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"Exploring the role of cultural capital in Family-School relationships and connections: A case study of an Irish Post-primary school."

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

There are many sociological arguments that have dominated and suffused the notion of family influence and the effect of family structures on children's educational and occupational success. It has been generally recognised that families are critical in promoting educational attainment among children and are pivotal actors in the development of children's cognitive, emotional and social development. Ethnographers have frequently documented the impact of family socio-economic status on educational outcomes. From an Irish perspective however, emphases within the literature have focused on educational failure and family disadvantage, parental involvement and school effectiveness and exploration of the gendered, classed and "raced" nature of parental involvement.

The Irish Education System is both a complex and deeply rooted one where education has always been valued in Irish society. Drawing on Bourdieu's work on cultural capital and with reference to the Post Primary Longitudinal study (PPLS) conducted by the ESRI and the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) studies this thesis endeavours to examine and explore the cultural elements of Irish families and how these cultural elements impact on education and schooling in Ireland. The research also investigates how various forms of capital coexist and are exchanged within different fields identified in the study.

Bourdieu alludes to the production of "habitus" whereby a system of dispositions such as aspirations arbitrates between structures and practice. Bourdieu describes an inculcation effect exerted directly by families and schools on adolescents or by student's individual social backgrounds, but he also proposes a second effect arising from individual's predispositions such as the accumulation of academic capital which may cause them to resist "the forces of the field with their specific inertia that is, their properties, which may exist in the embodied form, as dispositions or in objectified form in goods, qualifications, etc." Evidence within the literature indicates that students with more "valuable" cultural capital attain greater educational outcomes that their otherwise comparable peers with less "valuable" cultural capital. These theoretical arguments prompted the researcher to construct a case study model to examine and evaluate the influences of cultural capital on students' educational outcomes while attempting to advance the description of the process whereby cultural resources may or may not convert favourably into educational advantages.

Data was generated through a mixed methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis from a cohort of families (parents and post-primary students), staff and management from a coeducational secondary school in the South of Ireland. Five primary data sets were constructed in the study; data through a questionnaire to parents; data generated through a number of focus group with post-primary students; questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with teaching staff and school management and visual data both researcher generated and student generated. The research employed a variety of methodological instruments to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data which were utilised to describe the many family and school cultures that pervade the social context of families and schooling in Ireland while affording an

opportunity to investigate the sometimes jarred but interdependent social context in which these cultures exist.

Informed by methodological literature that indicates that qualitative methods that rely on self-reporting of thoughts, feelings and experiences of beliefs face the dilemma that internal states are known only by the individual whose prerogative it is whether or not to share them with others and also the fact that such methods of data collection are embedded in social contexts and subject to social manipulation the researcher undertook to consolidate and triangulate the data. Triangulation was ensured through the inclusion of various methodological layers including the construction of visual methodology to enhance and develop the primary data collected through questionnaires to families, focus groups with post primary students and semi-structured interviews with teachers and school management. Taking an empirical approach to the collection of visual data the researcher gathered a combination of researcher generated and participant generated images that were used to further analyse and explore the research question.

The research utilised a diverse analysis of data to describe the jagged interface between family cultures and school cultures by foregrounding the data generated through the focus group interviews with the adolescent students which is contextualized by the backdrop of parent, teacher, school staff and school management data. The researcher has prioritized the evidence generated in the student focus groups and extrapolated key thematic findings from the focus groups. Cross tabulations of student focus group data and of data generated through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and visual constructions are woven throughout the analysis integrating both a vertical and horizontal motif that reveals convergences and divergences between data sets. Contours between numerical and non-numerical data are traversed in order to facilitate analysis of qualitative and quantitative data in response to the research question.

The integration of questionnaire data into the thematic analysis of qualitative data reveals findings that supports ethnographic evidence specifically related to the role of families and the promotion of positive educational outcomes. The findings also support a small selection of the Bourdieu theoretical dispositions in relation to the production of habitus and the accumulation of valuable cultural capital and associated positive educational outcomes while rejecting other aspects of the concepts of capital as espoused by various theorists referred to within the theoretical framework.
The study is an educational study conducted through the medium of a sociological lens and presents a contemporary description of the complex and contested nature of the cultural capital interface between families and schools in Ireland.

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I wish to express my sincere thanks to my research supervisor, Dr. Andrew Loxley for his meticulous guidance, sound advice and continued support at all stages of this study. His expertise was unequivocal throughout, his patience and listening skills knew no bounds and I deeply value his commitment, professional integrity and scholarly pursuit of pure academic rigour throughout this process. I am deeply appreciative of his encouragement, his enthusiasm at all times and his collegiality over the last number of years.

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I am particularly grateful to all the research participants; parents, teachers, management and students who must remain anonymous except to me. I wish to thank them most sincerely for their generosity of time and their enthusiasm and willingness to participate in all aspects of the research. Without them there would be no data and I am most obliged and indebted to them for their remarkable contributions to this research.

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To Willie, for always being there and always believing that this thesis would, some day get there too! Thank you for your patience, love and support at all times. Giorraíonn beirt bóthar.

