friend in order to gain access to that organisation. While this was sometimes a positive link being exploited to gain access to a field of genuine interest, for some it was a last resort believing they had nowhere else to go. Occasionally, students accepted placements with their part-time employers that generally undermined the true goal of the work experience programme.

While the girls in the girls' school were shown overall to be more likely to declare work experience a highlight of Transition Year, it is interesting to note that the boys in the boys' school were shown to be more likely to see work experience as a highlight than the students in the co-educational school. This could perhaps be attributed to the programmes on offer in each of the schools and the differences that may exist between school types. 60 per cent of students claimed that work experience was a highlight of TY with only 28 per cent disagreeing with this suggestion. The balance was undecided. Those who saw work experience as a highlight of the TY programme were generally those with definite and, in

some cases, early career ideas, those who made careful placement selections and those with higher self-esteem. This was also true of students who had parallels between their dream and realistic career choices. Age did not appear to make any significant difference to students' perceptions of work experience as a highlight. The students whose placements were not out of genuine interest in the job, tended to be less inclined to view the experience as a highlight.

Eighty five per cent of students disagreed with the statement "work experience really did nothing for me" and 90 per cent disagreed with the statement "work experience is a waste of time". The boys were shown to be more likely than the girls to believe they got nothing out of their work experience. While the girls were shown to be more likely to disagree that they got nothing from work experience than the other two school types, no significant difference was noted between the boys' school and the co-educational school. Of the small minority who agreed that work experience was of little or no benefit to them, these were mostly students who had poor placements, who lacked confidence in their ability to pursue further education, who had low self-esteem or who expressed uncertainty about what they wanted to do in the future. The large body of students who disagreed with this statement was made up of students whose dream and realistic jobs were similar, who had definite or even early career ideas, who made careful placement selections, and to an extent, who wanted to go on to third level education.

Thirty five per cent of students believed they should have been more careful in the selection of their work placement. However this left 54 per cent who were satisfied with their choices. Those who felt they should have been more careful were predominantly students who expressed uncertainty about their futures and those who believed they had little choice in the placement they secured. The students who expressed satisfaction with their work placements were students who had similarities between their dream and realistic jobs, who felt they had

made appropriate placement selections, and who had ideas about their careers since early childhood. It was also evident from the data that younger students were more likely to believe they made good choices with an element of scepticism creeping in as students progressed through the senior cycle.

The girls in the girls' school were the most likely to accept that their future career focus was aided by their work experience programme. A significant 63 per cent of students believed their future focus was helped with just 16 per cent disagreeing. While there was no major difference between the boys' school and the co-educational school, males were shown overall to be less likely than females to agree that their work placement helped them focus on their future career. This attitude was generally expressed by those with low self-esteem and those who felt they had little or no choice in their placement selection. Otherwise students with similar dream and realistic career ideas, definite career aspirations, genuine interest in the career area sampled, and higher self-esteem all believed that their future career focus was clarified by the formal time they spent in the world of work. These students were more likely to reject the suggestion that they should have been more careful with their placement selections.

While 48 per cent of students said their subject choices were not influenced by work experience there was still 37 per cent who believed that they were influenced. The 15 per cent who were unsure could potentially have a significant impact on either of the previous values. Even though those who agree that subject choice was influenced by work experience is only a significant minority, a noteworthy 60 per cent of students agreed that they discovered the importance and relevance of particular subjects as a direct result of their time spent on placement. Students who had definite careers in mind and those who believed in advance that their placements fitted with their career goals were the most likely to believe that their choice of subject was influenced by work experience. The question regarding the

placement fitting with career hopes and aspirations was intended to gather student attitudes to the efforts, or otherwise, made by them in selecting their placements in the first place. The aim was to determine if the students had made a serious effort to find worthwhile placements that they believed would help them achieve a better understanding of the career involved as well as an appreciation of adult life and the world of work. An associated question was why students chose their individual placements. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the positive response (66 per cent of students) was that the placements were chosen due to a genuine interest in particular career fields. This too proved to be a significant factor in whether or not students' 5th Year subjects were influenced by their work experience with those falling into that category being more likely to have been so influenced. On the negative side, students who expressed uncertainty about their futures were shown to be less likely to agree that there was any influence from work experience on their subsequent subject choices.

In the questionnaire students were asked to predict their performance in the Leaving Certificate Examination. This was done by asking students to estimate the CAO points they hoped to receive rather than actual grades. This data, following analysis, showed that those with high expectations of success in the terminal examination were more likely to agree that their work experience influenced their 5th year subject choices.

A significant minority (37 per cent) of students were switched off their possible career as a result of the time spent in the world of work. It is reassuring to note however, that 51 per cent of students would not agree with that statement. For those who did agree, the most common reason given was boredom. This may be accounted for by how students are deployed by organisations. They are sometimes ignored or given menial tasks to complete such as photocopying or running errands, and this can lead to students being unchallenged and ultimately bored in their placement. Boredom was closely followed by students claiming

to have not enjoyed their experience or being given the wrong kind of experience; for example, not doing the work they were interested in doing when they chose that organisation. Students whose dream and realistic careers were the same were shown to be less likely to be put off a particular career. Teaching proved to be a popular example of a dream career matching an intended real career for students. These students, in most cases, took their placements in schools and got to trial that career. The vast majority of those students, therefore, had their career idea reinforced. Females, particularly in the girls' school, were shown, following analysis, to be less likely to be put off their career idea than boys subsequent to work experience. Earlier, girls were shown to be more conscientious in the first place about their placement selection. Consequently, this is not a surprising outcome. Transition Year students were also shown to have a lesser chance of being put off their careers than their older 6th Year counterparts who, perhaps over time, began to change their perceptions as they reflected on their time spent on work experience. Other students who were put off were those with uncertainty about their futures and those who felt they chose their placements because they believed there was nothing else available for them.

6.5 Conclusion

- Students' attitudes to work experience were broadly quite positive.
- While for some students their dream and realistic careers were at variance, for others they were attainable goals.
- A significant minority of students (37 per cent) accepted that work experience directly influenced their subject choices for 5th Year. These were predominantly students who had definite career ideas, made a serious effort to find a suitable placement and had high exam performance expectations.
- The majority of students (60 per cent) believed that they discovered the importance of certain subjects for their future careers directly as a result of participating in the work experience programme.

- Students overwhelmingly agreed that work experience was a worthwhile exercise with females being more likely than males to agree with this.
- Students, especially females, agreed that their career ideas were reinforced by the time spent on work experience. Having career ideas since early childhood had a significant effect.
- Students, especially females, declared work experience to be a highlight of the entire Transition Year Programme.
- Students with low self-esteem, poor academic performance and whose placement choices were poor or careless, believed work experience was a waste of time.
- Most students made careful and considered work placement choices though a significant minority (35 per cent) believed they should have been more careful in their selection.
- Some students can be put off their career choice following time spent on work experience. This is more likely amongst boys.
- Students agreed that work experience helped crystallise their future career possibilities with females being more likely than males to agree with this.

Chapter 7: Qualitative Data Analysis

7.1 Introduction

This research commenced with the quantitative survey of 323 students from three different school sites with the intention of gathering the general perceptions of those involved in the work experience component as part of the overall Transition Year Programme (TYP). With that data in hand, the next measure was to gather deeper insights from a random sample of those students by conducting 32 semi-structured interviews.

The various processes around preparing for the interviews and their subsequent rolling out are outlined in Chapter 5. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were bound on a class by class basis for each of the three schools producing a total of nine booklets. The transcripts were read over several times. Initially, it was difficult to see any common themes, but further reading and the subsequent application of line by line coding, helped reveal the commonalities in the transcripts. Normally themes do not "jump out" of the data (Morse & Field, 1995, p. 139). The researcher, they claim, needs to take a step back and carefully consider what he/she is looking at, along with the question "What are these folks trying to tell me?" (p. 139). Themes can lie beneath the surface initially but once they have been identified they do seem more obvious (Morse & Field, 1995). On completion of the line by line coding, colour coding was used, throughout all of the transcripts, to highlight the various themes as they were un covered. Ultimately, there were ten themes that not only helped answer the main research questions, but also helped to allow a story to unfold.

Overall the students were very positive about the work experience element of Transition Year. Throughout the interview process there was a strong sense of fulfilment from students

as they reflected on their time spent experiencing adult life and participating in the world of work. This was true not only of those in TY who had just completed the programme, but also from those in their final year of school and two years removed from their TY/work experience participation. Even those students who, on reflection, believed they were less than careful in their placement selections, and possibly their attitudes to the programme, felt that it was an important learning curve for them. This chapter presents the main findings and themes emerging from what the students at the three schools had to say. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix E.

7.2 Students being "put off" or confirming a particular career

The qualitative interviews yielded some interesting data in relation to the students' reaction to the career areas sampled by them. Not all students were impressed by their choices. In fact, a significant number of students were actually deflected from particular careers. Others were more satisfied and in many cases found confirmation for their career hopes and aspirations. Students' pre-placement expectations can often be quite high and the reality of those expectations not being met can bring gross disappointment and disillusionment. Fortunately, these students are in the minority according to the data gathered for this research. Some of the students involved in the ESRI (2011) longitudinal study *From Leaving Cert to Leaving School*, similarly described how they found their career directions through work experience while others explained how they were turned off particular careers (Smyth, Banks & Calvert, 2011).

7.2.1 Being "put off" a particular job or career

Over the three participating schools, 78 per cent of students said that they were put off some of the work types chosen by them. This was as high as 100 per cent in the boys' school, 83 per cent in the girls' school and 50 per cent in the co-educational school. It is imperative to

point out that the significant variation between the co-educational school and the single sex schools, in this regard, may be related to the co-educational school's strict policy of one work placement per student while the single sex schools allowed students to pursue two or more placements. Multiple placements, naturally, can increase the chances of a student being put off at least one of the career types sampled.

Most of those diverted from a particular career did not necessarily view that as a negative outcome. The reasons for being put off were predominantly twofold:

- Students were put off a career because they discovered the unanticipated reality of that career, and what it actually involved.
- Students chose lower order positions due to convenience, laziness, or because in some cases, they would receive some remuneration for their work. In certain situations, students took positions only because of the potential to acquire a part-time job during the school holidays.

The high percentage of boys turned off their career idea can be partly attributed to poor choices in many cases where boys, particularly in the all boys' school, were shown to be somewhat careless in their placement selection. They admitted to making choices based on convenience, on the potential to receive payment or simply accepting whatever placement they could get. The hope of a part-time job was shown to rank very highly for boys in particular, and as a result, their learning from work experience was different to their more conscientious peers. They may not have learned about specific realistic careers for themselves, but they did still learn about the world of work and perhaps even how to take advantage of the system for a more immediate short-term gain. There was one specific example of a boy, with very high intelligence, who confessed that he took a position in a retail store strictly on the basis that he knew it would afford him the opportunity to acquire a part-time job for the summer. His reason for choosing that route, he explained, was that he

had already made up his mind to study pure mathematics at third level and to work in the academic field subsequent to his studies. He claimed that he set his mind on this at the age of 14. He believed that there was no suitable work experience that could fulfil his needs and therefore followed what he deemed to be a more practical approach to his placement selection. He successfully secured a part-time position following his work experience placement and maintained it right up to his final year of school. He subsequently went on to pursue his studies in the field of mathematics having comfortably achieved the maximum possible score in his terminal examinations. Notwithstanding that, of course many boys also make very careful selections in a real effort to trial their potential future careers.

Girls, overall, were shown to be more tuned-in to getting things right for themselves and maximising the value of their work placements. The girls tended to be much more particular while at the same time more adventurous. They were shown to consider their placements carefully, intending to trial their genuine career interests. However, they also sampled other areas of interest that perhaps were not figuring as possible careers but were being trialled in the event that there may be something in it for them. For example, one girl had a deep interest in history and chose a placement in the City Archives. This confirmed her love for that field and her intention to pursue it as a real possibility. The same girl took a second work placement in a creative art studio because of her love of the school subject Art. She declared that though she loves Art, she does not see herself choosing it as a serious career option:

> I think [the studio] was really, really good…and I'm really interested in Art and designing things so ahmm…that was more fun. I wasn't really considering something in Art 'cause I love it but I wouldn't see myself in a career for it and it was just really fun…(Bernie, SM4)

Girls were shown to take the process more seriously than boys prior to placement. The girls in St. Monica's were the most enthusiastic and conscientious in terms of placement selection followed closely by the students, male and female, in St. Finnian's, the co-educational school. The boys in the all boys' school were shown to be the least likely of the schools surveyed to take the procurement of a work placement seriously and maximise whatever benefits were there to be harvested by them. Ultimately, this increased their chances of being dissatisfied or diverted from certain careers.

7.2.2 Career confirmed or being "switched on" to an alternative career

Eighty three per cent of students across the three school types had their possible career choice confirmed, or at least, were switched-on to a new career direction. This statistic is complimented by a study from Australia that showed 85 per cent of the participants there said that work experience, even if brief and limited, had an effect on their career decisions (Smith & Green, 2005). In this study, 100 per cent of the students interviewed in the co-ed school reported to have had this experience. Ninety-two per cent of the students in the St. Monica's girls' school also claimed to have their choices confirmed while in the boys' school just 58 per cent found their potential career direction. This is not so surprising considering that the boys in the boys' school were shown to be the most likely of the three school populations to exercise the least amount of care in placement selection. Grattan Street College allows the boys to have two placements and this is an issue that can be problematic in a small town. There is significant competition between students to secure placements. In this school, up to 90 students were enrolled in the TY programme at the time of the research. Securing two placements puts considerable pressure on the available pool of placements available in the community, bearing in mind that the town has three other schools with TY programmes drawing on that same finite resource. Saturation of the work placement

resource of a town is always a consideration for both the business community and the schools.

It would appear that the single placement in the co-ed school may be an important factor. One placement makes it easier for the student to find that placement in the first instance. Also, with just a single placement, students tend to put more effort into getting it as right as possible for themselves. A boy from St. Finnian's, the co-ed school stated:

> Yeah it was the accountancy side yeah… yeah… I have an interest in that so I wanted to see what it was like you know cause…the accounts in school would be different you know, to in a business as well you know, so I wanted to see if it is something like the one in school, something I know about. (Ron, F4)

Ron came across as quite intent on fulfilling his goal and trying to find answers to his questions.

A student from Grattan Street College, the boys' school, reflects a more carefree attitude:

> …I suppose it was convenient 'cause I know the owner. Ya, and it was the same with the Centra, it was kinda, kinda hard to find places so anything that came up I took. (Don, GSC4)

A girl from St. Monica's, the girls' school gives her reasons which she believed justified her selections:

> [I chose the] library because I like English…ahmm the pharmacy because I had never worked in a shop… (Virginia, SM5)

The low figure from the boys of Grattan Street regarding career confirmation or discovery may have its origin in the tendency for the boys to make those *convenient* selections. Interestingly, all of the boys who admitted to being less than careful in their placement choices clearly said they would advise those looking for a work placement, to choose

something they are interested in and not to take a position because "it's handy". Though the boys in the boys' school admitted their errors in selecting lower order jobs for convenience or payment, they equally admitted that the experience made them realise that they would have to work hard in school to avoid finding themselves in such jobs in the future. Herbert & Rothwell (2005, p. 14) advise

> There is no such thing as worthless work experience as even the most mundane jobs can be a learning experience and useful evidence of one's ability to apply oneself to task, to work as a team, to operate in a disciplined manner and to follow instructions.

They add that no work experience is likely to be viewed negatively unless "it is illegal or verging on the immoral!" (p. 14).

7.3 Career ideas dating back to childhood

The students interviewed had many different career ideas and many of these dated back to childhood or even early childhood. Ginzberg (1966) argued that children can develop career ideas as young as age six. He described this as the "fantasy stage" which continues up to age 11. When looking at decision making among 6th Year students Smyth, Banks and Calvert (2001) highlighted that a number of students in their study appeared to have always known what they wanted to do while others were influenced by their school work experience placement. One of the St. Monica's girls declared having an interest in being a teacher since as young as age four. She claimed:

> I always wanted to be a teacher since I was young. I wanted to be an English teacher since I was little…since I was about four…I used to run around… pretend I was a teacher. (Virginia, SM5)

She adds that she never changed her mind and never doubted it. Other students make similar claims saying they have held onto career ideas since ages six, seven, eight, nine and

upwards. The girls had the highest level of expression of childhood-formed career ideas with the boys having the lowest. Not only did the boys rate lowest, but the ages they suggested for the initial formulation of their career ideas were much higher at around ages 11 to 13. This is part of what Ginzberg described as the "Tentative Stage" which he claimed actually spans from age 11 to 17.

One of the younger ages mentioned by a boy was ten years old:

> …the teaching that was something I've, I was always thinking about like even from primary school, teaching was gonna be, was always gonna be my choice…I suppose I would have been about fourth class when I actually knew like what kinda it was about and everything, what it involved, I suppose it was then. (Ryan, GSC5)

It is worth noting here that any questioning during the interviews regarding how long a student had their particular career ideas only occurred if a student mentioned an on-going interest in a career since childhood or if they uttered the expression *"I always wanted to be a…"* followed by a specific occupation. Though Ginzberg referred to the early years as the *fantasy stage*, for many students these career ideas stay with them as real possibilities. For others, they remain as fantasies. John from St. Finnian's, for example, who since became completely set on a career in law and politics talked about his childhood thoughts:

> Yeah I went through many phases…I went from being…I wanted to be a Bell…you know them Bell lorry container trucks, when I was I'd say about seven, I wanted to drive a lorry and I wanted to be James Bond I think for a while. (John, F5)

Childhood ideas on career do not go without influence from family backgrounds. Children are always influenced by their own life experiences and those of their immediate and extended families. Boud (2008) highlights past experience as a characteristic of experience-based learning. He says such learning involves "recognition and active use of all of the learner's relevant life and learning experiences" (p. 3). This, Boud adds, facilitates the more

successful integration of the *meaning making* on the part of the learner in to his/her values and understanding. Thomas, a sixth Year boy, in the boy's school, had a long term interest in Architecture based on his uncle's occupation. He began to realise that career possibility by choosing the subject technical drawing when he was 12 years old. He said he was already "into houses and drawing plans". He said he had earlier childhood interests but wrote them off as play:

> Ah yeah but nothing like this [Architecture] it was all kinda play, to be a soccer player or a fireman or just whatever you see on the television and then you say oh yeah, I want to be a policeman…a sports person…like whatever I was playing at the time, whether I was playing hurling or playing soccer or rugby or whatever. (Sam, GSC6)

Ultimately, despite three years of studying technical drawing, Thomas was disillusioned by a career in Architecture subsequent to his work experience and instead decided to pursue something in the field of business.

Anna, in the girls' school, chose a placement in a Primary school. She said she wanted to be a teacher since age seven or eight. She added that when she was that age, her sister was in teacher training and that was a significant influence.

> Ah… my sister is a primary teacher as well so I kinda always wanted to do it when I was younger as well so…ahmm, probably when I was in primary school I kinda wanted to be a teacher…mmm, maybe senior, well senior infants. (Anna, GSC4)

Anna left her placement feeling very affirmed about her choice and said she was seriously pursuing the grades to secure a place in a teacher training college.

Joe chose a placement in an off-licence. He said his dad had worked there his whole life. Children can be very influenced by their father's occupation and often want to try it

(Ginzberg,1966). Ginzberg added that though children can be influenced by a father's career choice, their formulation can also include their own particular likes and dislikes. Joe says:

> I worked in an off-licence 'cause… ahh that's where my dad worked…it was pretty good. It was convenient…and I know a bit about it from my dad… I'd have a big interest in it and he hooked me up. (Joe, GSC6)

Following his work placement in the off-licence, Joe declared it was not something he wanted to do for the rest of his life. He described it as "hard work and not that rewarding". He appended that the experience made him want to work harder in school in order to "get more out of it (school)".