Acronyms

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES: Department of Education and Skills
ETB: Education and Training Board
FE: Further Education
GUI: Growing Up in Ireland (study)
HE: Higher Education
HSCL: Home-School Community Liaison
ITE: Initial Teacher Education
JCSP: Junior Cert School Programme
LCA Leaving Certificate Applied
LCE Leaving Certificate Established
LCVP Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NA National Assessment
NCSE National Council for Special Education
NCVA: National Council (for) Vocational Awards
PPLS: Post-Primary Longitudinal Study
SCP: School Completion Programme
SDPI School Development Planning Initiative
SES: Socio-Economic status
SSRI: Stay in School Retention Initiative
TY Transition Year
VEC: Vocational Education Committee
WTE: Whole-time Equivalent (teacher)

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Part One

Chapter One

1.1 Context of the Research

There are many sociological arguments that have explored the notion of family influence and the effect of family structures on students' educational and occupational success as well as failure relative to prevailing social norms. It has been argued by a number of writers that families are a critical institutional arena in promoting educational attainment among children and young adults and are critical actors in the development of children's cognitive, emotional and social development (Booth and Dunn, 1996; Byrne and Smyth., 2010b; Giddens and Griffiths, 2008; Hanafin and Lynch, 2002; Lynch, 1989; Meighan, 1986; Ryan et al., 1995; Share et al., 2007; Smyth et al., 2011). However, from an Irish perspective, the emphasis within the literature has been historically skewed towards exploring what is seen as educational failure through the prisms of familial disadvantage, school effectiveness and more generally, discussions concerning the gendered, classed and "raced" nature of parental involvement (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002).

Whilst acknowledging the validity of the many sociological arguments that link educational outcomes of students to parental engagement in the education process, my study seeks to move beyond a deficit discourse as espoused by Irish policy makers and to theorise the connections and relationships between Irish families and post-primary schools in terms of the production, reproduction and location of a range of cultural resources that support and mediate the education processes through which Irish post-primary educational patterns are created and reproduced.

My practitioner experience has afforded me multifarious experiences of professional encounters with families in the Irish education system at pre-school, primary, post-primary, further and higher education stages which repeatedly prompted me to ask why do families participate in the education system in the manner they do, whether that be in a participatory and engaged mode, in a perfunctory mode or on occasion with a laissez faire approach. Aligned to this underpinning query I was driven to ask how, despite evident levels of low socio-economic status (SES) do a proportion of families accrue educational advantage in the Irish education system and in doing so make decisions about their educational pathways that enable them to secure favourable educational outcomes. As a professional who has worked directly in the delivery of educational disadvantage initiatives at both primary and post-primary education level I believe that it is equally important to

establish and illuminate examples of how families achieve favourable educational outcomes where there is clear evidence of socio-economic disadvantage. Investigation of the manner and level of engagement of families who do not evidence socio-economic disadvantage but who also secure favourable educational outcomes also merits consideration. An overarching view of families and how they engage in the Irish education system therefore prompts me to move beyond the social reproduction theories alone and to ask what is it that determines and influences the educational outcomes of students of Irish families.

1.2 Theoretical perspectives

Looking at the Irish post-primary education system through my borrowing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, my study is framed by the complex and contested concept of cultural capital and how that manifests within families and within Irish post-primary schooling. My study examines the episodic transmission and inter-weaving of that cultural capital between the Family and the School and the influence of that dual cultural capital on the educational outcomes of the students. Notwithstanding the fact that the rigidity and time-boundedness of Bourdieu's original classifications are not entirely aligned to the contemporary Irish education context I believe that a Bourdieuian perspective is useful in offering a theoretical viewpoint which I utilise in this study along with other theoretical propositions to evaluate and interrogate my research questions. For the purpose of my study I have opted to use Bourdieuian terminology to describe the forms of capital within the Irish post-primary school context. I acknowledge that the use of Bourdieuian terminology may present challenges in itself and that those terms require an explanation of what they mean in the Irish context. In acknowledging that the transfer and exchange of capital between the family and the school is not always spontaneous, but often jagged and intermittent, the study investigates how various forms of cultural capital namely; social and economic capital, which may manifest as embodied, objectified or institutionalised capital may co-exist or not within different fields (Bourdieu and Nice, 2008) identified in this study, including the school itself, the family, extra-curricular activities and school based non-teaching related activities. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the forms of capital using Bourdieuian terminology as described in this study.
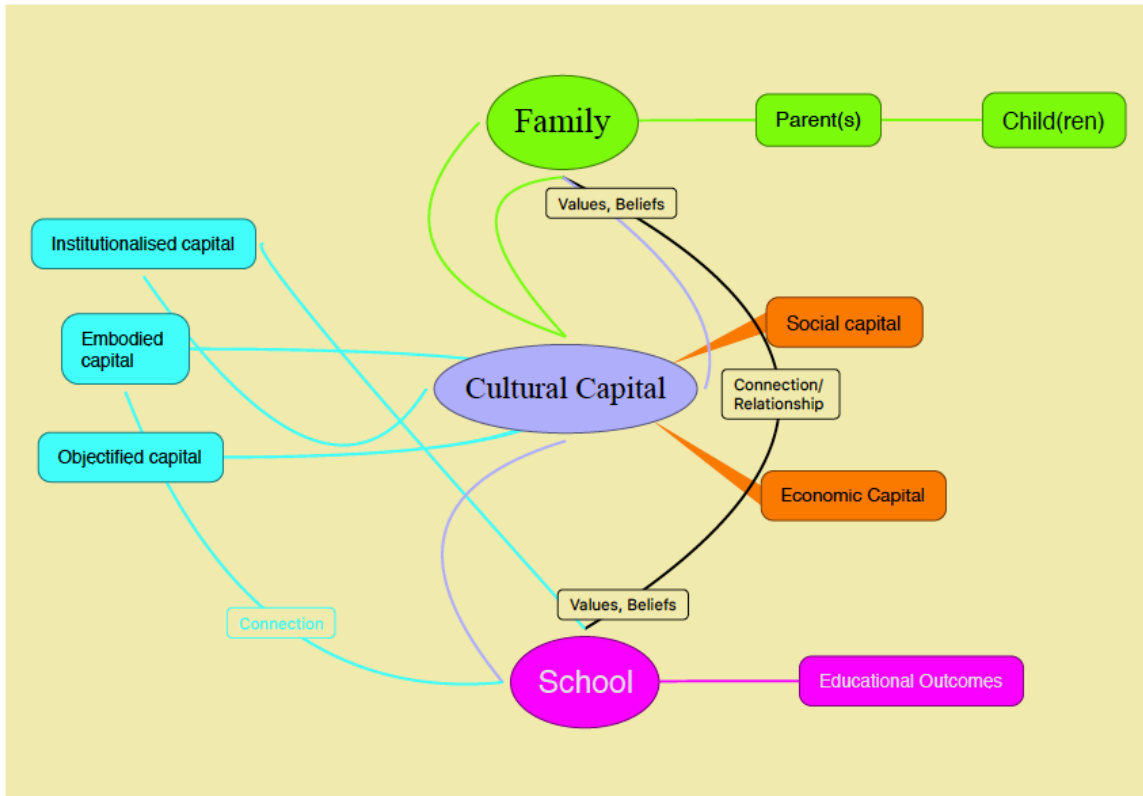
Figure 1.1 Forms of capital in the research

In Bourdieuian terms, the term "habitus" which is in itself "an enigmatic concept" (Maton, 2008) is complex and often misunderstood. Bourdieu defined "habitus" as a "property of social agents (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a "structured and structuring structure" (Bourdieu, 1994, p 170). Maton also explains that while habitus is "structured" by one's past and present circumstances including family upbringing and educational experiences, habitus is in itself structuring in that it "helps to shape one's present and future practices" (Maton, 2008, p 51). Lyons et al (2003) offer a simple but understandable explanation of habitus which they describe as "home experience" (Lyons et al, 2003, p 330). Using Bourdieuian terminology they clarify how the research of Bourdieu and colleagues has underlined the importance of cultural capital in education. They note how parents from varying social classes are either advantaged or disadvantaged by the forms of cultural capital they have access to via their habitus. Smyth and Banks (2012) refer to the fact that there is little consideration or attention given in the literature to the organisational and structural aspects of the school and how they may impact on the realisation of students' educational outcomes. They argue that there has been considerable debate about Bourdieu's work with certain

commentators arguing that his focus on habitus as durable and unconscious may result in an over deterministic explanation (Jenkins, 2002) while Reay, (2004), Sweetman (2003) and Adams, (2006) have argued that Bourdieu's framework allows for the possibility of "agency" and possibly reflexivity (Smyth & Banks, 2012). Maton (2008) clarifies that Bourdieu's habitus emphasises the underlying structures of practices; i.e. "acts are underpinned by generative principles" (Maton, 2008, p 56). He goes on to quote from Bourdieu who claims that habitus something that has been acquired by an individual and "durably incorporated into the form of permanent dispositions" and is "something historical, linked to individual history" belonging to a genetic mode of thought (Bourdieu, 1993, p86). Lyons et al (2003) also emphasise how Bourdieu's work has shown "how schools only grant legitimacy to particular forms of cultural capital, thereby advantaging some parents and marginalising others"(p 330).

International and national literature (Darmody and Thornton, 2015; Grenfell, 2008; McGrath et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2011; Smyth and Banks, 2012a) takes account of and stretches beyond the Bourdieu perspective to discuss a potential "contextual effect" relative to the social class mix of the family and of the school with regards to educational outcomes. The literature also examines the concept of young people and their families' decision-making in relation to their educational outcomes and post-school choices (Smyth and Banks, 2012a) as informed by their "habitus" and their "agency" while investigating the role of the institutional "habitus" of the schools they attend. They refer to a binary explanation which pitches the Bourdieu social reproduction theory against the rational choice perspective theory based on a cost and benefit principle whereby families make decisions in relation to educational outcomes at a family or student level without balancing for the potential impact of the school in shaping students' educational aspirations. This extension beyond the traditional social class reproduction theoretical perspective is constructive and facilitates a realistic contemporary analysis of the Irish context. Both the Growing Up in Ireland Study (GUI) and the Post-Primary Longitudinal Study (PPLS) have offered meaningful insights on both the significance of the interconnectedness of the family and the school. This literature has also documented noteworthy perceptions on the various processes of familial habitus, institutional habitus and personal agency, all of which shape the framework which is of interest to me as a researcher. The concepts of "Bonding" and "Bridging" social capital as espoused by Putnam (2000) are also considered in the research as being relevant to the research questions.