The number of students who secured placements connected to their childhood idea is significant. In the girls' school 100 per cent of the students who had a childhood career interest, sampled that career. In the co-ed school it was also 100 per cent while in the boys' school just 60 per cent of them trialled something they had been fixed on since a very young age. Don is a boy who did not pursue his childhood career interest. He chose two *convenience* placements in retail stores while his actual goal was to be a member of the Gardaí. When asked why he didn't try to secure a place in a Garda Station he answered that all the places were booked up and he couldn't get one:

> Ya I couldn't get anywhere… I think they were all booked up. (Don GSC4)

From what Don says however, it would appear that he didn't make any significant effort. He said he *thought* they were all booked up. Don presents as lazy as far as work placement selection is concerned. This is borne out in an earlier quote from Don above where he admitted to making his selections because they were "convenient" and because he "knew the owner".

Jan, however, claimed she wanted to be a teacher since she was six or seven years old. As a little girl in school she was actually told by her teacher that she should consider being a teacher:

> …when I was in senior infants on my school report it was shown Jan should be a teacher and Jan is an organiser and a leader was the phrase used like… so I've always just had it in my head. (Jan, SM5)

Jan successfully sought a placement in a secondary school on her own initiative and found it very stimulating and rewarding. It set her on a course to realise her childhood fantasy:

> I used to play with my sister who's a year older…I was always the teacher and she was the student and that was the way it always was…(Jan, SM5)

The quotes above from students relating to early or even childhood career ideas are fascinating. So too is the fact that such a high percentage of those in this category acted upon these ideas and in many cases made them an on-going part of their occupational dreams. At this age, young people are learning more about themselves and, concomitantly, about reality. As part of the maturation process, young people acquire a greater ability to simultaneously contemplate their desires and reality (Ginzberg, 1966).

7.4 Influence of work experience on subject choice

This is a significant topic as it is one of the cornerstones upon which this research is built. The leading research question is concerned with any link that may exist between the work experience programme and the subsequent subject choices made by the participating students. The most confounding aspect of the data gathered from the qualitative surveys is that there is a clear dissonance compared to what was revealed by the quantitative data. In the co-educational school 90 per cent of the students interviewed claimed a link between their work experience and the subjects they chose. In the girls' school 66 per cent said there

was a link with an additional 16 per cent saying their subjects were affected to an extent or because of the whole TY programme in general, as opposed to the work experience module alone. In the boys' school, 66 per cent said there was a link with 37 per cent of that group saying the effect was limited.

Students will usually choose up to four subjects from a list of options for their Leaving Certificate programme. In the majority of cases, one of these choices will be a modern language, leaving three subjects to be chosen freely by the students. The popularity of the modern language in Irish second level schools is predominantly due, historically, to the compulsory status of a modern language by some third level institutions as an entry requirement for further study. This research is interested in any or all of these choices being influenced to any extent by the experiences garnered on formal or informal work placement. The effect can be explicit and personal as described by Bernie talking about her placements:

> I was unsure about choosing History and then I went to the Archives and said I'm definitely choosing history…then I wasn't really sure about Art either…but once I went to [the studio], you know, I wanted to do Art. (Bernie, SM4)

The effect can be less personal too as described by Bobby:

> The Vet…I was working with…he done Spanish when he was in secondary school so he kinda convinced me to keep it on so I could go to university and I really wish he hadn't done now because Spanish is totally different in Leaving Cert as it is in Junior Cert… (Bobby, GSC6)

Other students like Stan can be less sure of the extent to which his choices may have been influenced. When asked if he chose any subject to help his potential career in sports science following work experience he answered:

> Well I did Biology so that might have something to with it… (Stan, GSC4)

Stan's instinctive answer to whether work experience influenced his subject choice was "No". However when he considered the situation, he thought that perhaps there was some effect after all.

In essence, 64 per cent of all students interviewed chose some or all of their subjects in 5th Year as a direct result of their experience in the workplace. The reasons were varied. Amy took a placement in an architectural practice and though she enjoyed her time there she chose not to pursue it as a career:

> I decided not to do Architecture…I really enjoyed it but there was a lot more to it than I thought and I'd been interested in doing something in science at the same time so I kinda chose Science over Architecture…I picked Biology, Chemistry, Business and German. (Amy, F4)

John spent time with a solicitor and was very content with his selection. He talked about his rationale for choosing particular subjects after his placement. He specifically mentioned why he chose History:

> …there's a lot of writing involved in History and there's a lot of writing involved in Law so the two kind of complimented each other, so that's why I said if I was going to do Law, and if I'm not able to do History…the chances are I wouldn't be able to do Law. (John, F5)

A 5th Year girl in St. Monica's liked the idea of teaching. Though Irish is compulsory in secondary school in Ireland, students may choose the level at which they would like to study the subject. This was one of the factors not considered initially by students when they completed the questionnaire. With time to reflect they remembered that the levels chosen by them in some subjects may have been as a result of decisions made following their work placement. So while they may have believed that particular subject choices were not influenced by work experience, subject levels may have been. Joanne, for example, selected the higher level in Irish as it is a requirement for primary teaching:

> Ahmm…like in the primary school they told me I'd have to do higher level Irish so ahmm like we had to do Irish anyway… but I'm sticking with higher level. (Joanne, SM5)

Fern thought she could never work indoors having always been the "outdoors type" and having grown up on a farm:

> It surprised me alright because I didn't think I would be able to work in kinda say a lab or an office setting or I didn't think that was for me but it surprised me in that I didn't actually mind working in a lab or having to be inside all day or that I really enjoyed it and it definitely helped me choose my subjects… (Fern, F5)

Other students claimed to be unaffected, when it came to subject choice, by their time on placement. Anna decided to pursue a career in primary teaching following the time she spent on placement in a local primary school. Her subsequent subject choices included Business, Economics and Geography, none of which she picked because of that placement. When asked if her choices were affected by WE she said:

> I picked Business, Economics and Geography… so not really I wouldn't think…I picked businessy subjects just in case I do decide to do Business and a language. (Anna, SM4)

Lily wants to be a hairdresser and has thought about this career since she was eight years old. Lily's response to the question on any influence her placement had on her subjects was simple, clear and politely delivered with a smile:

> Ahmm…not really 'cause you don't need specific subjects for hairdressing. (Lily, F6)

Don's response to the same question:

> Not really for myself now. (Don, GSC4)

When asked why he chose Technical Drawing, History, Geography and Business he answered:

> I kinda like the subjects and I did kinda alright in them in the Junior Cert…I kept away from the Science cause I didn't like it at all…it just wasn't my thing like. (Don, GSC4)

Joe from the boys' school was very laid back about the subject choice situation claiming that he had his subjects in his mind from the start of TY. He said he was very interested in science so he chose Biology and Chemistry along with Geography and German. In a similarly laidback manner, Joe was admittedly one of the individuals who made little effort in his placement selection and took a convenient job in his dad's workplace rather than pursue his actual career interest.

7.5 Effect of the work placement on subsequent study patterns

In all three schools, 100 per cent of students said that their work experience caused, inspired, or helped them to work harder at school. This is a significant effect of any programme on the academic development of a young person. To discover that the impact can be that powerful makes one consider the added value of the work experience programme as a motivator to simply work harder at school, let alone assist in the crystallisation of one's career path. Smyth et al. (2004) state that on average, students who participate in Transition Year achieve higher grades in the Leaving Certificate exams and are more likely to go on to higher education than non-participants. The motivation to work harder following work experience is a likely contributing factor towards that finding. That same motivation to work emerges in a number of ways for different students. For some it's the discovery that their tested career feels very right for them, whether they had this career notion for a while or even since childhood, or whether it is an entirely new discovery for them. For others it is the negative experience on placement that makes them realise that either they cannot see

themselves spending the rest of their lives doing that job, they hate the work involved, or the job was simply not what they expected. The students explain their motivation is a host of diverse ways.

Ron is a TY student in Finnian's who loved his work placement and believed it confirmed his future career. When asked if he could produce the necessary points at Leaving Certificate to realise his career in accountancy he said:

> Ahmm…well yeah… if I work hard enough in fifth and sixth I will [get the points]. If I keep studying and stuff I will… think I can…yeah. (Ron, F4)

Later, Ron expressed feeling more motivated as he prepared to return to the academic schooling of fifth year. He added "fifth and sixth are easier with a goal in mind". He equates studying with a chance of "pursuing that career for the rest of your life".

Lily said she wanted to be a hairdresser but also expressed significant interest in studying childcare in college. Talking about her attitude to school after work experience she comments:

> It kinda made you see what you want to do now and what work you need to put in if you want to get it so… it's real good. (Lily, F6)

Stan took a placement in a supermarket and spent much of his time "stacking shelves". He claims:

> It was good as well but it's something you wouldn't want to be at for the rest of your life…it would make you realise how much work you want to put in [at school] so you don't end up in a job like that. (Stan GSC4)

Stan went on later to say that how work experience changed his attitude to school "big time". He said "I'm really gonna have to put the work in". He learned that if he works hard at school he will have more options for college:

> For the sake of two years [school] work like you're gonna have…you'll have a lot of options like and that so that would be even…especially for college like cause it's a must now. (Stan, GSC4)

Danny is a final year student in Grattan Street College and is considering a career somewhere within the music industry. For his work experience he taught music in a local school. Following work experience he concluded that he still wants a career in music but most likely not teaching it. Regarding how it affected his attitude to school he replied:

> …yeah it would make you work hard like, it depends, it shows you what kind of line of work you want to go into and then, then you can start working on how many points you need and what you need to do to get into it and all. It makes you work harder… (Danny, GSC6)

In the girls' school, Joanne returned from work experience convinced she wanted to be a primary school teacher. Her response to whether or not her attitude to school changed following her placement was:

> Yeah, ahmm, 'cause I didn't really know before I went on work experience. I didn't really definitely know what I wanted to do like. I knew that… maybe primary teaching but when I came back then I said definitely want to do primary teaching so I kinda focused more on school…Yeah I kinda felt like I know what I want to do now…that I should work hard and stuff. (Joanne, SM5)

Nina is a sixth year student from Nigeria who left behind the childhood fantasy careers of medicine and law for what she claims is her true love, working with children. She admitted to not liking school but reflected that things really changed for her following her work experience:

> I've never liked school to be honest but ahmm…I think [work experience] kinda pushed me a bit more. I'd say I worked harder because I felt I…when I went on the work experience I saw people were doing, you know the people that were helping the kids, I saw what they were doing and I was like…I want to be able to do this and even if I don't, if I don't put in the work I won't be able to do this, so it kinda pushed me and I'm really happy about that. I'm glad, I'm really glad I did it cause I wouldn't be a one to study at all…no way like, so it kinda gave me an aim like, do you know, that kinda way like, make me… focused me, gave me focus like… this is what I'm doing… this is it… and I have to work at it like. (Nina, SM6).

Many of the students made reference to their changing attitudes to study and motivation. They also alluded to the importance of setting goals. Goal setting is something that they seem to have realised can truly drive them forward:

> …its nice being in sixth year having a goal and a target…they help me achieve what I want. (Siun, SM6)

Retail entrepreneur J.C. Penney said "Give me a stock clerk with a goal and I'll give you a man who will make history. Give me a man with no goals and I'll give you a stock clerk."

7.6 Personal identity and emerging vocational identity

During the interviews the students talked about many things. The opening part of each interview was designed to give students a chance to settle down and to adapt to the presence of the voice recorder. Students were given a moment to talk about themselves and their families prior to getting on with the exchange regarding their work experience. The boys were very inclined to talk about themselves and their sporting interests in the opening discussion while the girls were more forthcoming about their families and their general backgrounds. Students did share a significant additional amount of detail about themselves as the interviews progressed. It would actually be possible to draw up a personality profile from the information shared and demonstrated by each student. For this research, the interest is in *where students are* in their lives in terms of the development of their identities and the

emergence of what was described in the literature review section (see Chapter Four) as their vocational identities. The two, of course, are inextricably linked. Vocational interests are an expression of personality (Holland, 1985). Personality, according to Hogan and Blake (1999), is concerned with the identity of the person including their hopes, dreams and fears.

So, what are students saying about themselves? In each of the three schools used for this study, there is a broad mix of different social backgrounds. St. Monica's School is the only school in that town available to females for second level education. Grattan St. College is in a town where there is one other very small competing boys' school but the vast majority of boys in the area attend the larger school. St. Finnian's school is the only secondary school in that part of its town. Ninety per cent of its students come from the surrounding area with the balance commuting from more rural locations within a twelve mile radius. The following examples give an idea of the personalities of these young people and how their identities are growing and merging with the concept of vocational identity and their future or possible selves:

> Nina, a final year student at St. Monica's, presented as a proud Nigerian teenager whose family have lived in Ireland for seven years. All of her second level education was received in the girls' school. She likes interacting with people and she likes to be liked by others. She has always loved children and has spent a lot of time caring for children belonging to her own extended family and also children at the mosque where she practices her Muslim faith. She describes herself as having a strong personality and defines personality as "who you are and what you like". Nina is very open about her family and likes to talk about her siblings. She has always had a great relationship with them and with her parents too.
>
> Nina is very independent and likes to do things for herself. She possesses very good leadership skills and enjoys being in control of a situation. She has high expectations of herself but also of others. She is very determined and when she decides to do something, or indeed to pursue something, she does everything she can to realise that goal. She is academically able and though her aim is high, she remains realistic and grounded at the same time. She believes in following her heart. As a final year student in secondary school, she is intent on studying psychology at third level and subsequently using her skills to work with children in her chosen field. She describes herself as confident and caring. She is still finding herself and admits to wanting to get to know *who she is* better. She would like more time in her busy life, as a student, to listen to herself and not always the voices of others. She claims to be a practical

person and says she has" little time for theory". She is very clear on wanting to get on with her life and her career and to also have a family of her own in time.

Nina talked about how Transition Year helped her to develop as a person. She said her confidence increased significantly. The time she desired to help "find herself" was made available to her by the looser structure of the programme. She got the opportunity to take a part-time job which further increased her independence by earning her own money. She claimed that prior to Transition Year, she couldn't have participated in the interview for this research as she would have been too shy and would have "freaked out". She said that she had the chance to make new friends and that some of the friends she made were people she would otherwise never have spoken to. She also developed stronger bonds with her existing friends.

Regarding her vocational identity, Nina came into Transition year with childhood thoughts of wanting to be a lawyer or a doctor. These were predominantly inspired, she says, by her parents. However, in TY she discovered that she wanted to work with children. She loves her parents and respects her father's wishes for her to be a lawyer. She has significant strength and belief in her own desires and has made it clear to him, in a caring and sensitive way, that it is not her dream to be a lawyer. Her dream is to study psychology and to care for children with emotional difficulties. Following her work experience she became set on that career idea and now wants to get on with her studies and settle into that field of work. She claimed her work placement helped crystallise her ideas and that it helped her set aside her childhood fantasies for what she described as a "realistic option" for her. She has also considered teaching as a backup career following time spent in a homework club as part of her work experience. By being adventurous and trying other areas such as hairdressing and retail, she believes she has saved herself time by ruling out certain things. She admits her belief is that her mother is in her job because "she has to be and not because she wants to be". She does not want the same thing to happen to her. She is adamant that she wants to love her work and feels confident that she is making the right decision. She emphasises that it is more important to her to be happy in her career than to earn a lot of money.

For Nina it appears the work experience programme gave her time to think about her future. It helped her to an extent to choose her subjects for her senior cycle education. She developed a sense of what she wants to do with her life. Though that may change further with time, it is evident that the TY work experience programme had a significant effect on her emerging vocational identity.

Box 7.1 **Brief profile of Nina's identity and emerging vocational identity.**

The sample profile in Box 7.1 was created based on the information shared by the student from St. Monica's in a short interview that was asking questions about work place experience and not specifically about identity. Nonetheless, Nina was very forthcoming about herself and was quite content to paint a picture of the young girl who was preparing to

leave secondary school and move on to the next phase of her life, adulthood. She gave the interviewer a generous introduction to what Gee (2000) would refer to as her core identity. She also indicated the shape of her emerging vocational identity. The same applies to Lee, a 5th Year boy, who's story unfolded in a similar manner:

> Lee is a 5th Year Irish boy in Grattan Street College. He has been interested in teaching as a career since he was about 13 or 14 years of age. There is no history of teaching in his family but he has a sister who is currently studying to be a primary teacher. Lee gets on well with his sister and has always looked up to her. Her satisfaction with choosing primary teaching as her work placement during her time in TY had a major impact on him. This caused him to consider the possibility of such a placement for himself. His own experience of being educated in single sex schools was reproduced when it came to selecting a school for his work experience placement as he found himself choosing an all boys school. His mother worked as a special needs assistant (SNA) in the past and it was evident that the sense of satisfaction from that work, openly expressed by her, further affirmed his decision to consider working with children. Lee holds his parents in high regard and now, more than ever, he appreciates how hard they work.
>
> Lee is an easy-going, calm individual. He intimated that he is also quite patient and very approachable. These qualities, he believes, make him suited to being a good teacher. He has very good interpersonal skills and as a result finds it easy to get along with others. He said he enjoys connecting with people. Lee likes to be liked and expressed great satisfaction at sharing the positive comments made about him by the teachers with whom he worked. This also applied to the children. He claims that children need good role models and he believes that he would make a good role model himself. He said "I'd be someone they could come to if they had problems… I could sit down and listen to them, one-to-one". He wants the children to see him as a friend as well as a professional. His altruistic qualities are very evident in the way he speaks about caring for children. He chose to work with children around five to six years old. Lee was amused by the children referring to him as "Sir" or "Teacher" and his demeanour, while speaking about it, suggested that he liked that acceptance into the adult world.
>
> Though teaching is his first choice, he would consider working as a social worker or an SNA if things did not work out for him. The only reason expressed by him for not making it into teaching would be his grades. He is taking ordinary level Irish but it getting extra tuition with a view to switching to higher level, a requirement for entry to primary school teaching in the Irish teacher training colleges. In any event, he has already contemplated and researched going to the United Kingdom to study where he believes he may have a better chance of gaining entry to a suitable college. He is a very determined and confident young man. His determination is further highlighted by his intention to take another placement for three weeks, as soon as TY is over, in a special needs school in a neighbouring town. He said he wants to see what it would be like and be in a position to compare and contrast it to what he experienced in the regular primary school.

Lee takes great pride in his family and his school. His passion for helping others once again came to the fore through his involvement in a TY module set up in his school to bring to light the plight of the homeless. He got involved in an awareness campaign and a fund-raising programme and showed huge pride in the fact that he and his team-mates brought honour to the school by winning first prize in the awareness category of the Social Innovators Awards.

Lee is very aware of the difficulties associated with adult life in the current economic crisis. He has several older friends who are currently without work and without college places. He has witnessed his sister's difficulty in securing part-time work to help offset her college expenses. Apart from school arranged work experience, Lee tried working with his father, an electrician, for three weeks to see if that would appeal to him. He gained great respect for how hard his father works but decided it was not for him. While on one hand, he did not like the labour intensive nature of the work, he was also diverted from it by the lack of security and the necessity to move from place to place in search of work. Lee prefers to use his mind and for that reason is committed to working hard at school in order to secure his chosen career, primary teaching. This approach to hard work at school appears to be a new-found interest for Lee, suggesting that he may not have fully applied himself to his work in the junior cycle. He described how he really "settled down to study in 5th Year" as a result of TY.