Cognisant of the fact that there has been much debate at an international and national level about the relevance of the work of Bourdieu in contemporary terms and in an attempt to go past what can be seen as a reductive 'reading' of cultural capital, my intention in this study is to explicate an analysis of the interface and interaction between family cultural capital and school cultural capital in the context of the case study school. My analysis attempted to identify and interpret indicators of possible synthesis and harmonising of congruent cultural capital across the fields identified within the study and also areas of mismatched cultural capital where gaps and disparities present and are clearly discernible. However, ultimately the purpose of the study has been to explore how families actually and actively engage in the post-primary education system and how the system vis-à-vis the school engages with the families in the process of generating educational outcomes with the use of cultural capital as way of theoretically 'framing' this process.

1.3 Research Approach and Design of this Case Study

Flick (2009) refers to qualitative research as being inherently multi-method in focus. My study utilised a mixed-methods approach using tailored, bespoke research instruments to generate data in a single case study and is primarily a qualitative inquiry characterized by an inductive approach relying not only on theoretical constructs but also on data gleaned from the ground up (Creswell, 2014). Flick (2009) further argues that the combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013).

I opted to carry out qualitative research in order to establish a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Creswell, 2008a) of family-school connections and relationships in the Irish context. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (Creswell, 2008b).

As well as setting out the theoretical and empirical context to the study in chapters two, three, four and five of this thesis, my approach to representing the data in chapters eight and nine is foregrounded in the evidence generated in student focus groups and student visual diaries. I have

chosen to augment my instrumentation with the inclusion of visual methods which are both participant and researcher generated and offer a different perspective for consideration. I also cross-tabulated student focus group data and data generated through parent questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and visual constructions throughout the analysis to integrate both a vertical and horizontal motif to examine possible convergences and divergences between data sets. Contours between numerical and non-numerical data were traversed in order to facilitate analysis of qualitative and quantitative data in response to the research questions.

Figure 1.2 below illustrates the phases of the research study.
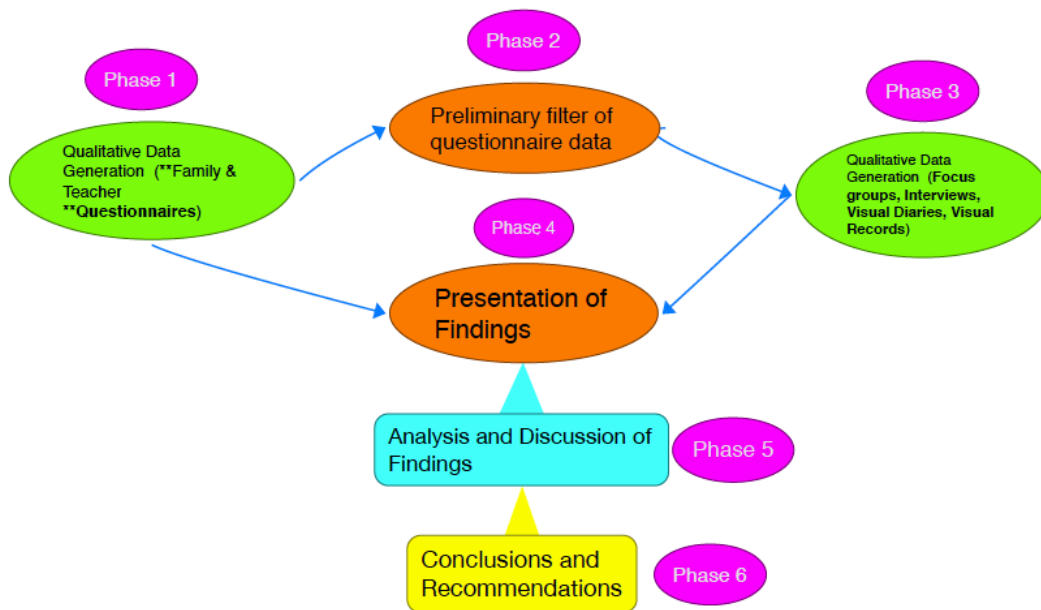
Figure 1.2 Phases of the Research

1.4 Research Questions

a) 1.4.1 Research Questions Overview

There is incontrovertible and extensive research evidence that exemplifies the negative impact of low levels of educational engagement by families on student educational outcomes globally (Darmody and Thornton, 2015; Hanafin and Lynch, 2002; Ljunge, 2015; Lynch, 1989; McCoy et al., 2014a.) Within the Irish national context, specific interventions addressing educational needs and levels of educational engagement of students and families from disadvantaged backgrounds, have been 'delivered' through the School Support Programme (SSP) since 1997. Outcomes of the SSP include enhanced levels of retention of students to Leaving Certificate at post-primary level. These outcomes are supported by published data (2014)[1] from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) indicating an increase in the retention of students to Leaving Certificate completion rates from 82.3% for the 1997 entry cohort, to 90.1% for the 2007 entry cohort. This increase represents a growth in the number of students retained in the post-primary system to Leaving Certificate completion and arguably represents an increase in the number of families remaining engaged in the post-primary system. The level of retention of post-primary students of the 2007 cohort to Leaving Certificate of non-DEIS[2] schools was 3.5% (97.6%) higher than DEIS schools (94.1%). This indicates a high level of engagement in post-primary education amongst students who attend non-DEIS schools. Levels of retention and engagement in non- DEIS schools was highest in Voluntary Secondary[3] schools at 91.85%. Statistically these figures demonstrate that a greater percentage of students are retained in the Voluntary Secondary sector, but a question that necessitates further exploration is why that might be the case and to what extent family dispositions, values and cultures influence this engagement and the learning outcomes of students. In short we know very little about the societal mechanisms and processes surrounding families who do 'successfully' engage with formal schooling.