Lee spoke very highly of TY attributing his occupational choice, his interest in working at his studies, his understanding of adult and working life and his subject selections, to his time spent on work experience and being part of the TY programme overall. He saw TY as an opportunity to step back from everything and consider life, career and family. He expressed a clear recognition that he had laid the foundations for a definite career trajectory and occupational identity.

Box 7.2 **Brief profile of Lee's identity and emerging vocational identity.**

All of the students interviewed shared equally interesting information about who they are and what their futures may hold for them in terms of a career. Their views were clear, strong, and practical at the same time. They put considerable value on being content in their chosen careers which they believed could be achieved by setting goals and working hard to realise them. They said it was more important to be happy and like one's work than it was to earn a lot of money. Slaney (1988) refers to this complex decision when he compares two different careers, a brain surgeon and a beef splitter. One yields a high income, the other not so much. If monetary return is important, then this is easy to quantify, and perhaps makes it easy to decide which career is more desirable. However, the beef splitter may have no job

related worries such as malpractice suits, and may be much happier in the job due to the absence of stress. Slaney refers to other factors such as prestige and leisure time, but, like stress, these are more subjective values and therefore more difficult to quantify.

The students showed that the link between identity and vocational identity is a strong and interdependent one. Their belief that their careers may well define who they are in the future came across very strongly in their comments. Work experience appears to have helped shape their occupational goals. Such goals can ground hope in actuality which in turn allows a young person to see his/herself as having a coherent identity in terms of a career (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995).

7.7 Adult life and the world of work

Students enter the workplace all over Ireland as part of their Transition Year programme. As outlined in Chapter Two, the role of the student on work experience is that of a *learner* and not an *employee* (Miller, Watts & Jamieson, 1991). However, for the outcome to be "substantial and distinctive" (p. 16), the experience must bring the student as close as possible to actually being an employee. The single most important purpose of the workplace is to engage in work with learning subordinate to the task in hand (Boud, 2008). This author adds that this can be a challenge for students coming from an environment where learning directions are the norm, to a workplace where work tasks are made explicit while the associated learning is implied. The goal is to increase the students' awareness and understanding of adult and working life. Work experience gives students an opportunity to acquire and test the skills needed to function in the world of work. In the UK, there have been calls to assess these skills. In Chapter Three, it was mentioned how the British Institute of Employment Studies expressed the view that there needed to be more focus on objectives and learning outcomes. They said it was not good enough to use work experience simply as

an opportunity to experience working life considering how much tuition time was being dedicated to it (Hillage et al., 1996).

When asked about their experience of adult and working life, the students interviewed were very positive about this element of the work experience programme. The nearest thing to a negative comment was that some students said they found it "hard", "daunting" or "scary". Though these words have negative connotations, the students used them to describe something that they found initially challenging, but rapidly and easily overcome with courage and effort:

> It was scary at first (laughs)… but it got me just used to it; like it showed me a taste of what it would be like…to be out in the working world, but it was a good experience overall. (Bernie, SM4)

> Yeah it's a bit daunting at first, yeah. By the end, I got on great and really enjoyed it…the fears were gone, yeah. (Fern, F5)

Invariably, the students interviewed expressed a sense of excitement and satisfaction with their engagement in adult life. They used words like *fun, enjoyable, great,* and *accessible* to describe their brief encounter with adult life and the workplace. An interesting comment from many students was the feeling of *independence* and *freedom* that they felt while participating in the programme. They talked about the *less controlled environment* that they experienced outside school. While there is a clear element of control in the workplace they saw it as very different to control in school or in the classroom:

> The best part of it is just kinda like… you're not, you're not working under someone, you're working with someone so you know, you're more kinda contributing to something whereas in school you're kind of a bit, I don't know, restricted… (Sam, GSC6).

Sam went on to suggest that in school one is learning but it is hard to see "an output". In work he says, there is an output for which one receives a reward in the end. The reward he

speaks of in this instance is *payment* for work completed. Some students did receive payment for their work experience. This proved to be most common in the all boys' school.

Ron in the co-educational school made a similar comment but his work was unpaid:

> It was a good way to feel like, that [unlike school] you were kinda not controlled but you were working for someone, you know…and that you were given a job to do and they trusted you to do it. (Ron, F4)

Fern also spoke about the sense of control in school:

> …a totally different experience that, that you just…like in school I suppose you're just under someone else's control the whole time… (Fern, F5).

These sentiments, once again, raise the issue of the teaching methods used in our schools and how they are perceived by students. The students describe them as "controlling" and "restricted" with little output, rewards and incentives. They describe the workplace as a place where you are working with others, having more autonomy, inspiring confidence, promoting independence and giving responsibility. These are the sentiments that should ideally be used to describe their whole education, particularly in the years outside of Transition Year. Other adjectives used by the students to describe their experience of adult and working life are *insightful, positive, realistic, responsible, capable, enjoyable,* and even *surreal*. Learning can often occur in the *in-between* spaces (Boud 2008). Boud explains how learning conversations can take place between work and non-work. Here, he is referring to tea-breaks, lunch breaks or any breaks that can occur during a working day. He describes these in-between spaces as opportunities for productive reflection. Boud adds that similar informal learning occurs in schools and colleges between classes in places like corridors and canteens. These he says are important exchanges that need to have their value acknowledged.

The students expressed significant positivity around the opportunity to sample adult life. They claimed to have acquired feelings of ability and confidence in themselves. The insights gained during their brief, but clearly wholesome, time spent in a vastly different environment increased their awareness and generated new perspectives. It opened the door to new challenges and opportunities. Students believe that they were given access to something that they fantasised about while growing up, worried about as they progressed through second level education and became passionate about when exposed to it through the work experience programme. Ryan, from the boys' school, expressed how his confidence was increased by his experiences on work placement but also seemed very sure that he now knew he was able to do the job. When his time would come to train to be a teacher he would be confident that he could do the work and that it would be the same as the time he tried it as a student:

> …definitely more confident and more open minded…being put in a classroom with all those children…that would definitely make you more confident. Like, to actually know that you would be able to do it now and then go back and do it in a few years…you're just the same as last time, you can do it like, no trouble. (Ryan, GSC5)

A senior girl in St. Monica's became very passionate about her exposure to adult life. She talked about her feelings in particular regarding how the world of work was for her:

> You feel…you feel like one of them as well. You feel like an adult…this is my work…I want to do this…let me do it. You're free like you know…you know right from wrong like you know. (Janet, SM6)

There is little doubt from the students' comments that the experience of the world of work and adult life was a positive one. In sum, they proclaim it offered them excitement, challenge, opportunity and a certain freedom.

7.8 Student learning about self

The idea of developing identity and emerging vocational identity was discussed earlier in Chapter 7.6. But what do students say about what they learn about themselves during work experience and Transition Year in general? By now it is clear that Transition Year gives the students an opportunity to learn in a different way. It exposes them to experiences and people they would not have encountered if they had continued into 5th year directly after their Junior Certificate examinations. Such encounters are the very basis for the changes and developments that take place in their young lives. Students used the words *confident, mature* and *independent* to describe themselves. During the interviews all students presented as very aware that they had changed in many ways subsequent to their TY experiences. Some students actually choose the TY option with the hope of gaining confidence and having a chance to mature. One very obvious case was Carrie, a 5th year student in St. Monica's. Carrie's twin sister also did TY in the same school. Though Carrie presented as a little shy and nervous she was very clear on how much she had changed and the extent to which she had improved her confidence and her ability to deal with the challenges she faced on a daily basis. She was aware of her shyness and believed TY would help her address this issue:

> I did 4th year because I thought it'd help me become more mature and like, I didn't know really what to do when I left school…so I thought if I skipped 4th year, I'd be really… like… lost. (Carrie, SM5)

When asked about her twin sister, Carrie described her as being more outgoing while she was the shy one:

> I'm always kinda hiding behind my twin and leave her speak more…I think she's more outgoing and I think she knows it as well like so…I was always the more shy one, yeah. (Carrie, SM5)

She explained how TY helped her to bond with her peers and her teachers. She said she developed good relationships with everyone. This, she added, gave her more confidence:

> It did give me a bit of confidence like, like, interacting with people more like, like, don't be so shy like in front of like a group like…speak out more and everything. So I think be more confident and don't be hiding behind someone else. (Carrie, SM5)

Carrie learned to be herself and to step out from her twin sister's shadow. Her sense of self developed during her time in Transition Year. Super (1957) amplified the idea of the development of the self-concept in his career development theory outlined in Chapter Four. He put great emphasis on maturation too, describing it as central to adolescent career development. Super was adamant that there was a difference between self-concept and identity, describing the former as being more subjective than the latter.

In contrast to Carrie, Theo, a 5th year boy in the boys' school, was already quite confident entering TY. He claims, however, that TY helped him mature and gave him a strong belief in his own ability. He took his placement in a primary school and quickly discovered that he did not want to be a teacher. His second placement in a supermarket whetted his appetite for something in the field of business where he could tap into his entrepreneurial spirit. Theo talked about opening his own business and said that this goal was confirmed by his time spent on work experience. He expressed great determination:

> Well obviously it's not going to be easy, but ahh…I have the drive and determination to get it done so, so I don't see a problem I would work very hard at that kind of thing so…again there would have to be barriers there like, but I am sure I could get around that like. (Theo, GSC5)

Even though Theo was brimming with confidence, he was quick to acknowledge the value of the TY programme in further developing himself:

> That extra year made a huge difference and I'm more grounded and hard-working like…I don't know if I really would have been absolutely driven for the first part of 5th year if I hadn't done TY. (Theo, GSC5)

Ginzberg (1966) asserts that there is a "discernible sequence in the way in which the majority of individuals act with respect to occupational choice" (p. 118). He argued that the degree of variation was greater in the *realistic* period than in the period of *tentative* choices. Ginzberg believed that the way in which adolescents approached the problem of occupational choice was dependent on the level of "emotional and intellectual development" (p. 119) which he proclaimed was more dependent on age than experience. Transition Year and its work experience programme offer students opportunities to expedite such development. It affords students the opportunity to seriously consider possible careers prior to entering third level education. It allows them to narrow the possible choices which Ginzberg claims is a prerequisite for crystallisation of career aspirations.

The language used by the students during the interviews in this research strongly suggests significant changes in their attitudes to school, to work and to how they feel about themselves. They talk of how much they changed and how much they learned not just by participating in the work experience programme but also the many other activities that form part of the unique programme that is the Irish Transition Year. The sense of awareness, maturity, determination, leadership and hope that is appropriated by the students was literally bubbling over the edge of each interview. There is no difference in the positivity emanating from them whether they are still in TY or in 6th year, two to three years after the event.

7.9 Student support for Transition Year and Work Experience

The relevant question posed here during the interviews was if students believed the work experience programme was actually worthwhile. The response was overwhelmingly positive with 100 per cent of the students expressing immense satisfaction with it. In fact, almost 30 per cent of students interviewed claimed it was the highlight of the entire Transition Year programme. Considering that students participating in TY usually get involved in exciting things like world travel, musical theatre and enterprise, to name but a few activities, then this suggests that work experience is very highly ranked indeed.

A fifth year boy in Grattan Street was asked what stood out for him during his entire TY experience:

> We had a pretty good group. We got on …everyone got on very well and ahmm…the work experience was worthwhile, was very worthwhile and that would be very high up there. (Theo, GSC5)

Though Theo said it was hard to single out any one thing in TY, he was very pleased that work experience helped him to rule out one field of work and very much "steered" him in a definite direction.

Nora, in the all girls' school, also ranked work experience as a highlight of TY. She became aware prior to starting TY that the subjects she would choose in 5th year could determine her future. While she said that initially she panicked, she then decided to use Transition Year to trial subjects and discover what she liked and disliked. Her work experience gave her the opportunity to sample the world of work which she said she enjoyed:

> I think work experience is really important. As a personal experience, I would class it as the most important [part of TY]…work experience puts you in the place…it puts you in the situation where you think… could I do this as a job really? It makes you really think about if you like certain [occupational] choices or not. (Nora, SM4)

Ron in the co-educational school described TY as "brilliant" and, like many other students interviewed, said he would do it again if he could. When pushed to select his highlight from the TY programme he responded:

> Ahmm…I'd have to say it would have been the work experience 'cause I enjoyed it a lot. (Ron, F4)

In the same school, one of the girls had a similar reply:

> Yeah…definitely, I think [work experience] was the highlight of TY. (Fern, F5)

Leona from St. Monica's also described work experience as a high point of her TY. She was particularly pleased to be in a position to rule out a number of areas that she had considered as potential careers. She was equally pleased to find a career direction which helped her to set goals. She acknowledges the influence of her mother both in terms of encouraging her to do TY in the first place and in encouraging her to trial primary teaching. After a most praiseworthy description of her work experience, Leona went on to describe her overall TY experience:

> TY was definitely the best year of my life…I am definitely happy that I did TY, definitely…work experience showed me what I didn't want to do so I can narrow my choices. (Leona, SM4)

Leona and other students mentioned *narrowing their choices,* something Ginzberg (1966) claimed is an essential component in crystallising future career ideas. This is a significant outcome of the Transition Year work experience programme and a factor which needs to be considered by the Department of Education and Skills when it comes to deciding on the value of such a programme. The abolition of the TY programme, as a cost saving measure, has been mooted by the current government. As well as seeing work experience as very

worthwhile and describing it above as the most important part of TY, Nora makes a clear statement on how she feels about any potential threat to the existence of the programme:

> I would hate for the government to get rid of it…it is a definitely an important year. (Nora, SM4)

Student feelings appear to run deep in relation to Transition Year in general and, in particular, to one of its clear key components, the work experience programme.

7.10 Discovering a career is "right" or "wrong" at age 15

When asked if age 15 or 16 was a good time to find out whether or not a career is suitable, 90 per cent of students agreed that it was a good time in their lives to make such a discovery. The vast majority agreed that it was both valuable to find out which careers might be a good fit for them but equally which careers were possibly going to be rejected by them. Of course, there is an inevitable link between these sentiments and the education system to which one belongs. As the Irish education system terminates for practically all at age 18, then, there is a certain logic as to why students would perceive age 15 as being suitable. They have to choose their subjects for their terminal examinations at this time, therefore, anything that can assist in such a major decision for them can only be welcome.

Joe, a final year boy, is quite laid back about the timing issue but nonetheless agrees that it is a timely age for finding out what is suitable or otherwise:

> Ah yeah…it's a grand enough time 'cause it's before you make any major choices about college or subjects or anything like that. But it's more or less the right time to do it. (Joe, GSC6)

A younger boy, Paddy, in the same school supports what Joe said and declares that the two years following TY are founded on what you discover at that time in your education:

> Yeah, yeah, definitely it's a good time to find out like in general. Yeah, because the rest of the two years at school is gonna like be based on what you kinda realise then. So, you're working towards what you found out. (Paddy, GSC5)

Don, in Grattan St. College, had just reached the end of TY and was anxious not to repeat the error made by an older sibling. He explained how his brother started a course in college which he discovered was entirely unsuitable. This caused him to drop out and pursue a liberal arts programme in a different institution. He makes it very clear that he does not wish to find himself in that position:

> It's good to find out [at 15] cause there's no point like going…doing a course and to find out later on in the middle of the course you don't like it. So I just kinda want to avoid that side of it you know, I don't want to be mixing and matching. (Don, GSC4)

Stan, on the other hand, is part of the small minority who suggest that age 15 is too young to be making such decisions about one's future career. When asked if it was a good time to find out what one would like to do, he replied:

> No, not at all. Yeah, absolutely far too young I think. Well… I kinda see the way it has to be done as well. You have to go in and pick sometime. But like, people are only starting to mature maybe in 5th or 6th year like and you really don't know what you're at like. People change so much. (Stan, GSC4)

Despite this strong statement from Stan he contradicts himself to an extent by later claiming that it is good to find out what one does not like in terms of a career through work experience at age 15. He says it is "a good idea" to find out how tough certain jobs can be and how one could perhaps be doing something better. He affirms the work done by the people who actually do these jobs in the real world.

The girls expressed positive feelings towards age 15 as the age of discovery regarding their careers. Marian, in St. Monica's girls' school, attached significant importance to discovering

what might work for her as a career. She believed that finding out what is not right for her helped her to further research the possibilities:

> Yeah, it is, like it's really vital because you get to realise that what you are doing is wrong for you. Then it's all messed up like…oh my God, where am I going to go now?...I think it's really vital for you to know what you want at that age…if you find out something is wrong for you at a really early time, it's really good 'cause then you get to explore the world more and like, you get to go further. (Marian, SM6)

Her classmate, Virginia, also responded positively to the same question:

> It is, because then you have all sorts of things that you might not have wanted, that you thought was brilliant and go to college, do a course in it and go…oh I hate this… and then you have no choice 'cause then you have to go back and set yourself back for all these couple of years. (Virginia, SM5)

Nora who had just finished TY in the girls' school agrees with the timing of work experience in TY and also acknowledges the importance of decision making around subjects for 5th year:

> Yeah…to me now it sounds young, but I'm glad I was that age (15) 'cause I think it gets harder the closer you get…you're under more pressure to kind of decide what you want to do. It's hard because you don't really know at this stage but…I'm glad I did the work experience back then because if I hadn't, I never would have considered childcare or ahmm…I don't know really…You might think you'll like a place and go there and you can tell when you come back. I think it's a good age around 15 to be figuring that out especially when you have to pick subjects ahmm… when you come back to school after work experience. (Nora, SM4)

In St. Finnian's school the feelings are once again similar regarding the suitability of making career decisions in the mid teen years. Ron, a current TY student at the time of the interview, again linked the importance of investigating the world of work with choosing subjects for 5th year:

> I think it's the right time anyway because if you're, you know, just about to pick your Leaving Cert subjects…say if you went into a lab and didn't like it, then that could put you off science subjects…so I think it's the right age to do it anyway because you

> know, subjects in your Leaving Cert…you'd be off working at them for two years and they will decide your points…so…if you don't like them then it's hard to do anything with it…so I think yeah…15 or 16 is a good age. (Ron, F4)

Ron's classmate Kelley, who was interviewed some time later, also agreed that finding out at around age 15 was appropriate saying:

> Yeah, because by the time you are 17 or 18 you need to be kind of deciding what you want to fill in to your CAO and that like really helped me. If I didn't really do work experience I still wouldn't know if primary teaching was what I wanted to do or not. But that really made me make sure that that was what I really wanted to do. It was really helpful. (Kelley, F5)

When asked if 15 is a good age to discover what you don't want to do Kelley agreed saying that such an outcome would cause one "to start thinking about other careers" and re-affirmed that it is a good time to figure these things out.

Like Stan in the boys' school, Ailish, a co-ed student, thought 15 was too young to be making decisions about future careers:

> No, most definitely not because I'm 18 now like and I still find it hard to decide for definite what I like. I think it's just way, way too young to be deciding. I think it's very, very young. (Ailish, F6)

Again, like Stan, this student did agree however, that finding out what one does *not* want to do around age 15 is of value. Career elimination is quite a powerful breakthrough in the search for a vocational identity. Often, those who cannot make up their minds on what they would like to do, can begin the process by eliminating what does not feel right for them. Certain aspects or components such as potential salary or the appeal of the work, can be chosen by the students based on their overall importance to them. These aspects may, of course, be desirable or indeed undesirable and may be used by the individual in the

elimination process (Slaney, 1988). The various aspects need to be considered over time before any serious decisions can be made about careers.

7.11 Advice for younger students on workplace selection

Students were asked what advice they would give to another student regarding work placement selection. One hundred per cent of those interviewed were most willing to do so. Their answers were quite remarkable. Fifty per cent of them used the word "interesting" in the interview. They were advising younger students to choose something that was of genuine interest to them as a career. They advised, strongly in some cases, to avoid convenience placements or what they referred to as "handy jobs". These are placements that may be with relatives or people they know because it is easier to access that work place, that may be convenient to where they live, that have no link with what they are considering as a career, or where the sole attraction is the possibility of payment for their work. Quite often this advice came from students who actually made that mistake.

Joe, a senior boy in Grattan Street College, chose a placement in his father's workplace which was an off-licence store. He said his father had worked there his entire life and that he arranged the placement on Joe's behalf. Joe said:

> It was convenient and I know a bit about it from my dad. (Joe, GSC6)

Joe declared a major interest in science and possibly in becoming a science teacher in time. When asked why he did not seek out a placement in a scientific or educational environment his reply was simple and honest:

> The main thing was laziness. (Joe, GSC6)

Joe went on to say he did not expect much from his placement and that the possibility of an on-going part time job was an attraction. He suggested that his father was working there because he did not work hard in school himself. He claimed his father did not want the same thing to happen to his son and as a result put pressure on him to take his schoolwork seriously. Despite a lazy, convenient, and low expectation workplace selection, Joe claimed to have learned from it all and said he would do it all again the same way for that very reason. He claimed to have learned that he should work harder in school but also that work is not just about the money. This echoes the quote above from Herbert & Rothwell (2005) about there being no such thing as a worthless work placement. According to Joe however, it is important to "like what you are doing and not going into monotonous (work) and getting bored of it". His advice to others is to pick something that reflects what "you want to do with your life…rather than something that's handy". He concluded that part of the interview by conceding that one is better off choosing wisely unlike the approach taken by him.

John, a 5th year boy in Finnian's had very clear advice for others and it was clearly based on his own approach to work experience:

> Some people get work experience in places only cause they're actually getting paid...I didn't get paid for my work experience… it was purely just work shadowing like is what I was doing...ahmm...like you have all the time in your life to work or get a part-time job...some people were using it for the money opportunity...like it would really be a waste getting a job in a shop when you know (*short laugh*) it's not going to be your future career or something like that...ahmm...that would be the main thing ahmm...the other thing is like pick something even if you don't think you could get the points...try...even if you do the work experience in a place, even if the career required high points, it might motivate you to say you could get it or something along those lines like. (John, F5)

Kelley in the same class offered similar advice:

K: Yeah, I am, I'd tell them to really think hard about what they want to do and really think about their career because it's not all what you see. And go somewhere you know you want to fulfil a career… don't just go somewhere because it's convenient to go… because it's really worthwhile to have something in mind when you get to experience it.

Int: And do you think students do that? Do you think students pick placements because they are convenient.

K: I… ahmm… yeah, some people do just pick places because it's easier to get in and they mightn't be, like, a hard job and stuff… but it would be more worthwhile going somewhere you want to. (Kelley, F5)

The same sentiments echoed from the girls' school when Jan said:

> Just take your chance and don't let your preconceived ideas of jobs stop you, just go with what you think would help you… not just something that you think is going to be easy or you're going to get paid at the end of the week. Go for something that you think will actually work 'cause it's like with everything else in TY, it's what you put into it is what you get out of it so, you just have to try your hardest. (Jan, SM5)

Students take the programme very seriously and it would appear that there is learning in every type of experience engaged in by the students. The common theme regarding advice is to make it count, make it interesting and avoid being guided by lesser attractions such as convenience or pay. Bernie (SM4) sums it up saying that choosing a placement for those reasons is a "wasted week" and simply "stupid". The same message came from students involved in the Smyth, Banks and Calvert (2011) study of Leaving Certificate students who said work experience must be meaningful in order to help shape future decisions.

7.12 Conclusion

Students can have varied experiences while on work placement including being encouraged in a particular career direction or indeed being turned away from what they originally believed would be a suitable choice for them. They were very aware that even when poor choices were made there was still learning involved. The majority of students

with early career ideas, dating back in some cases to early childhood, tended to investigate these ideas by choosing placements that gave them the opportunity to test that career. Subsequent to spending time on work placement, many students used the learning from that experience to choose their senior cycle subjects. The number of students who agreed with the fact that subject choice was affected, in the qualitative part of this research, was significantly higher than the number produced by the quantitative questionnaire. Following work experience, all of the students interviewed claimed that they returned to the more academic senior cycle with a clear motivation to work harder with a view to securing their possible career to ensure that they do not end up in an undesirable occupation when they leave education. Students were very willing to share insights into their core values and identities and to discuss their emerging vocational identities. They seemed to see themselves changing as they went through the education process, marking the experience of Transition Year as a landmark year in their own personal development.

The vast majority of students were very positive about the time spent in the adult world and learning about the world of work. Students spoke openly about how their confidence was boosted by this experience and how they became more mature and more outgoing. This was primarily due to the whole Transition Year involvement but aided in no small way by their exposure to working life outside the school community.

In general, students were very positive about the Transition Year programme and especially about the work experience element which many described as a highlight of the year. The chance to investigate what careers might be an option for them and which ones they would choose to avoid was certainly not underestimated by them. Subsequent to the opportunities afforded to them during TY, students were most willing to give sound and well considered advice to those coming through the school behind them. That advice consisted primarily of choosing wisely and making the best possible use of the chance to follow one's true interest.

Chapter Eight considers the two methods of data collection. It discusses the variables produced by the quantitative survey and the themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews conducted with the students. The intention is to unearth any divergences and convergences that exist between the two.

Chapter 8: Perceptions and Reflections: The Meeting of Methods

A comparative discussion

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the analyses from Chapters Six and Seven will be used to support or oppose, as appropriate, the findings from the quantitative and the qualitative elements of this research. The purpose of using a mixed methods approach, as outlined in Chapter Five, was to attempt to derive a richer understanding of the phenomenon is question. That phenomenon is the effect that the Work Experience Programme (WEP) in Transition Year may have on senior cycle school subject choices and the emerging vocational identity of the students who participate in this programme. By collecting large amounts of data through the quantitative questionnaires, it was possible to build a picture of *how things are* for the students involved in the programme with everything from their previous state examination results to their valuable opinions on the programmes in which they participated. As well as gathering opinions and attitudes, it was also possible to build an academic profile of each student as required to facilitate the cross-checking of data and the overall comprehension of their answers to the questions put to them. The random, semi-structured interviews allowed for some more in-depth understanding of what the students had to say. Each student interviewed clearly remembered the process of completing the questionnaire though not necessarily what they said in their answers. All of the data were collected within a four month period.

8.2 Quantitative and Qualitative comparison table

The table below (Table 8-1) outlines the inter-connections between the two datasets.

Quantitative		Qualitative
Worthwhile	⇔	Positive response Support for WE/TY programme
Reinforced career	⇔	Confirmed career interest Early childhood career ideas Finding out career is right or wrong
Highlight	⇔	Strong support for WE/TY
Did nothing	⇔	Personal & Vocational identities Learning about self
Placement choice	⇔	Advice to other students
Future focus	⇔	Study focus (Senior cycle)
Subject choice	⇔	Subject choice
"Put off" career	⇔	"Put off" career

Table 8-1 Quantitative and Qualitative analysis relationships

8.3 Discussion

It was somewhat anticipated by the author that there would be an overlap of ideas from the analyses of the two data collection methods used. This was due to the fact that both instruments were specifically designed to seek answers to the key research questions posed in Chapter Five. However, as the interviews were semi-structured in design, there was significant room for variation and change of direction in each individual interview, depending on how the exchange between the researcher and the interviewee would unfold. Despite this licence for variation, the common themes that were eventually highlighted from the interviews did align well with the variables generated by the quantitative questionnaire survey.

The left hand column (Table 8.1) illustrates the eight variables used for the statistical analysis. These variables were chosen based on the statements put to the students in Parts Three and Four of the quantitative survey. Some of the statements posed in the survey were eventually amalgamated reducing the final number of response variables to eight as they were basically measuring the same thing. This was an intentional tactic used in the drafting of the questionnaire to check the consistency of student answers. These were key statements as they elicited student opinions on their experiences while on work placement. The first three parts of the questionnaire were focused on background/biographical information and facts about subjects along with placement types chosen. Part Five, the final part, was predominantly based on students' self-concept which will be addressed later in this chapter.

The table shows a very close link between the quantitative variables and the qualitative themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews. These themes emerged from the gathered responses given by students as they spoke of the things that presented as important to them, following the coding of the qualitative interviews. The quantitative responses were more

straight-forward as they were primarily based on the answers to closed questions using a Likert-type scale.

Based on the analysis of the survey responses, the students overwhelming agreed that the work experience was a worthwhile exercise (85 per cent). This was supported by the positive way in which the students spoke about their time in Transition Year (TY) as well as the opportunity to participate in the work experience programme, during their interviews. One hundred per cent of those interviewed agreed that work experience was worthwhile for them for a host of different reasons.

While 63 per cent of students surveyed agreed that their career interest was reinforced by work experience (WE) in the questionnaire, this figure was higher at 83 per cent from the interviews. However the latter figure includes students who believed that they either had their career idea reinforced or had actually discovered a definite new career direction. Ultimately, it suggests that they were considering a career that they wanted to actively pursue. It also includes the students who were acting on career ideas that they held since early childhood, something Ginzberg (1966) advocated in his occupational choice model. These figures are similarly positive, suggesting that the majority of students believed that their career ideas were confirmed for them through involvement in WE.

While over 60 per cent of students described work experience as a highlight of TY in the survey, just 30 per cent said so in interview. However, unlike the questionnaire, the question was not posed directly in the interviews and students simply used the expression "highlight of TY" in response to the question "Do you think work experience was worthwhile?" When answering a similar question regarding TY in general, some students actually described it as the "best year of their lives". They listed some of the opportunities and adventures that they

were presented with, and in some instances, found it difficult to single out individual activities that they preferred over others.

The fourth variable from the quantitative analysis "Did Nothing" was based on the statement "Work experience did nothing for me". This statement was overwhelmingly rejected by students in the quantitative survey. That rejection was reflected in the interviews where students talked positively, and in detail, about how much they had matured and had learned about themselves while participating in the world of work but also by being part of the TY experience. Chapter Four highlighted the importance of maturity in both the SLSS (2007) document on TY and in Super's (1957) career choice theory. Students spoke about how they had developed serious vocational intentions and an appetite to try and realise these by applying themselves to their senior cycle studies. All of this, many added, was supported by the growth in confidence and self-belief that they acquired due to the combined experiences to which they were exposed. The positivity from the students during interview was palpable and there was no doubt that every interviewee was clear that they certainly got something of value from Transition Year and, in particular, from the work experience programme.

More than half of the large number of students surveyed said that they were satisfied with their placement choices with approximately 35 per cent realising they should have been more careful in their selection. During the interviews, students were not directly asked if they were happy with their placements but the fact that the vast majority said they discovered their potential career directions, as discussed earlier, partly answers that question. All students were very willing to give positive advice to others regarding how to choose placements when their time would come. While most offered sound advice that they had adhered to themselves, those who did prove somewhat careless in their selections gave sound advice nonetheless such as "choose something you are interested in" or "avoid

convenience placements". This is a remarkable development on the part of these young students demonstrating the power of experience based learning.

The quantitative survey revealed that the majority of students claimed that work experience helped them focus on their future careers (63 per cent). Whether or not they had thought about it before commencing TY, most believed that they had achieved a focus on life beyond school, even if they remained unsure about their actual career choice. In the interviews, students talked about that same future focus attributing it, in most cases, to the time spent in the world of work. They spoke about how that new focus on the future caused them to adjust their attitude to school work and study. For some, it was to increase their determination to help secure their goals. For others, it was to begin making an effort in the first place, either to secure a particular career idea or to ensure that they avoided another career with which they had a negative experience during their time in the field.

Regarding subject choice, 37 per cent of students agreed that subject choice was affected by work experience. The interviews revealed a significantly higher level of agreement at 64 per cent on average across the three school types. The figure was as high as 90 per cent in the co-educational school while the figure was 66 per cent in the two single sex schools. The lower response from the questionnaire still showed a significant minority in agreement, particularly on consideration of the fact that just 48 per cent disagreed while the remaining students were undecided. During the interviews the students had more time and opportunity to consider the question and subsequently gave more credence to the possibility that their choices were facilitated by their time spent in the workplace. Also, students realised that they had chosen the higher level of study for certain subjects, most notably Irish, English and Mathematics, to meet third level colleges requirements for entry to particular programmes. This was something they had not considered when responding in the questionnaire.

In the quantitative responses, it was shown that 37 per cent of students were "put off" a particular career as a result of time spent on work experience. This figure was considerably higher based on the interview results with on average 78 per cent stating that they were diverted from a particular career. A possible explanation is, perhaps, that in the questionnaire students may have been thinking of their *preferred* work placement and career goal when responding to that question. During interview, students were talking about being put off any *one* of up to three placements chosen by them, depending on their school. This is supported by the fact that the lowest figure for being put off was 50 per cent in the co-educational school where only one placement was allowed by comparison to the other two schools where up to three placements were permitted. From the questionnaire data, the main reason given for being put off was boredom. During interview, the main reasons given were the unanticipated reality of the work involved in particular jobs or simply not liking the work, which, in some cases was attributed by the students to having made careless or convenient selections. The latter was especially true in the case of the boys in the all-boys' school. In both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis, the boys were shown to be the ones most likely to be careless in their selections while the girls were shown to take placement selection more seriously and even to be more adventurous. In the interviews, students were asked how they felt about being put off a career at that stage of their school lives. The vast majority were in agreement that it was a good thing to make that discovery as it could save them from making unsuitable subject choices or potentially applying for unsuitable third level places following secondary school. They largely accepted it as a positive rather than a negative though it must be acknowledged that some were disappointed to discover what they thought was a good choice for them, was no longer viable subsequent to their placement.

8.4 Conclusion

Table 8-1 shows the similarities between the ideas that emerged from the two data collection methods. Overall it appears that both methods positively support each other with a relatively minor level of divergence. Where divergence does occur, it is predominantly down to percentages. When an average of both is taken, it comfortably supports the overwhelming value students place on the work experience programme as well as the whole concept of Transition Year. The combined outcomes are:

- Work experience is a most worthwhile exercise
- Most students found a career direction as a result of WE
- The majority made meaningful placement choices
- Most students were assisted in focusing on their vocational futures
- WE influenced subject choices for many
- Some students were put off their vocational interest
- Those who were put off a career saw it as a positive discovery

The final chapter discusses the outcomes of the research, offering a summary of the overall research and answering the key questions posed in Chapter Five. It concludes with a series of recommendations to be considered by schools, parents, employers, and policy makers.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This chapter will take a helicopter view of all of the data gathered and analysed thus far and bring it together in a coherent whole. It begins with a rationale for the research followed by a summary of the study and the overall results. The work experience is discussed in relation to the key concepts outlined in Chapter Four prior to dealing with each of the research questions posed at the end of that chapter. Recommendations are made that are particularly relevant to school authorities, teachers, guidance counsellors, parents, employers and policy makers. The chapter closes with a final summing up of the overall findings of this research study.

9.2 Background

This thesis, like thousands of others, started as a hunch on the part of the author. I believed that something significant was happening to students, with whom I worked as a careers counsellor, regarding their vocational development and potential career direction as they progressed through the senior cycle of their secondary education. That hunch became something that I felt compelled to learn more about. I started in a most informal manner simply speaking with students and asking final year groups about their future plans for study and work. These casual conversations were conducted with groups and with individuals. The key feature that emerged was how a number of past students, from my own school, were actually working in careers that they had trialled as part of the work experience programme whilst in attendance at school. This raised the possibility that the work experience programme could be even more powerful than I had originally anticipated. From further conversations with former students, I learned that many of those who pursued their

Transition Year (TY) work experience careers said that once they discovered they liked the job, they began to take steps to make it a reality for themselves. They explained that they accomplished this by studying particular subjects and subsequently choosing college courses that would prepare them for a potential future in that occupation.

I decided this phenomenon was worthy of further investigation. This was realised by means of a master's thesis based on data collected from a student cohort in a single school. I chose a co-educational school for the convenience of having both boys and girls on one site for the investigation. Two years later, on completion of the thesis, I was satisfied that there was a definite trend of students discovering a potential suitable career following time spent on work experience. Furthermore, these students were shown to have taken steps, beginning with senior cycle subject selections, to make these career interests a reality. Inevitably, this caused me to want to further expand the study to include more schools and to find out more about the influence of work experience on students' subsequent subject choices and college course selections. For this thesis, I also extended the study to consider the development of the young person as they followed the Transition Year programme, especially considering their maturation, which is a key concept underpinning the entire programme. This led to the inclusion of the concepts of *identity* and *vocational identity* on the part of the students which proved to be significant in their decision making process regarding future occupations. Socio-cultural learning and experience based learning are key elements of the TY programme and the other senior cycle programmes LCA and the LCVP, outlined in Chapter Two. Students demonstrated a clear appreciation of the different teaching and learning strategies experienced during TY.

This mixed methods research was conducted by gathering data from students by means of a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews. With permission from school management, these interviews were conducted in each of the schools where the students

were in familiar and comfortable surroundings. The overall aim of the research was to discover the extent to which students' subject choices were affected by work experience and also any effect it may have on their developing identities and emerging vocational identities.

The aim of the study was to prove a real link existed between work experience placement and subject choice. Subsequently, this affects college selections and possible careers. By proving this, schools, then, might better understand the value of the work experience programme (WEP). It would highlight the need to ensure that a well organised programme, including briefing and debriefing, is put in place along with the necessity to offer subjects, making up the curriculum, that meet the needs of the student body. It may also be of interest to policy makers in the Department of Education and Skills (DES), together with the various support services, who need to know the value of such programmes in terms of developing resources to ensure all schools are in a position to offer a sound and well-coordinated programme. In recessionary times, cut-backs are inevitable and programmes such as the Transition Year usually come under the spotlight. Prior to the annual national budget, someone has to decide if the programme remains in place or can savings be achieved by cutting it. Jeffers (2007), in his report to the DES, makes a strong case for the continuation of TY as a stand-alone programme which, he outlines, is generally very well received by all of the partners involved despite the various tensions that exist within the programme. The most notable of these is the tension between learning for personal and social development versus learning how to succeed in examinations. He asserts that the data gathered showed the schools researched for the report, had generally realised the Transition Year goal of providing "a broad educational experience with a view to the attainment of increased maturity" (DE, 1993c, as cited in Jeffers, 2007, p. 261). My intention is to show that work experience, a key component of TY, is in itself a valuable and powerful programme with significant effects on how young people map their futures. It is a programme that requires

more attention from all of the stakeholders responsible for education in the State as well as the research community.

9.3 Summary of the study

The research was conducted in three schools involving 323 students. All of these students were surveyed by means of a detailed questionnaire, the first part of which gathered data on the students in relation to their gender, age, and career dreams. The second part collected details of their academic performance in the State Junior Certificate examination, followed by their predictions of how they would perform in their terminal examinations. Part three asked students about the work placements they chose while in Transition Year and why they chose them in the first place. The fourth part of the questionnaire sought students' attitudes to work experience using a Likert-type scale while the fifth and final part, also using a Likert-type scale, asked students how they felt about themselves, their careers and their futures.