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[1] Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools 2007 Entry Cohort, Department of Education and Skills, January 2014.

[2] DEIS- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, a programme of the DES School Support Programme.
[3] State funded post primary schools in the Republic of Ireland are designated as one of the following four school types; Vocational, Community, Comprehensive or Voluntary Secondary. All of these schools have different management structures and historically have attracted different types of student cohorts, Department of Education and Skills, 2003.

b) 1.4.2 Types of Research Questions

Blaikie (2010) refers to three main types of research questions; "what" questions; "why" questions and "how" questions which he considers to be aligned to the objectives of description, explanation and understanding and change. I have borrowed from and adapted Blaikie's list of question types in my formulation of the research questions of this study. Blaikie states that these three questions normally form a sequence where "what" questions normally precede "why" questions and "why" questions normally precede "how" questions. Whilst the research questions of this study do not follow exactly the sequence proposed by Blaikie the logic of "what" questions eliciting descriptive answers, "why" questions eliciting explanatory answers and "how" questions eliciting an explanation of change my objective in asking my research questions in this study is to provide a description, an explanation and understanding and articulation of the influences and changes in the social phenomenon under scrutiny, namely the role of cultural capital in the generation of educational outcomes from both a family and school perspective in Ireland at post-primary level.

c) 1.4.3 The Study Research Questions

Epistemologically, the case study research questions have been developed on the basis of what I as the researcher have constructed in my mind through my interpretation of the world and the events within it from my professional experience. My research questions represent a statement of what I wanted to learn about the social phenomenon I elected to study, I wanted to learn what influence familial cultural capital has on the educational outcomes of the students participating in my study, contextualized by the background of the family and the school and the interdependent connections between both. I was particularly interested in the evidence from the data evidenced in the student focus groups as I consider that the students hold a dual role in this research, a role which is equally embedded in the home and in the school. They offer a broad insight into both domains and they experience the cultural capital of both the Family and the School.

The levels of engagement and connections between families and schools vary from school to school and indeed, between families within schools. Clarity about the inter-connectedness, what constitutes a connection, how connections are established and maintained between families and

post-primary schools in Ireland is ever evolving but the level of engagement remains contingent on the cultural capital of both the family and the school. In order to explore and evaluate the influence of cultural capital on students' educational outcomes my research is underpinned by four research questions which evolved in a two-stage process. The initial two questions were always to the fore of my thinking about this piece of research and at face value are obvious research questions within the realm of the research topic but on reflection and having consulted with the literature the second two questions emerged as being worthy of inclusion in that they offer further possible explanation and understanding of the phenomenon being examined:

1. What does familial cultural capital "look like" in an Irish context?
2. How does familial cultural capital influence the educational outcomes of post-primary students in the Irish education system?
3. What influences children from families experiencing similar social and economic circumstances to aspire to and attain different educational outcomes?
4. How do the connections and relationships between families and schools contribute to the development of educational patterns and paradigms in Irish education?

In order to explore these questions, I adopted a case study research approach to investigate the influence of family cultural capital (social, economic, embodied, objectified and institutional) on educational outcomes by looking at the daily activities, interactions, values, norms and mores of the selected families. The data was generated through a range of verbal, written and visual ethnographic techniques including focus group interviews, questionnaires and the construction of visual diaries.

1.5 Researcher Background

This segment details my professional experience which has ultimately prompted me to carry out this research in the form of a professional doctorate. As a teacher, I initially asked many questions (consciously and often sub-consciously), many of which I could not answer and I regularly enquired about my practice as a teacher and later as an educationalist. I struggled at the initial stages of practice to understand my own practice and I neglected to acknowledge that my own practice was only a small part of the overall context. My initial concerns and queries as a teacher fell within a basic teaching-learning-assessment approach and outside of that I was not

unduly concerned. My own praxis was theory laden, uninformed and offered little in the way of enquiry or reflection. However, having taught for a number of years my interest in the connections between students and the curriculum and the teaching methodologies and their motivations and aspirations for engagement in school and the involvement of their families and the general nexus of all things family-school related faced me in a different direction and challenged me to enquire in a different way as to why things were as they were. At a certain point, I came to understand that I not only worked in the system but that an emergent epistemological viewpoint was forcing me to think about the bigger picture and my positionality within. I found myself drawing on my newly acquired and acknowledged ontological values which I relied on as I tested and evaluated the validity of my claims. My education compass pushed me in a number of directions before I finally undertook to problematize the family-school narratives that presented in the many practice-related scenarios I encountered as I sought to understand and answer the research questions of this piece of research.

1.5.1 The initial experience

My initial professional experience in education began as a post-primary teacher of Physical Education and Gaeilge in a coeducational vocational school in the south of Ireland. The school had an enrolment of approximately seven hundred and fifty students and a teaching staff of fifty. As a newly qualified teacher (NQT) I was allocated a combination of Physical Education and Gaeilge teaching hours (twenty-two hours in total),[4] which I taught to both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate classes.