Once the questionnaires were completed, they were numbered school by school and 12 students were randomly selected from each school using a computer programme to generate the random numbers. The questionnaire data was collated and entered into an Excel worksheet. This data was then transferred to SPSS version 19 for detailed analysis. The main quantitative study was based on eight variables which were constructed from individual questions or, in some cases, the summation of questions which were concerned with measuring the same underlying themes. These variables are discussed and graphically represented in Chapter Six. As this was a mixed methods design, the 36 randomly selected students were then contacted and times were arranged to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Following a number of visits to each school the final number of interviews completed was 32. A grounded theory based approach was used to analyse the interview

scripts. The scripts were coded and categorised and ten distinct themes emerged which are detailed in Chapter Seven.

9.4 Results summary

The quantitative study showed students' attitudes to work experience to be quite positive. A most interesting development was the convergence and divergence in relation to students' dream and realistic careers. In some cases the dream career was deemed an "unreal" and "unstable" choice, while in other cases, the dream career was seen as an attainable goal. A significant number of students, though an overall minority, believed that their subject choices were directly influenced by their work experience placements. These students were predominantly those who had definite career ideas, high examination performance goals and who took the process of securing a suitable placement seriously. While others claimed their subject choices were not directly influenced by work experience, they did state that they discovered the importance of particular subjects in relation to future careers as a result of their time on work placement. The general feeling among students was that the time spent on work experience was not only very worthwhile, but even a highlight of the entire TY programme, with females being more likely than males to believe this. Those who had existing career ideas, especially the female students, agreed that their career choices had been reinforced by the opportunity to participate in adult life and the world of work. This proved to be particularly true of those who had ideas about their future careers for a long time and even dating back to early childhood. The very narrow margin of students who believed that work experience was a waste of time for them, were predominantly those who expressed low self-esteem, had poor academic performance records, and whose placement choices were either poor or careless. The majority of students however, did make careful and valuable selections with those in the former category freely admitting that they should

have been more careful in their selection. While the majority of students either had their career choices confirmed or found new career directions, a significant minority were put off their career idea. This was more applicable to boys than girls. In general, most students agreed that the work experience process, at the very least, crystallised their career ideas for the future.

The analysis of the interview data generally supported the findings from the quantitative analysis. Again it showed students to be very positive about the work experience element of the Transition Year programme. Even those who believed that they had made poor selections agreed that there was significant learning there for them nonetheless. Many students talked about being put off a particular career while the majority believed that they either had their career idea confirmed or that they were switched on to a new career goal. Boys were shown to be more likely than girls to actually be put off a career but this is not that surprising when one considers that boys proved to be more careless in their placement selections in the first instance. A significant number of students, especially girls, had career ideas dating back to quite a young age. Super (1957) and Ginzberg (1966) refer to the time when this occurs as the Fantasy stage in their career development theories.

The qualitative interviews showed a more significant number of students claiming a link between their subject choices and work experience. This time it proved to be a majority of students who agreed there was a definite influence. The figure was highest in the co-educational school with a significant majority of those interviewed identifying a link. Another interesting development from the qualitative interviews was the extent to which students agreed that, subsequent to work experience, they had an increased awareness of the importance of study in the following years. Students, right up to their terminal year in school, still agreed that their Transition Year work experience caused them to work harder in school thereafter. While the interview questions did not directly probe the students' sense of

self, the interviewees did offer quite deep insights into themselves and their general identity. A good example of this is presented in Chapter Seven, Box 7-1 and Box 7-2, where profiles of two students, Nina and Lee, are given based on the incidental information they offered about themselves during the interview.

Students responded very positively to the question on their experience of adult life and the world of work. They expressed a strong sense of satisfaction and excitement when talking about the experience. They contrasted the independence and freedom of working life with the overly controlled environment of the classroom. They used words like *restricted* to describe learning in school while words like *insightful, responsible* and *enjoyable,* were associated with work-based learning. Similarly, positive words like *confident*, *mature* and *independent* were used when students spoke about themselves and how they were personally affected by their time in the world beyond the school walls. They were clearly aware of the development within themselves as young adults and the ever changing identity that defines them. Overall, students were overwhelmingly in support of the work experience programme and the Transition Year as a whole. The vast majority agreed that age 15 or 16 was an ideal time to develop some sort of career goal. They also saw significant value in discovering that a career was not right for them. When it came to advising others who are about to embark on a work experience programme, they were most willing to give sound advice with the very strong recommendation to choose something in which one is genuinely interested. They openly cautioned against convenience and careless placements.

9.5 Work experience and the key concepts

The data has offered considerable insights into student attitudes to work experience. Some of the key concepts discussed in Chapter Four are strongly linked to the taste of the world of work experienced by the students. This section will briefly discuss how work experience is

related to each of experiential learning, subject choice, vocational identity and overall identity.

9.5.1 Work experience and learning

Chapter Two situated the work experience programme in the overall Irish education landscape. The chapter opens with an introduction to the Irish education system briefly tracing its history and ultimately positioning Transition Year within the second level system. That system evolved very slowly over time originating from a colonial past and through the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922. It continues to evolve today with significant developments during the past 20 years in particular. The introduction of programmes with a strong active learning philosophy underpinning them such as the LCA, LCVP and the mainstreaming of the TY programme in the 1990s set the stage for some of the further developments currently being rolled out in the form of the new Junior Certificate and the revised Leaving Certificate.

Chapter Three establishes how schools throughout the world have embraced work experience over the past 50 years. The data gathered by this research has shown that work experience in Ireland has been extremely well received and is highly valued by the participating students. It is also an introduction for young people to what they themselves have referred to as a preferred way of learning; learning through experience. Experiential learning, as defined by any of the major theorists in this field (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1910; McElhaney, 1998) effectively underpins the Transition Year programme. The Department of Education (DE) saw TY as a means of varying the learning environment and "helping to dispel the notion that learning is something that happens only, or most effectively, within the classroom" (DE 1993b, p. 3). They perceived work experience as one method of achieving this. The responses of the students who participated in this research affirm the success of

this approach to learning. TY has many other examples of experiential and socio-cultural learning in the form of Young Entrepreneur schemes where students set up and run small companies; school musicals where students take on all sorts of roles from acting and singing to design, production, and direction; social innovation programmes where students work with others in the community dealing with social issues; foreign travel which gives students an opportunity to interact with other cultures and in some cases total immersion to develop their language skills. TY, as the name suggests, is a year of transition. Perhaps a further conceptualisation of this could be to see TY, as well as LCA and LCVP, as a vehicle for the *transition* of Irish classrooms from traditional centres of learning to active centres of learning, as suggested by the OECD (1991) and previously mentioned in Chapter 2.2.2. The focus of this research, however, is work experience. The findings here confirm that students overwhelmingly see it as a most worthy activity for inclusion in the TY programme as well as the overall education system, exposing them to new ideas, new concepts, and new ways of learning. Much of what they experience is very well reflected in the underpinning assumptions of work experience put forward by the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) as listed in Chapter Three.

9.5.2 Work experience and subject choice

Students have many different reasons for choosing particular subjects for further study as they progress through the education system to which they belong. The quantitative questionnaire, in fact, asked students for their general justifications of the subject choices they made as they progressed to 5th Year. The options given were:

- Considered an easy subject
- Performed well in Junior Cert exams in that subject
- Nothing else on that subject line appealed

- Parents said to choose it
- Discovered through work experience that it would be useful
- Liked the subject
- Required for Leaving Cert points
- Required by 3rd level institution
- Advised to choose it by Guidance Counsellor
- Other reason (space provided for free write)

All of the above, of course, are influenced by the list of subjects provided by the school in the first place. Some schools have a very broad curriculum offering students significant choice while others have a more limited range of subjects available. This is predominantly affected by school size but also by decisions made by the administration in relation to what subjects should be on offer for students. The most popular choice by the students surveyed was "Liked the subject", closely followed by "Performed well in Junior Cert exams in that subject". The subjects chosen by students for their senior cycle can have a significant influence on both the educational and career options that are open to them (Thompson, 2005). This effectively makes subject choice such an important factor for young people trying to make career decisions. The relatively small number of students who chose the option "Discovered through work experience that it would be useful" conflicts with the overall finding that up to 64 per cent of students agreed that their subject choice was influenced by work experience. This may be because most students only ticked one or two of the ten options for that question despite the instruction to tick as many boxes as desired. As a result, only their top one or two reasons were declared. As "liking the subject" was the most popular answer from the questionnaire, it would be reasonable to assume that their career choice and favourite subjects would be closely linked, thus leading to the possible

selection of that subject having some relationship, even if unconsciously, to student experiences and influences while on placement.

Regarding subject choice, the most significant finding from the study, however, is that a considerable number of students stated that their subject choices were directly influenced by work experience. While this was a significant minority in the case of the quantitative investigation, it was a significant majority according to the qualitative element. This is a finding that adds particular value to the work experience programme in our schools. Knowing that it can have such an impact on the subject choices made by students should alert work experience organisers to ensure students maximise their efforts to secure worthwhile placements and that a solid structure is in place within the school to facilitate this. It may also inspire schools to review their curriculum by conducting regular curriculum audits to help the school provide for the ever changing needs of each student cohort.

9.5.3 Work experience and vocational identity

In modern society, the workplace has become detached from normal human existence. Gone are the days when the child would witness the occupation of the parents in the home, on the farm or in the workshop (Eggleston, 1982). Work and the workplace, in the modern context, is considerably more complex and, in many cases, not just out of the sight of young people, but also quite inaccessible. All of this has consequences for the development of a child's vocational identity. Schools have begun to take more responsibility for helping young people with the development of their vocational identity. One of the most powerful ways of achieving this has been through the inclusion of work experience programmes as part of regular schooling. In Irish education students now have several opportunities to access work experience through the Transition Year Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme as outlined in Chapter 2.2.5. Young people

witness careers today through digital media, print media, social media, television, and other forms of information technology. These artefacts coupled with a well prepared programme of work experience can assist adolescents in the construction of their work identities.

During the qualitative interviews students expressed strong, clear, and practical views on their vocational identities. The vast majority were certain that they had found something worth working towards in terms of a career and expressed that with hard work and commitment, they could realise their career goals and aspirations. They rated the knowledge of a potential career very highly and portrayed a strong belief in the idea that their careers may well define who they are in the future. They made no secret of the fact that work experience was a significant factor in shaping their occupational goals.

9.5.4 Work experience and identity

Holland's (1985) view that vocational interests are an expression of personality is one that resonates with the ideas on identity and vocational identity being inextricably linked. As well as a core identity, people have various other identities that determine who they are. In the modern world people reach conclusions about others by what they do in life. The more common question on a first encounter with someone these days is not "who are you?" but "what do you do?" The kind of person one is, or indeed, the several kinds of person one is (Gee, 2000), is something that that develops with experience (Trede, 2012). Trede adds "who we are is our past" (p. 161). This research proposes an addition to that with students saying that who they aspire to be is also part of who they are. Nevertheless, past experience is very significant in its own right. Boud & Walker's (1990) model of learning from experience incorporates the basic assumption that all learning is built upon various types of previous experience (Boud, 2008). Dewey (1939) spoke of the "organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 25). A key factor of experience based learning is that

meaning is drawn from a new experience in the light of prior experience. Any learning therein, is facilitated by reflection, evaluation and reconstruction by the learner (Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 2001).

Personality is concerned with the identity of the individual including their hopes, dreams and fears (Hogan & Blake, 1999). The maturity developed by students during Transition Year is a key factor in their evolving identity. Some will argue that students are a year older anyway and this accounts for the extra maturity compared to their 3rd Year counterparts. This may be true to an extent but it is the experiences, according to the students, that change them. They make no secret of the impact of work experience on *who they are* by the end of the programme.

9.6 Research questions

Chapter Five closed with the key questions for this research. This section will deal with each question individually and offer responses based on the findings from the data analysis. Answers are not always easy to find, nor is it easy to always pose the right questions. The challenge for this research is to ignite an interest in the fascinating world of student work experience. While work experience in general has been considered by the research community it seems to be predominantly based on those involved in third level education or in industry, such as, for example, internships. Little attention has been paid to secondary schools and especially secondary school students in Ireland. Have the right questions been asked? This is a starting point and already further questions have presented themselves during the process. These questions will be posed in the closing paragraphs.

Question 1: Does work experience affect decisions around students' subject choices?

The answer is a definitive, yes. The data from both research approaches in this mixed methods study clearly showed that 37 per cent of the 323 students surveyed said there was a definite link between their time spent on work experience and the subjects they subsequently chose for senior cycle study. This figure was shown to be as high as 64 per cent from the qualitative data with significant variation between the three school types. 90 per cent of the students in the co-educational school agreed that their subject choices were definitely influence by the process. This drops to 66 per cent in the all-girls school with a further 16 per cent saying that the influence was from the entire TY experience. The all-boys school was also 66 per cent with 37 per cent of that group saying that the effect was limited.

Why then is the qualitative interview result significantly higher? I attribute this to the time given to the students during the interviews to reflect on the questions asked and the time to develop their answers. Reflection is an on-going process. Andresen, Boud & Cohen (2001) suggest that the process of reflection "lasts as long as the learner lives and has access to memory" (p. 2). Reflection regarding work experience, for the students who completed the quantitative questionnaire, would have been rekindled by simply completing the questionnaire in the first place. The announcement that there would be random, follow-up interviews and in time, the setting of the actual appointments at the schools to conduct the interviews, would naturally have caused students to think even further about their time involved in work experience. In Chapter Two learning was defined, according to Kolb (1984, p. 41), as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". Andresen et al. (2001) emphasise this strongly by suggesting that the quality of the reflective thought on the part of the learner has a more significant effect on the learning outcomes than the actual experience itself.

During the interviews a number of students remembered that they had chosen higher levels in some subjects that they had originally been contemplating taking at the ordinary level. This was mostly to qualify for particular 3rd level courses required to realise their possible careers. They had not originally considered that an actual subject choice when in reality, it was very much the case. With the exception of the co-education philosophy, the only other obvious difference between the single sex schools and the co-educational school, was the fact that the co-ed permitted only a single placement for the two weeks of the work experience programme. The other two schools were encouraged to choose two placements or, in some cases, up to three as in the girls' school. The increased number of placements may be the cause of a lower level or specificity or certainty on the students' part possibly accounting for the greater influence of work experience regarding subject choice in the co-ed school. It was also noted in the girls' school that some students who chose three placements had difficulty, for a host of reasons, attending each day. One girl, for example, described a situation where due to a combination of illness, technical breakdown, and a school exam she actually only spent one day out of five in a local radio station, one of her three placements. This, by her own admission, did not offer her any reasonable insight into that career area. Another contributory factor to be considered here is the advance preparation by schools and students in relation to their work experience programmes. McElhaney (1998) specified the importance of suitable advance preparation prior to participating in learning outside of the school environment. The level of preparation can vary from school to school. The analysis showed that students who had definite careers in mind and who chose placements appropriate to their hopes and aspirations, were shown to be more likely to agree that their work experience influenced their subject choices. This also applied to students who chose placements in which they had a genuine interest and who possessed clear academic goals for their future.

Question 2: What are students' attitudes to the work experience programme?

Students' overall attitudes to work experience were significantly positive with the vast majority of students agreeing that it was a worthwhile endeavour. By way of checking, a similar question was posed in reverse, elsewhere in the questionnaire, asking students if they thought work experience was a waste of time. A similarly large number disagreed with that sentiment. Students said the programme was worthwhile because work experience:

- helped them focus on particular careers,
- reinforced existing career ideas
- confirmed childhood career ideas
- saved them from pursuing unsuitable careers
- assisted with subject selections
- helped them learn about themselves through experience in the adult world of work
- helped them increase their focus on study for a better future
- gave them insights into how their professional identities might look

Question 3: What effect does work experience have on students' existing career ideas?

The majority of students were shown to have chosen their placements out of a genuine interest in that particular career. This finding is supported by Smyth et al. (2004) who said that this was evident from the group interviews conducted during their research. It stands to reason then, that these students would either have that work idea confirmed or alternatively discover that it was not a suitable choice for them. Smyth, Banks and Calvert (2011) also confirm this in their ESRI supported study of 6th Year students. Ginzberg (1966) and Super (1957) included a fantasy stage in their vocational choice theories. Ginzberg believed that children as young as five or six years old could have real career ideas. They imagine

themselves in these roles. This was the case for many of the students involved in this research, particularly girls. In Ginzberg's model, young people during what he labelled the *Tentative Stage*, become aware of the need to be realistic about career interests around age 13-14 years and by age 15-16 years they begin to evaluate their choices based on their own specific goals and values. Super, who built on Ginzberg's theory and expanded it across the life span, also included a *Tentative Stage* at age 15-17 as a sub-heading for the *Exploration Stage*. Again he believed this was a crucial time for young people trying to put a shape on their vocational identities. 54 per cent of students in this research study were satisfied that they had their existing career interests reinforced according to the quantitative analysis, while this figure was as high as 83 per cent in the qualitative study. The latter, however, also included those who may have been "switched on" to a new career idea subsequent to work experience. Being put off an existing career idea was revealed not to be a negative outcome for most. Many students expressed relief at making that discovery in time. Others, who may have made careless choices or who accepted what they referred to as "handy" placements, learned that these career choices were not a good option for them and ultimately discovered an interest in working harder at school to avoid such occupations in the future.

Question 4: What contribution does work experience make to the development of the student's emerging vocational identity?

Work experience was shown in the analysis to have a significant effect on the students' emerging vocational identities. Super's (1974, as cited in Savickas, 2001) concept of "planfulness" which is the awareness that vocational choices must be made coupled with the inclination to make those choices, really applies well to those students who approach the work experience programme with enthusiasm and a genuine interest in trying to figure out the career direction they should be considering. They are participating in what Super termed his *exploratory stage* involving both action and reflection. Through this, students can begin

the process of informing themselves regarding their own career values, interests, and abilities (Savickas, 2001). This was the general response from the students interviewed. They saw themselves discovering a direction in life that could well determine who they become professionally. The majority agreed that around age 15 or 16 was a good time to figure this out as it would assist with many of the decisions facing them in the coming years. A significant contribution by Super to career development theory was his recognition of the idea that the self-concept changes over a person's life as a result of their experiences. This notion is supported by Gee (2000) who said identity develops with experience and Trede (2012) who said we are our past. Work experience, according to the data, gave students the experience, knowledge and encouragement to prepare themselves for their future professional selves while concomitantly developing their self-concept and their overall core identity.

Question 5: To what extent does work experience affect the student's overall identity?

Following on from the previous section, the answer to that question can only be that work experience has an effect on a student's individual identity. Just as vocational identity is developed with time and experience then, by virtue of the inextricable link outlined earlier, it follows that one's core identity will follow a similar pattern with these two vital ingredients. Time is an essential part of all of our experience. Experience can bring change and change in turn brings evolution. Identity is never stable particularly through adolescence when young people are not just learning from experience over time, but are actually *trying on* different identities as they learn to cope with everyday life. In each of the three schools there were students from all socio-economic backgrounds. During the interviews, students gave basic information about themselves as an ice-breaker. They would talk about the number of siblings they had or the types of hobbies or sports that they liked, while others talked about their age or where they lived. This is a reasonable beginning when it comes to

building a personal profile of someone. However, as the interviews progressed students said much more about "who they were" as individuals by the way they spoke about each of the issues raised through the interview questions. Many commented on feeling more confident about themselves and their abilities while others talked about simply being more open-minded and independent. Maturity was a common thread through the comments of the students, a key concept in Super's Life Span/Life Space theory. Many students commented on how they felt they had matured and work experience was singled out by some as a significant contributor to that development. This sense of increased maturity is borne out in Jeffers (2007) report on attitudes to TY on the part of the students, their parents, their teachers, and even the policy makers.