My preliminary awareness of cultural capital in families was prompted while teaching both Physical Education and Gaeilge to students at this school. I discerned varying degrees of interest by both parents and students and varying levels of engagement in the education process by different families attending the school in the two subjects that I taught. I observed and noted various indicators of academic, economic, social and cultural capital from my teaching experiences and also from my involvement in extra-curricular activities at the school.

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[4] Required number of teaching hours for permanent/whole time teachers in Republic of Ireland is 22 hours as per contract with the Department of Education and Skills.

Students at this school were assessed using standardised assessment tests on initial enrolment and were streamed and allocated to first year classes on the basis of the results. I observed that some parents expressed and articulated views that their children be placed in the highest stream class as they believed that they would have better progression opportunities in that class. Furthermore, the school offered a broad range of academic and practical subjects and class sizes ranged from fifteen to thirty students each, depending on the curricular subject and the examination level of that subject. The academically more challenged students were typically allocated to smaller classes of fifteen or less students. All subjects were offered at all levels to both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students.

The school also offered a Post Leaving Certificate NCVA[5] business course. The socio-economic profile of families attending the school varied greatly and included children of professionals and children of long term unemployed[6]. The school operated a book rental scheme with approximately 50% uptake of the scheme.[7] While I was teaching there the school did not have designated disadvantaged status but it was subsequently included in the DEIS School Completion Programme in 2003, affording the school access to many educational and social supports as identified in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) National Disadvantaged Scheme and also linking it as part of a cluster to a number of feeder primary schools, also identified as having DEIS status.

My observations prompted me to enquire further as to why some families participated to greater degrees than others in the education process and why some families valued different aspects of their children's education over others. Some families blended seamlessly into the day-to-day norms of the school and participated enthusiastically and ambitiously in all aspects of school life. Others did not and engaged in challenging the day-to-day aspects of the school and generally found it very difficult to "fit in" to the rigid timetabled system of school life.

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[5] National Council for Vocational Awards, now know as FETAC (Further Education & Training Award Council) FETAC was be merged into QQI with HETAC and University Award sector in 2012. QQI, 2016
[6] Classification of professionals- CSO, 2016
[7] Book rental schemes are funded by the Department of Education and Skills through local Vocational Education Committees. Book rental schemes are means tested. All social welfare recipients are entitled to participate in the book schemes. Department of Education and Skills October, 2003.

There were anecdotal patterns of particular families transferring seamlessly from junior cycle to senior cycle and there were also patterns of those who did not transfer at all and left school at sixteen years of age or before in some cases. While teaching at this school I became very aware and very familiar with the various indicators of cultural, social and economic capital of the families attending the school and it fascinated me as to how some families could engage and prioritise certain aspects of education and also prioritise the accumulation of "capital" through the education process and how some families placed little or no value or interest in their children or themselves participating in the process. There were some parents of students that I taught that I never met or had any interaction with during my time at the school and others who I met regularly and enjoyed regular positive and progressive interaction with.

1.5.2 Second experience

I moved to another VEC school which was in a different part of the county. This school was awarded designated disadvantaged status in 1999 and was among three pilot schools in the county to participate in the 'Stay in School Retention Initiative' (SSRI)[8]; I was appointed as the programme coordinator. This school had very high levels of economic disadvantage with up to 85% of families in the school being in receipt of social welfare payments. The school also had a significant number of students from the Traveller community enrolled at junior cycle. The Traveller population in the school ensured a significantly enhanced pupil-teacher allocation for Traveller students. Each Traveller student attracted an extra 0.07 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) teacher in the teacher allocation for the school. The school also had a teacher allocation of 1.5 teachers for Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers.

Additionally, the school had a full time Learning Support teacher and several resource teachers as there were a high number of students eligible for both Learning Support and Resource teaching hours as per certified Special educational needs. My experience of the 'indicators' of the various forms of capital in this school was different to the previous school, as the overall SES was

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[8] Stay in School Retention Initiative was the precursor to School Completion Programme and the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme for schools with disadvantaged status. These programmes provided extra stand-alone funding to schools to devise localised programmes to address retention issues in schools. DES, 2003.

significantly lower and parents' involvement and participation in their children's education varied from my previous experience. One of the most obvious indicators for me was the provision and uptake of higher level subjects at both Junior and Leaving cycle.

High levels of unemployment and low socio-economic status (SES) characterised most families in the school and in families where both parents were unemployed I noted that the mothers tended to mostly, but not exclusively, engage with the school in relation to their children's progression and participation in school. Occasionally the fathers engaged with the school with some attending parent-teacher meetings, but for the most part, it was the maternal input that I noticed as being a strong and motivating factor for students to progress, to undertake higher level subjects where possible, in particular at junior cycle and to identify possible higher education or further education opportunities. Some mothers enrolled themselves as students of Further Education (FE) in the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses that the school offered thus acting as positive role models for their children while being visible around the school campus while pursuing level 5 and level 6 certified courses of study.

The school introduced the Junior Cert Schools Programme (JCSP)[9] to cater for Junior Certificate students who required a reduced Junior Certificate curriculum with students studying a maximum of six curricular subjects. I worked as coordinator of the JCSP while retaining other teaching hours. The parents reacted positively to the introduction of the programme in the school and participated in a number of parent-student events and celebrations which brought parents into the school and familiarised them with the school itself and the norms and daily activities that their children were engaged in. Some of these parents had been uncomfortable in coming into the school before that as a result of what they articulated to be very negative experiences of education themselves.