Question 6: What other issues arise for students who participate in work experience?

Though touched upon in the answer to Question Four, it is worth highlighting the fact that many students were turned away from particular careers. It is a powerful reveal for a student to discover that a particular career is not right for him/her. Students agreed that this outcome is as important as finding that your career interest has real potential. The reasons for discovering that a career was unsuitable were varied. For some, it was discovering the realities and complexities of a career and simply realising that it was not what they thought it would be. For others it may have been poor or careless selections that opened the students' eyes to the difficulty or monotony of certain jobs that, henceforth, they were going to do everything possible to distance themselves from, realising that a good education can bring them beyond jobs like that. This leads to another issue that arose, which was that subsequent to work experience, students found an increased interest in studying harder at school to achieve or improve their career prospects. They talked about the importance of goal setting and working hard at school to achieve those goals. This may be a contributory factor to why students who participate in TY have been shown overall to out-perform their

non-TY counterparts in the Leaving Certificate examinations. Improved performance was demonstrated in the work of Smyth et al. (2004) and the NCCA study by Miller and Kelly (1999).

A remarkable number of students claimed that they had career ideas dating back to a young age, and even as far as early childhood. Up to 71 per cent of the students interviewed said they had early career ideas with 50 per cent of that group having such ideas going back to before they were ten years of age. A career offers students a trajectory by which the roles and expectations of childhood are reified in the choice of career that feels right for the individual and that is recognised by others as an appropriate fit for future success (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995).

Finally, the increase in self-confidence and self-esteem expressed by students is a significant issue making the work experience programme, and Transition Year overall, a powerful tool mediating the development of young people. Super (1990) believed that those who possessed high self-esteem are better able to act on their interest. The new Junior Certificate, currently under construction, will be an earlier introduction for students to an alternative approach to education. Perhaps in time, it will lay the foundation of a better, more student-centred, senior cycle with socio-cultural learning and experience based learning at the core.

9.7 Limitations of the study

While this research may serve as a base for future research in the field of work experience, there are a number of limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, while I was satisfied to work with Voluntary Secondary Schools, which make up the largest proportion of secondary schools in Ireland, it may, on reflection, have been prudent to access other types of schools such as Vocational Schools or Community and Comprehensive schools. This may have

given a broader view of work experience in all school types. The justification for this research at the outset was that Vocational Schools, in particular, already have a strong vocational emphasis with a range of subjects specifically designed to prepare students for direct entry into further vocational training or into the workplace. Furthermore the most geographically convenient Vocational schools for the researcher did not offer the TY programme.

Originally, I intended including some interviews with focus groups. However, I decided not to proceed with it at the time of data collection, as I was satisfied that there was adequate data collected from both the hundreds of questionnaires and the individual interviews. In hindsight, this may have initiated some interesting horizontal discussion among the students that could have generated either additional variables or themes and possibly a further development of those themes that did emerge from the data analysed. It is only as I write these discussion pages that this hindsight presented itself. By now, the class groups have moved on making it impossible to consider going back into the schools.

Due to my personal interest and experience within the Transition Year, the study was based on students from that particular programme. Though mentioned in Chapter Two, students from the work experience programmes in Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied Programmes (LCA) could perhaps have been included in the study. As some students expressed an interest in a further opportunity to participate in work experience prior to leaving school, then this may have offered a further perspective of work experience programmes in Irish education. The schools used for this research, however, did not offer either of these programmes, therefore, it was not possible to include such students once the research had commenced.

9.8 Recommendations for practice, policy and further research

While I am confident that the research questions posed at the commencement of this study were satisfactorily addressed by the data gathered, there is still considerable work to be done in this field. There are also many other questions that need to be asked. The work experience programme (WEP), in secondary schools, appears by now to be well established in this country, especially in Transition year. The power and relevance of work experience as a tool for learning, personal development and overall maturation is evidenced by the students who participated in this research.

This research has shown the value and significant influence of WEPs on the education, development and personal growth of our second level students. Schools that do not offer work experience, should reconsider their position and inform themselves of the many advantages of introducing such a programme. Schools that have a work experience programme in place need to reappraise their current programmes to make sure that all of the best elements of an effective programme are present. In particular, schools should attend to the importance of advance preparation for work experience coupled with an effective and thorough de-briefing and reflective practice process on completion of the placement stage of the programme. Both advance preparation and subsequent debriefing did form part of the work experience programme in each of the three schools used for this study according to the three Principals and the inspectorate reports accessed from the DES.

Parents can help by informing themselves, or being informed by schools, of the value of work experience for their children. They can assist by encouraging their children to participate fully and meaningfully in the programme. They can use any contacts or influence they have to help young people access appropriate workplaces. Parental support is very important to young people as they navigate the exploration stage of their careers. Parents

need to be careful not to push their children too hard in any particular direction. This research has shown that some students, during the qualitative interviews, expressed concern about letting their parents down especially when there was a dissonance between what they wanted and what their parents believed would be a good choice for them.

Teachers have a very important role in the development and operation of a fruitful WEP. With full knowledge of the powerful learning experience that a WEP can offer, teachers can be directly involved in the co-ordination or delivery of the programme or assist by reinforcing the programme in their classrooms. They can also help with the supervision of the programme through making themselves available for site visits. The specialism of the careers teacher or counsellor is not to be overlooked. Career practitioners have an integral role to play at all stages of the child's development throughout secondary school and thereafter. As well as being able to contribute to a successful WEP they can advise students individually or in groups, deal with issues regarding uncertainty, career inventories, change of mind, peer relationships, and any obstacles that might present regarding career development. This research demonstrates the significance and the value of work experience in schools. It is a programme that requires the careers counsellor as a key player. Krumboltz Learning Theory of Careers Choice and Counselling (LTTC) was primarily developed to assist careers counsellors in their work (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). It was a follow up to his original Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making (SLTCDM). Krumboltz believed that while his SLTCDM dealt with the origins of peoples' career choices, it did little to guide career practitioners in how to help others shape their own career paths. He said the careers counsellor can:

1) Help people to expand their capabilities and interests.

2) Prepare their clients for changing work tasks, including helping them deal with the associated stress of change.

3) Empower them to take action

4) Integrate career and personal counselling to help people deal with potential problems.

Though Krumboltz's theory is aimed more at adults, it is very adaptable to students and offers useful guidance to school careers counsellors with helping their students through the exciting and powerful experience that is the WEP.

Employers need to be encouraged to continue their association with school WEPs. They need to be actively informed of the many benefits of being part of work experience, some of which are outlined in Chapter Two. Employers, with careful management, have much to contribute to the further development of work based learning. They need to continue to open their doors to schools and students. For those who do not already participate in the process, steps must be taken to encourage them to get involved, inform themselves about the practice and become part of a powerful educational experience. In any town there is a finite supply of potential placements. To help minimise the possibility of saturation, a wide net has to be cast across the extended community.

We are currently in a time of recession and all government departments, including that of Education and Skills, need to find places to make budgetary cut-backs. The Transition Year "kite" has been flown on a number of occasions but I would recommend that the DES remove Transition Year from its sights for many of the reasons proposed by all of the research into the programme to date, especially in the work of Jeffers (2007) and Smyth et al. (2004) along with the many other positive reports on the programme that have been prepared over the past four decades. This thesis spotlights the high value of work experience

which will inevitably suffer if cuts are made to any of the programmes that support WEPs. Chapter Three clearly showed that other countries, such as the USA and the UK, invested significant sums of money in developing work experience programmes nationally. The Irish Government has invested little or nothing in work experience here. This is something for serious consideration if we want to offer the best opportunity to our young people. Schools have created amazing opportunities for young people and established effective work experience programmes on a shoestring budget. One can only imagine how the programme could develop if finance was ring-fenced for its advancement. The potential is truly limitless. Funding could be raised through the private sector, as they are major stakeholders in this process after all. In the short term, however, I propose that the DES initiates or commissions further research into the work experience component of all Irish education programmes.

This research has shown a significant link between time spent on work experience and the subsequent subjects chosen by students as they progress to the senior cycle. These subject choices, in turn can have an impact on the college courses or career areas pursued by the students thereafter. Such choices are made by students from all socio-economic backgrounds. All students participating in programmes like TY or Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) have access to work experience. Transition Year has been shown to be of benefit to students generally but in particular to those in disadvantaged schools (Miller & Kelly 1999). Jeffers (2002) points out that increased maturity, greater self-esteem and greater self-confidence are listed by disadvantaged students as benefits of the TY programme. These are the very qualities that this research has shown are being developed in students participating in work experience. The evidence in Chapter Six shows that students who possess these qualities are more likely to find a future career focus or have their existing career ideas reinforced. This finding is supported by the Smyth, Banks and Calvert

(2011) study where it was shown that the career decisions and choices, in post-school education of students in a large working class school, were heavily influenced by the work experience component of their course. The DES needs to consider what can be done to improve and increase the practice of work experience in our schools. Chapter Three has outlined how work experience has consistently been shown, in countries around the word, to be of significant value to those participating in such programmes during the past fifty years. They have been successful in placing students in an adult environment where they learn from others quickly and effectively as well as learning in an experiential way by actively participating in life outside of the four walls of the classroom.

Following on from this, if students are seeking particular subjects after work experience, it is imperative that appropriate subjects are available in schools to allow students the opportunity to secure the knowledge required for their chosen field of work. As demands in the economy for particular skills emerge, the DES can respond through the provision of a suitably educated workforce to fill those needs. Revising school sizes, creating more formal work based learning initiatives, working with employers to ensure they see the benefits to participation in school WEPs, and increasing investment rather than further cuts in this area are just some of the factors that should be for serious consideration by the DES. It seems to be inevitable that the DES will find it necessary to continue to review the current senior cycle in light of the forthcoming changes to the junior cycle. Transition Year is an excellent foundation on which to build such a programme. It already contains many of the teaching and learning styles, subjects, and forward thinking programmes required to, ultimately, create a better way of educating our young people than the current and less desirable practice of rote learning and teaching to the test.

As well as being somewhat under theorised, Transition Year and work experience also seem to be under conceptualised. There are many concepts and ideas that are applicable to these

programmes that need to be captured and applied to them. Dewey's (1991) four attitudes required for reflective thought, discussed in Chapter Two, for example, are easily applied to the work experience programme. Teachers need to be made more aware of the learning theories that underpin Transition Year which are referred to in the DES guidelines. The many theories discussed in this thesis need to be more explicitly linked to the programme and the language of socio-cultural learning and experiential learning ought to become part of every teacher's professional vocabulary. The activities in TY, such as work experience, could be made more standardised by observing best practice in schools and perhaps creating a comprehensive new set of work experience guidelines. This would assist educators in delivering an appropriate programme from preparation, through execution, and on to debriefing and reflection. Reflective thinking would become an integral part of the process. Evans and Poole (1992), in an Australian study outlined in Chapter Three, asserted that there needs to be more reflective thinking in schools and colleges if work experience programmes are to be more successful. Dewey (1933) said education requires thorough habits of thinking. Without such reflective thinking, he asserted that practical activity is just mechanical and routine. In order to develop and deliver such a programme, more extensive training would be required and this is a major demand on any Education Department during a major economic crisis. The DES has cut back significantly in recent times on training and CPD for teachers. The various support services and development agencies were recently amalgamated into one umbrella organisation, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). These previous services addressed a variety of needs such as development planning, leadership, curriculum development and many other elements of teaching and learning. The restructuring unfortunately, involved significant reductions in the numbers of trainers and advisers on the ground as well as the volume of programmes on offer.

The Department of Education and Skills, in consultation with other relevant departments, should consider the preparation of legislation to deal specifically with work experience programmes in Ireland. This legislation could then be used to inform the development of any further guidelines that may be necessary for all of the partners in education. Such legislation would also give work experience a stronger footing in schools, the community and society in general.

In terms of further work in this field, perhaps what is now needed is a funded national study on work experience programmes and their operation in schools throughout the country. Large scale research into the impact of work experience on subject choice, individual identity and emerging vocational identity would help establish a clearer picture of the situation in the Irish context. There are also a number of areas relating to work experience that need to be further researched such as;

- The effect of work experience influenced subject choices on subsequent college courses chosen and career paths pursued
- A study of newly qualified career professionals, who participated in a school WEP, and the extent to which it aided or impeded their success
- The effect of socio-economic background on access to appropriate work experience placements
- The career sectors chosen by students and the motivation behind these choices
- The affordances and constraints of a compulsory work experience programme in schools
- A comparative study of students who did not participate in Transition Year with those who did, regarding subject choices and their developing vocational identities
- A study of student attitudes and perceptions while actually on their work placements

- Employers experiences of accommodating students with placements and the reasons for their co-operation with work experience programmes

9.9 Conclusion

Transition Year is a widely accepted success in Irish schools, with much research supporting the predominantly positive attitudes towards the programme from all of the education partners. It is still difficult to comprehend that, based on its phenomenal success in this country, a Transition Year model, or similar programme, has not appeared in any other education systems. Work experience is evidenced by this research as a powerful programme within the overall TY experience. The research has shown a clear and important link between participation in the work experience programme and the subjects chosen thereafter by students for their senior cycle education as well as their potential career path. This contributes to previous studies on subject choice and decision making theories. It presents a significant influence on how students make choices around their school subjects. While there are many factors that influence subject choice, work experience has been proven to be one worthy of serious consideration. It is a factor that has a knock-on or domino effect. The subject combinations fashioned by students in the senior cycle will inevitably be leading them in a specific direction in terms of further study and a possible career. Slaney (1980) claimed that most college students already have expressed vocational interests. Decisions that carry that much weight need to be well thought out and this is where the education system, along with its various actors, can seize the opportunity to exercise their significant role in this process. Students need to be provided with adequate advance preparation, well planned placements, efficient monitoring, and appropriate guidance post placement in terms of debriefing and reflection.

Most of the career development and occupational choice theories discussed in this thesis are relevant in part or in whole to how students develop their career ideas and aspirations. Most researchers agree that the study of career theory started with trait and factor theory. This was built upon by a host of theorists working in the field. Lent, Brown and Hackett's Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) serves to bring together the various threads of career theory. It incorporates the evolutionary process dealt with in detail by Ginzberg (1966) and Super (1957) while having much in common with the work of Krumboltz (1976) which like SCCT, is fundamentally based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. In summary, Brown et al. advocate that beginning in early childhood, and extending through adulthood, people narrow their scope with a view to forming or pinpointing a career goal or, indeed, a career choice. They add that the likelihood of success can reinforce career choices. This was a significant outcome for students who participated in work experience. The vast majority of those who participated in the research for this thesis had their career goals reinforced if their placement proved to be an agreeable experience. Where barriers are perceived, according to Brown et al., then the interest and choice actions are much weaker. Some of the barriers perceived, by a minority of students in this research, were things like their inability to attain grades, not liking the work, the difficulty of the work, low self-esteem and lack of confidence in their ability to pursue a third level qualification.

The research has also demonstrated the significant effect of work experience, and the broader TY programme, on students developing identities and their emerging vocational identities. Holland's Career Typology (1959) illustrates a strong relationship between personality and the occupational environment. This suggests that one's identity, ultimately, has a significant effect on the selection of a suitable work environment. Transition Year assists with maturation and the development of personal identity. Vocational identities

emerge or are honed by participation in the work experience programme. Combined, a career path, leading to the development of a potentially successful future self is laid.

In sum, the work experience programme evidently influences senior cycle subject choices by students. It helps students fashion a clear focus on their future career possibilities while in some cases causing students to generate entirely new career paths or directions. A significant number of students, who participate in a work experience programme while still at school, can have existing career ideas reinforced, including ideas they may have held since childhood, or even early childhood. Work experience contributes to improved academic performance based on the evidence in this study. Students experience personal growth during the Transition Year experience with work experience contributing to the development of their confidence and their self-esteem. Following on from this, students are helped with the clarification and the further development of their gradually emerging vocational identities. All of this contributes to their developing overall identity. Finally, and of great significance, young learners are exposed to alternative ways of learning both within the school community and outside in the adult world of work. Work experience is a gateway to effective subject choices and a pathway to a positive career trajectory.

9.10 A Brief Reflection

This research journey commenced in 2008 with a view to bringing the immense value of the work experience programme, that forms part of the Irish Transition Year programme, to the attention of all the interested partners. It has been a time of significant learning and an even deeper belief in the power of education. The Transition Year, I believe, is the unsung hero of Irish education. It has been growing slowly but steadily, like an oak tree, for the past 40 years. With threats to cut funding, actual funding cuts, funding reinstatement, threats to cut the programme as a means of saving money, comments from those who do not understand

the programme calling it a "doss year" and such like …there it is, still growing. Right through the economic collapse,…still growing (see Table 2-2, p. 63). TY is a classic case of "not being able to see the tree for the forest". The Transition Year may be the very roots upon which the inevitable new Irish Leaving Certificate will depend,

"The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn" (Emerson).

While trying to learn, grow and develop, students struggle to figure out who they are and who they will be. I expect we all do. They learn from the adults in their lives. They learn from their peers. They learn from themselves. They question everything. The big question for every adolescent is: "Who am I? Later, that may be decided by the question from others: "What do you do?" They all seek the path to their future selves. When things become difficult and confusion sets in, they can lose sight of the path:

> …a tree has something to say to us: Be still! Be still! Look at me! Life is not easy, life is not difficult. Those are childish thoughts. Let God speak within you, and your thoughts will grow silent. You are anxious because your path leads away from mother and home. But every step and every day lead you back again to the mother. Home is neither here nor there. Home is within you, or home is nowhere at all.
>
> (Hermann Hesse)

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Appendix A: Letter to school Principals

Principal,
School address.

Date

Dear ,

My name is Joseph Moynihan and I am a PhD student at University College Cork. As part of the requirements for this degree I have to carry out a research study. My research concerns the work experience element of the Transition Year Programme and any effect it may have on subject choice in 5thYear. It is also concerned with the development of a student's identity and more specifically his/her vocational identity.

I would like to request your permission to administer a short questionnaire to around forty of your Transition Year students, forty 5th Year students and forty 6th Year students. The questionnaire should take no more than fifteen to twenty minutes to complete.

Following this I would then like to interview a small sample of four students from each of the same year groups outlined above. The content of all questionnaires and interviews will be held in the strictest confidence and all students will remain anonymous. I have attached a copy of both the questionnaire and the set of interview questions for your perusal.

Participation in this study will be voluntary. I have also attached a copy of the consent form that I will ask students to sign or have signed by a parent/guardian (if under 16) prior to the commencement of the study.

I will contact you by telephone in the coming days to discuss the contents of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Joseph A. Moynihan.

Appendix B: Information sheet for students

Information Sheet

Dear Student,

I invite you to take part in a study that is investigating the role and influence of the work experience component of the Transition Year Programme in Irish secondary schools. Your involvement in the work experience programme makes you expert in this area and I am very interested in your opinion as a participant.

The study itself will involve gathering information by means of a questionnaire that should take no more than about fifteen minutes to complete. Afterwards, four students from each group surveyed will be invited to take part in an individual interview lasting about thirty minutes. The purpose of that interview, should you agree to do it, is to collect more detailed information from you on your actual experience and how it makes you feel now about your future course of study and/or your possible future career. I will need to record the interview on a mini voice recorder.

The information collected will be used to write a report some or all of which may be published at a future date.

All information collected will be confidential and no one's name will be used in the final report. If you feel in any way uncomfortable about your participation you can withdraw at any stage.

If you require more information feel free to contact me or my supervisor. The contact details are listed below. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Joseph A. Moynihan,
PhD student.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form attached.

Contact details:

Joseph A. Moynihan,
Email address

Supervisor: Dr. Julia Walsh, UCC,
Email address

Appendix C: Consent form for students and parents

Consent form for research participants

I……..agree to participate in Mr. J. Moynihan's research study.

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

I am participating voluntarily.

If interviewed I give permission for it to be tape recorded.

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

I understand that extracts from my interview may be quoted in the research project, however, names and places that might identify someone will be removed.

Based on the information provided:

I agree to participate in the study

☐ Yes ☐ No

Signed……. Date…….

Students under 16 are asked to get consent of at least one parent/guardian.

I agree to my son/daughter participating in this study. I have read and understand the information sheet provided.

Parent/Guardian signature: 1)_____ 2)_____

Date: _____ _____

Appendix D: Quantitative questionnaire

Transition Year Work Experience Programme

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The questions are about your school subject choices, the work experience element of the Transition Year Programme, and how you view yourself at this particular time in your life. The questionnaire should only take around ten to fifteen minutes to complete. Where you are invited to write a response please write as clearly as you can. It's better not to write your name on the questionnaire as it is intended to be anonymous. Your help with this research is really appreciated. Feel free to ask questions.

PART 1 Please answer the following questions about yourself.

Please tick

1) Age: ○ 14 ○ 15 ○ 16 ○ 17 ○ 18 ○ 19

2) Gender: ○ Male ○ Female

3) Year group: ○ TY ○ 5th Year ○ 6th year

4) What would be your dream career?

_____

_____

_____

5) What do you expect may be your actual career?
(Answer only if different to above)

_____

_____

_____

6) If your answer to question 5 is different to question 4, could you explain why they are different?

_____

_____

PART 2 Educational Profile

1) In your Junior Certificate Examination, list the subjects you studied, the level you took for the exam, and the grade received:

Subject	Higher	Ordinary	Grade
Irish	○	○	
English	○	○	
Mathematics	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	
	○	○	

2) What subjects did you choose for fifth year?

Subject	Higher	Ordinary
Irish	○	○
English	○	○
Mathematics	○	○
	○	○
	○	○
	○	○
	○	○
	○	○
	○	○
	○	○
	○	○
	○	○

For each 5th Year subject you chose **other than** Irish, English, and Maths, please fill in the subject name below and tick the statement that best describes why you chose it.

(You may tick more than one circle for each subject as required)

Subject _____

- ◯ I thought it would be easy
- ◯ I did well in this subject in my Junior Cert
- ◯ I couldn't find anything else on that Subject line
- ◯ My Parent(s)/Guardian told me to do it
- ◯ I discovered during work experience that I would need it
- ◯ I like the subject
- ◯ I needed it to reach my Leaving Cert Points target
- ◯ It is a requirement for my chosen college course
- ◯ The Guidance Counsellor advised me to do it
- ◯ Other reason: _____

Subject _____

- ◯ I thought it would be easy
- ◯ I did well in this subject in my Junior Cert
- ◯ I couldn't find anything else on that Subject line
- ◯ My Parent(s)/Guardian told me to do it
- ◯ I discovered during work experience that I would need it
- ◯ I like the subject
- ◯ I needed it to reach my Leaving Cert Points target
- ◯ It is a requirement for my chosen college course
- ◯ The Guidance counsellor advised me to do it
- ◯ Other reason: _____

Subject _____

- ◯ I thought it would be easy
- ◯ I did well in this subject in my Junior Cert
- ◯ I couldn't find anything else on that Subject line
- ◯ My Parent(s)/Guardian told me to do it
- ◯ I discovered during work experience that I would need it
- ◯ I like the subject
- ◯ I needed it to reach my Leaving Cert Points target
- ◯ It is a requirement for my chosen college course
- ◯ The Guidance counsellor advised me to do it
- ◯ Other reason: _____

Subject _____

- ◯ I thought it would be easy
- ◯ I did well in this subject in my Junior Cert
- ◯ I couldn't find anything else on that Subject line
- ◯ My Parent(s)/Guardian told me to do it
- ◯ I discovered during work experience that I would need it
- ◯ I like the subject
- ◯ I needed it to reach my Leaving Cert Points target
- ◯ It is a requirement for my chosen college course
- ◯ The Guidance counsellor advised me to do it
- ◯ Other reason: _____

4) Do you have a definite career in mind? ○ Yes ○ No

If YES, what is it? (If unsure try to specify the field of work you believe you would like to pursue)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5) What points range do you expect to achieve in your Leaving Certificate?

(Please tick the relevant range)

○ 35-150	○ 151- 200	○ 201-250	○ 251-300	○ 301-350
○ 351-400	○ 401-450	○ 451-500	○ 501-550	○ 551-600

PART 3 Please answer the following questions about your work experience.

1) What is the name of the organisation(s) that accepted you for work experience?

a) _____

b) _____

2) What was your job title? *(Be as specific as you can e.g. Lab assistant, Retail assistant, Teacher aide, Receptionist, Mechanic, Hairdresser etc.)*

a) _____

b) _____

3) Which ***ONE*** of the following statements best describes your choice of work experience placement? *Please tick only one circle.*

It was all I could find..... ○

My placement was with a relative/friend whose career I admire..... ○

My placement was with a relative/friend because it was convenient..... ○

I have or had a genuine interest in this field of employment..... ○

I already had a part-time position with this organisation..... ○

My parents arranged it for me..... ○

My teacher arranged it for me..... ○

Other *(describe)*..... ○

_____

_____

_____

4) Overall, I believe my TY work experience was worthwhile.

○	○	○	○	○
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

5) I believe my work experience reinforced my intention to pursue a career in the field that I chose for my work placement.

○	○	○	○	○
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

6) If you believe your work experience **put you off** that possible career choice, please state why you think this was the case:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

PART 4

1) The following is a set of statements about attitudes to work experience. For each one, state whether you ***Strongly agree, Agree, are Not sure, Disagree or Strongly disagree***. *Please tick the appropriate circle.*

a) My work experience helped me focus on my future career.

○	○	○	○	○
Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree

b) Work experience really did nothing for me.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

c) I should have been more careful choosing my placement.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

d) I discovered the importance / relevance of certain school subjects.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

e) I knew by the end of the programme that it was a possible career for me.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

f) My work experience helped me choose my subjects for 5th year.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

g) My work experience placement put me off that particular career.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

h) When I chose my work placement, I was happy that it fitted well with my career hopes and aspirations.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

i) Work experience was one of the highlights of Transition Year.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

j) Work experience is a waste of time

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

Any other comments?

_____

_____

_____

PART 5

1) The following statements are about how you feel about yourself, your career, and your future. *Please tick the appropriate circle*.

a) I have a clear sense of who I am as a person.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

b) I am a confident person.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

c) I feel good about myself as a person.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

d) I have low self-esteem.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

e) I have had definite ideas about my career since I was a young child.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

f) I have no idea what I want to do in the future.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

g) My parents/guardians have my future study and career mapped out for me.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

h) I don't think I have what it takes to pursue a 3rd level qualification.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

i) After I leave school I want to go straight into a job.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

j) I really want to go to college when I leave school.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
○	○	○	○	○

2) Are there any general comments you would like to add?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your co-operation with this research. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Appendix E: Interview protocol

Qualitative Interview

1. Tell me a little about yourself.

   Name, age, where from, how long in the school...

2. Tell me about what you chose for your Work Experience placement?

   To what extent has this field of work been important to you?
   Tell me about any history of that career in your family?

3. What made you choose that particular area of work?

   Who, if anyone, helped you with finding the placement?
   What family contacts were used to secure the placement?

4. How suitable do you think your choice was once you had settled into the placement?

   How did the work appeal to you?
   To what extent did the choice of work you made meet your expectations?

5. What, if any, was the effect of that placement experience on the subjects you chose for 5th Year?

   What particular subjects might be required for that career?
   What specific subject requirements are there to access a suitable 3rd level programme for that career?

6. How did your experience on that placement make you feel about it as a potential career for you?

   How realistic is that choice for you?
   How attainable is that particular career for you?
   How fulfilling do you think it would be as a lifestyle choice?

7. What value do you think there is in discovering that a particular career is "**right**" for you?

   How important is it for you to know what you want to do with your life at this point?

8. What value do you think there is in discovering that a particular career is **"not right"** for you?

   How important do you think it is to make this discovery at this stage?
   What changes might you need to make following this revelation?

9. What do you think were the overall outcomes of your Work Experience placement for you?

   How do you feel now about your future?
   How worthwhile, or otherwise, was the experience for you?
   What advice would you give to younger students who are about to embark on a Work Experience Programme?

10. How did the experience make you feel about yourself?

    What did it do for your confidence?
    How did it make you feel about your ability to perform in the world of work?
    What affect did it have on your attitude to school?

11. What else do you think may have influenced the way you chose your subjects?

    School?

    Teachers?

    Family?

    Friends?

    Possible opportunities?

    Media?

Appendix F: TY Guidelines

Transition Year Programmes – Guidelines for Schools

Introductory Note

Circulars M31/93 and M47/93 indicate that from the beginning of the school year 1994/95, a Transition Year will be recognised as the first year of a three-year senior cycle.

These guidelines are a revision and updating of notes formerly issued to schools for the Transition Year. The main purpose of the guidelines is to facilitate the design of programmes by individual schools, especially those offering the programme for the first time from 1994/95 onwards. The NCCA will keep the guidelines under review from 1995 onwards.

These guidelines do not envisage major change in the nature of Transition Year where it is currently demonstrating good practice.

A Transition Year offers pupils a broad educational experience with a view to the attainment of increased maturity, before proceeding to further study and/or vocational preparation. It provides a bridge to help pupils make the transition from a highly-structured environment to one where they will take greater responsibility for their own learning and decision making. Pupils will participate in learning strategies which are active and experiential and which help them to develop a range of transferable critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills. The Transition Year should also provide an opportunity for pupils to reflect on and develop an awareness of the value of education and training in preparing them for the ever-changing demands of the adult world of work and relationships.

CURRICULUM GUIDELINES

Mission
To promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative, and responsible members of society.

Overall Aims
The following aims are interrelated and interdependent and should be strongly reflected in every Transition Year programme:

1. Education for maturity with the emphasis on personal development including social awareness and increased social competence.
2. The promotion of general, technical and academic skills with an emphasis on interdisciplinary and self-directed learning.
3. Education through experience of adult and working life as a basis for personal development and maturity.

The aims and philosophy of Transition Year should permeate the entire school.

Goals and objectives
Schools providing Transition Year programmes have responsibility for setting appropriate goals and defining the objectives necessary for their achievement. The schools should involve parents, work providers and the wider community as educational partners in all aspects of the programme and ensure efficient and effective delivery of the programme.

Curriculum Principles
Content
Curriculum content is a matter for selection and adaptation by the individual school having regard to these guidelines, the requirements of pupils and the views of parents. In establishing its curriculum, the school should also take into consideration the possibilities offered by employers and other work-providing agencies and the wider interests in the local community.

The Transition Year should offer pupils space to learn, mature and develop in the absence of examination pressure. The school should ensure therefore that, in all areas studied, there is a clear distinction between the Transition Year programme and the corresponding Leaving Certificate syllabus. A Transition Year programme is NOT part of the Leaving Certificate programme, and should NOT be seen as an opportunity for spending three years rather than two studying Leaving Certificate material. This is not to say that Transition Year programmes should lack intellectual content; it is essential that they offer a challenge to pupils in all areas of their development. Pupils entering the Leaving Certificate programme on completion of a Transition Year should be better equipped and more disposed to study than their counterparts who did not have the benefit of this year. Those who enter the world of work after the Transition Year should do so as well developed and reflective young adults.

The programme content for Transition Year, while not absolutely excluding Leaving Certificate

material, should be chosen largely with a view to augmenting the Leaving Certificate experience, laying a solid foundation for Leaving Certificate studies, giving an orientation to the world of work and, in particular, catering for the pupils[1] personal and social awareness/development. Where Leaving Certificate material is chosen for study it should be done so on the clear understanding that it is to be explored in an original and stimulating way that is significantly different from the way in which it would have been treated in the two years to Leaving Certificate. For example, if a module on drama is included, the production of a play which is on the English syllabus could be considered; in French, pupils might engage in a project of a type which would be of benefit subsequently for the Leaving Certificate course; for Business Studies, the setting up of a mini-company would help enrich syllabus content.

Remediation and Compensatory Studies

A central aspect of Transition Year should be the development of basic competences in key areas according to the needs of individual pupils, including remediation where appropriate. The aim should be to identify and eliminate weaknesses, and to develop the confidence and attitudes of pupils so that they will be better placed to give optimum consideration to their future study options for Leaving Certificate or other programmes. This will extend to enhancement of their study skills for more effective learning and to the development of their capacities for self-directed and open learning.

Interdisciplinary Work

An aspect of the Transition Year programme which should not be ignored by schools is the possibility offered for interdisciplinary study. An interdisciplinary approach would help to create that unified perspective which is lacking in the traditional compartmentalised teaching of individual subjects. One might choose a social theme (such as school life, pop culture, unemployment, use of energy) which could provide a focus for study during the Transition Year. Another example of this approach might be the basing of the Transition Year programme around a country whose language pupils are studying. Teachers of different subjects could collaborate in the development of a very stimulating learning experience for pupils. If this experience can have as its long-term goal a school trip to the country in question to observe at first hand some of the areas studied, so much the better.

Work Experience

It is intended that the Transition Year should create opportunities to vary the learning environment and to dispel the notion that learning is something that happens only, or even most effectively, within the classroom. One of the ways of doing this, and of providing an orientation towards the world of work, is to include a component of actual work experience. In cases where a paucity of work experience placement exists, it is important for the school to prioritise such placements as are available in favour of vocational programmes in the senior cycle, e.g. the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. In these circumstances, work experience should take the form of work simulation and/or work shadowing for the purposes of Transition Year. It is important that both pupils and prospective employers should be fully briefed about what is involved and that the pupils and teachers/tutors should be adequately covered by insurance for the particular situations in question. In order that pupils may obtain maximum benefit from their work experience, it is important to allow sufficient time and opportunity after each work period for de-briefing, reporting back and follow-up exercises.

Curriculum: possible areas of experience

N.B.

(1) Content and methodology should be decided upon in the light of the level of ability

and needs of the particular pupils.

(2) Suggested areas of experience and topics are outlined in the APPENDIX. They are neither compulsory nor exhaustive but are given merely as examples which schools could consider for inclusion and development in the programme.

Teaching Methods and Approaches

A key feature of Transition Year should be the use of a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies and situations. The goals and objectives of the programme can best be achieved by placing particular emphasis on:

- Negotiated learning;
- Personal responsibility in learning;
- Activity-based learning;
- Integration of appropriate areas of learning;
- Team teaching approaches;
- Group work: discussion, debate, interview, role play;
- Project work and research;
- Visiting speakers and seminars;
- Study visits and field trips;
- Work experience, work simulation, community service.
- Educational activities undertaken should enable students to have a valid and worthwhile
- learning experience with emphasis given to developing study skills and self-directed learning.

Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It should be diagnostic, so as to provide accurate information with regard to pupil strengths and weaknesses, and formative, so as to facilitate improved pupil performance through effective programme planning and implementation.

Pupils should be assessed on all aspects of the programme as part of the normal assessment process in the school. Appropriate modes of assessment should be chosen to complement the variety of approaches used in implementing the programme and may include any or all of the following:

- Summative evaluation: an overall statement of pupil performance by the teachers;
- Written, practical, oral and aural assessments;
- Report of work experience;
- Projects, portfolios and exhibition of work;Pupil diary/log book to record personal progress;
- Rating scales, record of skills, and competence attained.

Pupil participation in the assessment procedure should be facilitated. This form of assessment which involves dialogue with tutors and self-rating on various performance indicators should lead to greater self-awareness and an increased ability to manage and take responsibility for personal learning and performance.

The outcome of the assessment process should be a Pupil Profile. This would include a statement of achievement in all the areas of study and learning activities engaged in during the year and would incorporate an evaluation of a wide range of qualities. This appraisal should be compiled in the main by teachers/tutors but would include a significant contribution

from pupils and, where feasible, some observations from parents.

At the end of the programme each pupil should have:

- A completed diary/log book or journal for his/her personal evaluation;
- A pupil profile and record of achievement from the school.

Organisation

Whole-School Approach

The Principal, Deputy Principal and the school management team should positively involve the entire school staff in the Transition Year programme as part of the total curriculum. Where parents are already actively involved in school activities, the programme will benefit enormously by continuing and strengthening these links. In other cases, Transition Year can be a catalyst for developing real partnership with parents and the local community.
For many schools, the Transition Year programme will also be the first significant opportunity to develop links with the world of work. This opportunity should be maximised by building a sound partnership between the school, employers and other work-providing agencies in the community. The nature of the partnership should be one of mutual understanding and participation. Schools can learn and benefit enormously from the resultant interaction, provided that the fullest possible contribution to the process by workplace personnel is facilitated.

Co-ordination and Teamwork

All members of the Transition Year team should be committed to the philosophy, aims and successful implementation of the Transition Year programme. One member of that team should be nominated to act as Co-ordinator of the Transition Year, he or she to be assisted in the work of co-ordination by a core group of four or five teachers. Ideally the members of this core group should be drawn from distinct curricular areas so that each in turn may act as a stimulator, co-ordinator, and rapporteur of activities in his/her area.
It would be appropriate that the overall Co-ordinator should have ultimate responsibility for liaison with the Principal, school management, parents, community agencies and the non-Transition Year members of the staff. Keeping the later fully informed of Transition Year developments is most important, since the co-ordinating team will require their continuous support both individually and collectively throughout the year.

Planning

Planning for Transition Year is part of school planning in general, involving the entire staff. Detailed planning and implementation will be delegated to the Co-ordinator and his/her team, subject to the provision of adequate feedback to management and the school staff. The planning process should be enriched by the involvement of parents and consideration of their specific needs and those of their children. Early planning is essential to allow adequate time for involvement of the educational partners, for meetings with parents and pupils, and for clarification of the philosophy and expectations of the year. Where possible, a negotiated approach to planning should seek to facilitate active involvement of the pupils.

Planning should take place within the context of available resources and their efficient use; it should be informed by the need for balance, flexibility and realistic perspective; and it should facilitate programme development and documentation. Time should be formally assigned for the purpose of effective planning. While the planning process should be based on teamwork,

each member of the co-ordinating team should have responsibility for developing and documenting specific aspects of the programme. All aspects of Curriculum and Organisation should be clearly documented and approved by the school management and staff and by the Board of Management.

A clearly documented programme is essential for ongoing review and for effective internal evaluation of the programme in the school. The programme should be reviewed annually and revised appropriately following each review. A copy of the programme, approved by the Board of Management, should be retained in the school for inspection by the Department's inspectors.

Staff Development and Inservice Education

It will be a condition of participation in Transition Year programmes that schools will become involved in programmes of staff development / inservice education which will be locally and regionally based. In this way, participation by individual schools will be possible in both the formulation, delivery and ongoing development of the programmes for their own benefit.

Certification

The Transition Year programme will not be certified nationally by the Department of Education and Science. Schools, however, are encouraged to provide a school certificate within the general focus and interpretation of the programme as outlined in these guidelines. It may also be appropriate to consider certification in respect of certain modules of the programme for specific purposes.