The programme encouraged a cross-curricular methodology for students and parents welcomed this approach as it replaced an overall academic approach to traditionally academic subjects, which was both unsuitable and challenging for some students. The JCSP programme focused on students experiencing success in various subjects while pursuing Junior Cert syllabi. Parents reported

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[9] JCSP- DES programme designed to cater for weaker students allowing students to study a reduced number of junior cert subjects and adopting a cross curricular approach DES, 2003.

through surveys and focus group interviews that they found the programme supported their children to achieve successful outcomes in the Junior Cert subjects and parents in turn found it easier to support and motivate their children to participate and progress through the system and transfer onto senior cycle. Historically some of the parents had not transferred to senior cycle post primary education themselves, having left the system at junior cycle. The opportunity of their children progressing, represented a source of great pride for them as well as a cultural shift within their families.

I found it interesting that parents engaged at greater levels with the school when their children were engaged in a programme of study utilising the existing national junior certificate syllabi that promoted the experience of success as a learning outcome. The parents valued the programme and saw it as a way of their children accumulating academic capital, promoting progression to senior cycle and in some cases promotion to further education following completion of senior cycle. Interestingly, some teaching staff at the school disregarded the value of the programme on the basis that it generally did not offer higher level subjects at junior cycle thereby limiting students' subject choices at senior cycle and thereafter for progression opportunities to higher education courses. They viewed its academic credibility as dubious and frequently lamented the amount of time and supports that were extended to students on the programme as wasteful and unnecessary as they believed that it held no value for the long-term progression of students to higher education courses.

The transfer rate of students to higher education courses from the school was approximately 7%. Success within the JCSP or other programmes did not constitute an educational success in the view of a small number of staff in the school. These staff advocated a single route of progression throughout the school driven by the culture of terminal exams and associated assessments. As a practitioner, I found this representation of the reality of the school challenging and I viewed this approach as very narrow and myopic but from a research perspective this prompted my interest in further exploration of the various forms of capital and their indicators and how they coexist in families and in schools and how they impact on the educational outcomes of students.

1.5.3 Department of Education and Skills (DES)

I commenced a new post at the Department of Education and Skills (DES) devising and integrating education initiatives in the broader area of education for disadvantaged communities.

This brought me into greater contact with families on a daily basis while working closely with local schools at primary and post-primary levels to enhance family participation in education and to enhance educational outcomes for students and for families in general. This position afforded me experience in the area of pre-school education, primary and post primary education, access to higher education and also adult education, which extended to European projects. My experience at European project level afforded me an extensive view of education practices in other EU countries and also enabled me to study and investigate different cultural, academic, economic and social values associated with education in those countries. I found these to be very different to the Irish experience and I was particularly interested in the structures of education systems in other countries where education at post primary level in particular is quite specialised being organised into academic and vocational strands.

I noted that while some European education processes were constructed differently to Irish processes, that there was evidence of varying degrees of cultural capital within the education processes of the partner countries with whom I worked. Culturally there were notable differences in the curricular approach in that at senior cycle in other European countries I noted that curriculum was more focused and not as broad as the senior cycle programme in Ireland and that students specialised at an earlier stage. One of my earliest observations of partner European education systems was the prioritisation and recognition of pre-school education and the involvement of families as part of the formal education system, a concept that has been struggled with in Ireland through successive administrations, despite significant international research indicating the value of early educational intervention.

I also noted that from an educational disadvantage perspective that some European countries (Southern Italy, Slovakia and Greece) experienced greater levels of educational disadvantage than in Ireland with many social and economic factors combining to dictate low levels of participation in post junior cycles, particularly in males. While progression onto higher education or further education was a priority for some families of the European partners, it did not represent the same ultimate academic capital for those families as it does for Irish families. I observed that whilst those families played a strong and motivating role in the participation and progression of students through the post-primary education system to higher and further education, families were equally interested in students achieving a generally positive educational outcome as achieving a higher or third level qualification. This was different to my experience in Ireland, where for a significant

proportion of the age relevant cohort achievement of a course place in higher or further education was seen as paramount and where anything less did not register on the ubiquitous pinnacle of educational outcomes. I experienced family cultures to be stronger and more evident in some partner countries than others and I noted that the family cultures identified by various customs, practices and traditions didn't always harmonise with the culture of the school, occasionally causing disagreements and misunderstandings between the rigid regulations and demands of schools on a daily basis and the practices and norms of the family and impacting both negatively and positively on the educational outcomes of the students . This was also very evident to me within the Irish system. It was during my time working in the DES that I commenced my doctoral programme of study.

1.5.4 Teacher Education

From my role in the DES I progressed onto my current role in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Within this role I work with student teachers and with post-primary schools focusing on the teaching, learning and assessment aspect of initial teacher education and with a particular focus on the school placement aspect of the programme. One of the greatest challenges I note for the student teachers is the challenge of understanding the complexity of the relationship between home and school and in particular how that relationship affects student learning in terms of short-term learning outcomes and also in terms of long-term learning outcomes. I note that occasionally student teachers find that they allow the theoretical approach to teaching, learning and assessment dictate their assessment for learning and assessment of learning of their students and that they found it very difficult to factor in that there were indigenous factors in the student equation that they either did not know about or did not fully appreciate in devising lesson plans, schemes of work or learning experiences.