Evaluation

The programme should be regularly reviewed and evaluated internally by the co-ordinating team in close co-operation with school management, staff, pupils, parents, work providers and community interests. As part of this process, schools should attempt to develop appropriate quantitative and qualitative indicators as the means of raising and assuring the overall quality of the programme provided in the school. Regular monitoring and external evaluation of Transition Year programmes will be the responsibility of the Department's inspectorate and psychological service.

Appendix G: Frequency Tables for Explanatory Variables

		Frequency	Percent
School?	SM (Girls)	98	30.3
	SF (Co-Ed)	120	37.2
	GSC (Boys School)	105	32.5
Age?	15	7	2.2
	16	112	34.7
	17	106	32.8
	18	89	27.6
	19	9	2.8
Age (merged)?	15-16	119	36.8
	17-19	204	63.2
Gender?	Male	162	50.2
	Female	161	49.8
School Year?	Transition Year	108	33.4
	5th Year	116	35.9
	6th year	99	30.7
Dream = Realistic Career?	Dream Different from Realistic	154	47.7
	Dream Not Different from Realistic	169	52.3
Expected Leaving Certificate Points	35-150	2	0.6
	151-200	5	1.5
	201-250	8	2.5
	251-300	11	3.4
	301-350	39	12.1
	351-400	66	20.4
	401-450	76	23.5
	451-500	55	17.0
	501-550	38	11.8
	551-600	19	5.9
Junior Certificate Performance	0-60	46	14.2
	61-80	174	53.9
	81-100	75	23.2
Definite Career?	Yes	173	53.6
	No	150	46.4
Placement would fit well with aspirations?	Strongly Agree	43	13.3
	Agree	139	43.0
	Unsure	68	21.1
	Disagree	56	17.3
	Strongly Disagree	14	4.3

Clear Sense of Self?	Strongly Agree	56	17.3

	Agree	177	54.8
	Unsure	72	22.3
	Disagree	13	4.0
	Strongly Disagree	2	0.6
Confident Person?	Strongly Agree	39	12.1
	Agree	176	54.5
	Unsure	64	19.8
	Disagree	37	11.5
	Strongly Disagree	4	1.2
Feel Good about Self?	Strongly Agree	45	13.9
	Agree	204	63.2
	Unsure	50	15.5
	Disagree	19	5.9
	Strongly Disagree	2	0.6
Low Self-Esteem	Strongly Agree	7	2.2
	Agree	33	10.2
	Unsure	57	17.6
	Disagree	159	49.2
	Strongly Disagree	64	19.8
Childhood Ideas about Ideal Career?	Strongly Agree	35	10.8
	Agree	85	26.3
	Unsure	40	12.4
	Disagree	111	34.4
	Strongly Disagree	49	15.2
Uncertain About Future?	Strongly Agree	12	3.7
	Agree	35	10.8
	Unsure	65	20.1
	Disagree	128	39.6
	Strongly Disagree	83	25.7
Parents Planning Future for you?	Strongly Agree	3	0.9
	Agree	15	4.6
	Unsure	25	7.7
	Disagree	131	40.6
	Strongly Disagree	148	45.8
Lack Confidence to go to 3rd Level?	Strongly Agree	5	1.5
	Agree	11	3.4
	Unsure	45	13.9
	Disagree	104	32.2
	Strongly Disagree	154	47.7

Planning in going straight into job after school?	Strongly Agree	9	2.8
	Agree	21	6.5

	Unsure	53	16.4
	Disagree	128	39.6
	Strongly Disagree	111	34.4
Confident of Going to College?	Strongly Agree	210	65.0
	Agree	70	21.7
	Unsure	30	9.3
	Disagree	5	1.5
	Strongly Disagree	6	1.9
High Self Esteem (Merged from Clear Sense of Self, Confident Person and Feel Good About Self) Cronbach's Alpha: 0.753 1st Eigen Vector: 66.9% Variance	Strongly Agree	20	6.2
	4.00	12	3.7
	5.00	34	10.5
	6.00	113	35.0
	7.00	53	16.4
	Unsure	39	12.1
	9.00	24	7.4
	10.00	9	2.8
	11.00	10	3.1
	12.00	5	1.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	.3
Not Confident of Going to College (merged from Not Confident of Going to 3rd Level and Planning to Go Straight into workplace) Cronbach's Alpha: 0.710 1st Eigen Vector: 77.1% Variance	Strongly Agree	3	.9
	3	2	.6
	4	7	2.2
	5	8	2.5
	Unsure	33	10.2
	7	38	11.8
	8	73	22.6
	9	66	20.4
	Strongly Disagree	89	27.8

Appendix H: Key for all Survey Variables Used in Analysis

Variables based on Author's Interpretation are noted below

School (Which School Attended?)

1=SM (Girls School)
2=SF (Co-Ed School)
3=GSC (Boys School)

Age (Age in Years Old?)

Gender (Participant's Gender?)

1=Male
2=Female

Year (Participant's School Year?)

1= Transition Year
2= 5th Year
3= 6th Year

Dream=Real (Participant has same Dream and Realistic Job?)

0= Dream Wanted Job and Realistic Wanted Job were Different
1= Dream Wanted Job and Realistic Wanted Job were same

Dream (What is Dream Job?)
Real (What is Realistic Job?)

("Dream" and "Real" use Same Coding) (Based on Authors' Interpretation)

1=Sports Sector (Player, Coach, Gym etc.)
2=Service Sector (Retail, Hotelier, Hairdresser etc.)
3=Creative Sector (Actor, Author, Photographer etc.)
4=Education and Childcare Sector (Teacher, Child-minder, Professor Etc.)
5=Public Service Sector (Army, Garda, Social Worker etc.)
6=Professional Services Sector (Accountant, Lawyer, Office Worker etc.)
7=Healthcare Sector (Doctor, Nurse, Dentist etc.)
8=Design Sector (Architecture, Interior Design, Fashion Design etc.)
9=Farming and Animals Sector (Agriculture, Stud Faming, Veterinary etc.)
10=STEM Sector (Lab Work, Programming, Engineering etc.)
11=Media Sector (Journalism, Broadcaster, PR etc.)
12=Trade and Manufacturing Sector (Carpentry, Haulage, Mechanic etc.)
13=Other/None

Difference (Why difference Between Dream and Realistic Job?) (Based on Authors' Interpretation)

1=Points/Difficulty (e.g. Points Too High, Not Smart enough)
2=Unstable/Unrealistic (e.g. Lack of Opportunities, One in million job)
3=Economic Factors (e.g. Lack of Money, No Jobs due to Current Economy)
4=Competency/Comparative Advantage (e.g. Family Business more likely, Lack Required Skills)
5=Experience (e.g. No Experience, Haven't Tried Before, Unsure)
6=N/A, None, Other

Definite Career ("Do you have a Definite Career in Mind?")

1=Yes
2=No

JC Score (Junior Cert Score) (Based on Authors' Interpretation)

Calculation using JC Grades

Step 1)
Sum Scores of all Grades using Table below (Based Roughly on CAO Points System)

	Higher	Ordinary	Foundation
A	100	70	40
B	80	50	30
C	70	40	20
D	60	30	10
E	50	20	0
F	40	10	0
NG	0	0	0

Step 2)

Divide Sum Score by number of Subjects for Average Score.

e.g. 4 Higher Level Grades: A, A, D, E => 100+100+60+50=310
5 Ordinary Level Grades: A, B, B, C, D => 70+50+50+40+30=240
1 Foundation Level Grade: A => 40

Sum Score => 310+240+40= 590
Total Subjects Taken = 10
Average Score = 590/10 = 59

LC Expected (Expected Leaving Cert CAO Points Score?)

1=35-150
2=151-200
3=201-250
4=251-300

5=301-350
6=351-400
7=401-450
8=451-500
9=501-550
10=551-600

Placement 1 and Placement 2 (What was Placement Role Sector?) (Based on Authors' Interpretation)

Same as for Dream and Real except 14=No Placement

Why (Why did you Pick This Placement(s)) (multiple choice available)

1=All I could Find
2= Placement with Relative/Friend who I admire
3=Placement with Relative/Friend who is convenient
4=Genuine Interest in Sector
5=Already Had Part-Time Work There
6=My Parents Arranged it
7=Teacher Arranged It
8=Other

Worthwhile (Was Work Experience Worthwhile?) & Reinforced (Intention to Pursue Placement Career) Same Coding

1=Strongly Agree
2=Agree
3=Not Sure
4=Disagree
5=Strongly Disagree

Put Off (If Put off Career by Placement, why?) (Based on Authors' Interpretation)

1=Boring (e.g. Boring, Unfulfilling, Uninteresting)
2=Difficult Work (e.g. Stressful, Hard, Don't Have Patience)
3=Unsuited Skill wise (Didn't Have Radio Voice, Not Fit Enough etc.)
4=Incorrect Experience (e.g. didn't get chance to do X, Nothing Useful Learned about X)
5=Work Environment (e.g. Bad Atmosphere in Office, Couldn't Express Self)
6=Wasn't Interested Initially (e.g. Not First Preference, No Other Choice)
7=Generic Lack of Enjoyment (Not for me, Not the Right Career for me, didn't enjoy experience)

All Section 5 & 6 Questions have same coding as Worthwhile and Reinforced

Appendix J: Individual Testing for Effect of Explanatory Variables

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The effect of the explanatory variables on the response variables was investigated using different statistical procedures depending on the nature of the explanatory variables.

The suitability of parametric tests to investigate the effect of categorical explanatory variables on Likert-type items is an area of much debate in the academic literature (Carifio & Perla, 2007; Jamieson, 2004). Thus both parametric and non-parametric tests were used in this study so as to circumvent this. Both measures would be expected to converge at large sample sizes.

For explanatory categorical variables with two levels (e.g. gender), the parametric test procedure used was the Independent Two-Sample t-Test. (O'Rourke, Hatcher & Stepanski, 2005a) This procedure operates by subtracting the means of the groups from each other and dividing by an estimate of their pooled standard error. If the resulting t-statistic was large enough, accounting for sample size, the two groups were considered significantly different. The t-statistic (with significance indicated) and a 95% confidence interval for the difference were presented in this study. There are three assumptions underlying this procedure (O'Rourke et al., 2005a); that the two groups were sampled independently, that both populations follow a normal distribution and that both samples have equal variance. The independence assumption was assumed from the study design, the normality assumption was investigated using normal probability plots and histograms and the equality of variance assumption was investigated using Levene's Test for the Equality of Variance (Levene, 1960). If the equality of variance assumption was contravened i.e. Levene's test was significant, a Welch t-test was used. As non-parametric tests were used simultaneously, the above plots were not included in this report.

The non-parametric procedure for two-level categorical explanatory variables was the Mann-Whitney U Test. (Hollander & Wolfe, 1999) This is considered the non-parametric analogue of the independent t-test. Instead of using means, as in the independent t-test, it uses the relative ranks of the responses for each of the groups to generate a U statistic. Thus if one group tends to have more higher ranked responses on the response variable than the

other group, this would give a large U statistic and thus a significant p-value for this test. The U statistic (with significance indicated) was presented in this study. The only assumption for the Mann-Whitney U test is that the two groups be independently sampled. The advantage of this test versus the independent t-test was that it did not rely on the assumption of the Likert-item responses categories being interval (i.e. evenly) spaced. However, the test ignores information about the respective groups' central tendencies and thus is less informative.

For explanatory categorical variables with more than two levels (e.g. school year), the parametric test procedure used was a One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). (O'Rourke, Hatcher & Stepanski, 2005b) This procedure operates by separating out the variance explained by the differences between the means of the groups and the variance explained by the variance within the groups. The ratio between the group variance and the within group variance is used to generate an F statistic. If the resulting F statistic was large enough, then at least two of the groups were considered to have been significantly different. Bonferroni adjusted (which accounts for the higher probability of false positives if doing multiple tests (Abdi, 2007)) independent t-tests were used to assess which groups were different. The Bonferonni adjusted 95% confidence intervals, with significance indicated, were presented in this study. The assumptions underlying this procedure are same as for the t-test (except extended to more than two groups and the constant variance assumption cannot be compensated for through an equivalent to the Welch t-test) with the added assumption that the responses for a given group are identically and independently normally distributed. As non-parametric tests were used simultaneously, the tests for these assumptions were not included in this report.

The non-parametric procedure for two-level categorical explanatory variables was the Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance. (Corder & Foreman, 2009) This is considered the non-parametric analogue of the one-way ANOVA procedure. Instead of using means, as in the independent t-test, it uses the medians of the responses for each of the groups to generate an H statistic which is based on the Chi-Squared distribution. The H-statistic was presented in this study with significance indicated. The only assumption for the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA is that the groups be independently sampled and that all groups' responses follow the same (unspecified) distribution.

Whether using the independent t-test/Mann-Whitney U test or the One-Way ANOVA/Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, it would be expected that the parametric and non-parametric tests would give similar results.

Continuous explanatory variables were assessed using simple linear regression. (Draper & Smith, 1981) This procedure assumes the response variable changes linearly with the explanatory variable and provides an estimate of the magnitude of this change. In this study, β (the estimate of the size of the effect of the explanatory variable), with significance indicated, the constant (i.e. the expected value of the response variable if the response variable was at zero), with significance indicated and the R^2 value (which indicates the percentage of variance in the response variable explained by the explanatory variable, higher R^2 indicates a stronger relationship) were presented. The size of β indicates the size of the increase/decrease (a positive β indicates the response variable increases linearly with the explanatory variable, a negative β that it decreases with the explanatory variable) in the response variable per unit increase in the explanatory variable. Linear regression has several assumptions. For the case of simple linear regression, these are that the response variable and explanatory variable are linearly related and that the error term (i.e. the difference between the predicted and actual values) has constant variance and is independently and identically normally distributed. The first assumption was assessed using a scatter plot of the response variable against the explanatory variable. The constant variance assumption was investigated by plotting the residuals (the difference between the expected and actual value of a data point) against the expected value and the normality assumption was assessed using normal probability plots and histograms of the residuals. The scatter plots are included in Appendix F.

Multivariate Regression Testing for effect of explanatory variables

The analysis conducted in section 3.3 only accounts for the effect of the explanatory variables individually. This section deals with assessing the size and type of impact these explanatory variables had, given the influence of all the other explanatory variables in a model, on the response variable. This analysis was conducted using hierarchical multivariate regression analysis. The type of regression analysis was affected by the type of response variable. The two regression techniques used in this study were multiple linear regression and binomial logistic regression.

With both techniques, a hierarchical regression approach was used. Hierarchical regression means that the model was performed in multiple stages, where blocks of variables were added to the previous model to assess the change in the previous variables and the additional predictive power provided by the new variables. The hierarchal structure has the advantage of allowing the grouping of variables according to shared themes (e.g. biographical data, academic performance) and allows the researcher to control for the effect of these on later variables. It also tests how robust the significance of earlier variables was given the addition of a wide range of other indicators. In this study, the order of the variables was that biographical data was added first (age, year etc.), followed by academic performance (expected and previous) and students' certainty about their future career, and finally indicators of students' self-perception (e.g. esteem, likelihood of going to college, opinion of how they thought placement would go). The reasoning for this ordering was the additional ease of measurement for the earlier variables and the increasing subjectivity of the later variables. Thus biographical indicators would provide a more robust and easier access to predicting student perceptions of work experience, if they were found to have high predictive power.

For response variables which were based on the summation of one or more underlying variables, multiple regression was used to model the effect of the explanatory variables. This was due to additional levels present in a combined variable (e.g. two five point scale combined would give a nine point scale, three would give 13 etc.) which made linear regression modelling more appropriate than for a single five point item (which would have issues regarding normality and with regard to the assumption of the response variable being an continuous variable). Multiple regression is an extension of the simple linear regression used in section 3.3 for the continuous explanatory variables (Draper & Smith, 1981). The method operates by looking at the size of the effect of a given variable given the predictive power of all other variables in the model. The significance of the overall model is assessed using an F-Test (as per the one way ANOVA) and the effect of the individual variables is assessed using t-tests. As per simple regression, the β value, with significance indicated, was presented in this study. In addition, the adjusted R^2 (multiple explanatory variables lead to an inflation in the standard R^2 which is compensated for with the adjusted value (Draper & Smith, 1981)) and constant (with significance indicated) for the overall model were presented. However, in multiple regression, as opposed to simple linear regression, β

represents the magnitude of the effect of that variable, given that all other variables were held constant. All the same assumptions hold for multiple regression as for simple linear regression with the additional assumption of multicollinearity. Multicollinearity is the condition where two or more variables are highly correlated and thus are measuring the same underlying source of variability in the response variable. If both of these variables were included then the estimate of the variance would be greatly inflated and the analysis would be less credible. Analysis was conducted to find variables which had a high Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) before the analysis was conducted. (O'Brien, 2007) Variables with a VIF in any model (<10) were removed from the study. These variables were mentioned before Section 4.3's analysis.

For response variables which were based on a single Likert-scale type item, binary logistical regression was used. Before this could be applied, the relevant response variable was collapsed from a five point scale item into a two point (binary) scale item, with "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" collapsed into an "Agree" category and "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree" and "Not Sure" collapsed into a "Disagree" category. While the inclusion of the "Not Sure" category in the "Disagree" category reduces the contrast between the binary choices, the large amount of data loss from excluding all "Not Sure" responses was considered too high. Before analysis was conducted, one of the variables was coded as the reference category and one as response category. In this study, the reference category was always "Disagree" and response category was "Agree". Thus, any positive coefficient indicated a higher probability of agreement with the statement and any negative coefficient indicated a lower probability of agreement with the statement. In addition, while it was possible to apply multinomial logistic regression to the original variables, preliminary analysis had shown that the sample size was considered insufficient to successfully use that technique due to concerns over empty sub-population cells.

Binary logistic regression (Bewick, Cheek & Ball, 2005) operates by transforming the probability (or odds) of an individual being in one category or another of the response variable, based on the influence of a particular explanatory variable, into a regression coefficient (which is directly related to the odds ratio). These explanatory variables can be continuous (e.g. height) or categorical (e.g. eye colour). If they were the latter, the levels of the categorical variables were transformed into dummy variables, with all levels being compared to a reference category, which was indicated in the model output. The β

coefficient, with its significance indicated, was presented in this report. Unlike linear regression, the β coefficient should not be directly interpreted except insofar that a negative value indicated a lower probability of that individual being in the response category (i.e. students were less likely to Agree the higher this variable was) and a positive value indicated a higher probability of being in that response category. Also included in the output were the results from the Hosmer-Lemeshow Tests for each model, which tests if the expected and observed levels of subjects in each subgroup of the population were the same. If the Hosmer-Lemeshow test was not significant this indicates a well calibrated model which is preferred. Also included was a p-value for the model, which uses a chi-squared model to test if the explanatory variables in the model have any significant predictive power for the response variable. Finally, the Nagelekerke R^2 value was included which is analogous to the linear regression $R^{2,}$ with a higher value indicating the explanatory variables had more predictive power. However, direct interpretation is not advised with this R^2

To interpret the β coefficient directly, it can be exponentiated (i.e. set as the power of the exponential function) which gives the odds ratio. If this number was less than one, it would indicate that an increase in that variable made it less likely that a student was in the reference category and if it was greater than one, it would indicate a higher probability. If it was equal to one, this would indicate that variable has no effect on the response variable. For example in this study, if an explanatory variable had a odds ratio of two, this would indicate a student would be twice as likely to Agree for every unit increase in that variable or from being in response category for categorical variables, while an odds ratio of 0.500 indicated that students were twice as likely not to agree than disagree if they were in the response category. Logistic regression makes no assumptions about the underlying distribution of the variables. However, multicollinearity must be accounted for, as per multiple linear regression.

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