1.6 Overview of thesis

The following study is presented in in two parts.
Part One
The introductory chapter is followed by chapter two which presents an historical overview and review of the literature which explores the historical landscape of the Irish post-primary education backdrop from the early 1960's and details significant educational developments that

have shaped and developed the contemporary educational backdrop against which this piece of research is set. The chapter also examines and delineates significant political, socio-economic and cultural episodes that have contributed to and impacted upon the formation of the Irish post-primary education setting in which the research is embedded.

Chapter three details the theoretical aspects of the literature relative to the research questions and the concepts identified in the thesis. The chapter includes an exploration and discussion of the literature which includes but is not limited to identifying the stakeholders, the theorists, the authors and the conclusions and recommendations from the literature that address the issues of the family, the school, cultural capital and educational outcomes and the connections and relationships between them. The chapter explores the wider research vista and scopes the research questions of the thesis against the backdrop of the most relevant material chosen to address the research questions. The chapter is organised thematically and seeks to identify literature that addresses the research questions while highlighting the gaps and shortcomings in the literature.

Chapter four focuses on a contemporary overview and interrogation of the policies and practices within the Irish education system that inform the day-to-day modus operandi of the system as underpinned by statutory and legal frameworks. This chapter discusses the contemporary education framework within which the research was embedded.

The conceptual framework chapter details the main concepts of interest in the thesis, namely the family, the school, cultural capital, bridging social capital and bonding social capital and educational outcomes. The role of the conceptual framework in this thesis is to bind and focus the study into an organised and logical progression which has evolved from the relevant concepts and constructs identified in chapters two, three and four through to the research design and research questions progressing onto the generation, gathering, presentation and analysis of data and finally onto an explanatory and interpretive elucidation of the findings of the research.

The methods and methodology chapter offers a detailed narrative recording the methods employed and other relevant methodological considerations of the thesis. The chapter clarifies

the methodology through which the relevant concepts and frameworks were explored and later progressed onto an in-depth analysis in the study, arising from which the conclusions and recommendations were constructed. The chapter includes an overview of the research questions of the thesis followed by a description of the selection and sampling of participants supported by a discussion on ethical considerations. The chapter goes on to address the empirical elements of the methodology including my selection of the case study approach and the selection of appropriate methods and instrumentation used to generate data.

Part Two

Chapter eight presents the findings from the primary data generated through the distribution of two questionnaires; an initial questionnaire to parents of students in the research school (Appendix Five) and a second questionnaire to teaching staff and management in the research school (Appendix Nine). The questionnaire to parents represents a substantive research instrument that was primarily utilised to profile the participating families in the research school. The questionnaire for parents also acted as a filter mechanism for the identification of students in the research school who with their parents' informed consent participated in the student focus group interviews which are discussed in chapter nine.

Chapter nine presents the findings from the student focus groups and from the visual diaries constructed by the students. The raw data generated from the focus groups and from the visual diaries was interpreted and transposed to form the research findings. Both instruments utilised structured templates and prepared topic guides that assisted the researcher and the participants to focus on the task and ensured consistency of approach with all participants. The findings in both chapter eight and nine are organised in a linear, logical format having been mapped onto the research instrument structures.

Chapter ten presents the analysis and discussion phase of the thesis. This chapter synthesises and theorises the findings presented in the previous chapters while discussing the findings in light of the research questions. The chapter is presented thematically prioritising the evidence that best addresses the research questions. The discussion optimises the links and connections that have

arisen in the findings and extracts meaning from the findings that are used to address the research questions. The qualitative research paradigm of the study guides the analysis discussion chapter. The thesis concludes with a conclusions and recommendations chapter that looks forward and suggests a number of practical and pragmatic recommendations based on the findings of the research.

The thesis is supported by a number of appendices and a selection of the electronically recorded visual images generated during the research.

Part One	
Chapter One	Introduction
Chapter Two	Historical overview of the Study
Chapter Three	Theoretical Perspectives from the Literature
Chapter Four	The contemporary Irish education paradigm, policies and practices
Chapter Five	Conceptual Framework of the Study
Chapter Six	Methods and Methodologies in the Study
Part Two	
Chapter Seven	Setting the empirical context- Introduction to the Analysis and Discussion chapters
Chapter 8	Presentation of Research Findings - The Family and School Context
Chapter 9	Presentation of Research Findings - The students' perspectives
Chapter 10	A conversation on the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships and connections
Chapter 11	Looking forward – Conclusions and Recommendations from this study

Table 1.1 Overview of the thesis

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the underpinning base of the research and has drawn on my epistemology of practice and the ontological values that scaffold my practice. The research questions have been documented and I have presented a snapshot of the theoretical perspectives that will be utilised in the thesis. The methodology is determined by the research questions and supported both by the theoretical perspectives and methodological concepts identified in the literature. The conceptual framework focuses on binding the study by emphasising the relevant concepts and constructs and identifying the route whereby the concepts and emergent research questions translate into a progressive research design that concludes with an explanatory framework through which the research questions may be answered at the analysis and discussion stage. The chapter concludes with a description of the layout and progression of the thesis.

Chapter Two

Historical Overview

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the historical landscape of the Irish post-primary education backdrop from the early 1960s and details significant educational developments that have shaped and developed the contemporary educational backdrop against which the research questions have been developed. While the research questions are set within a contemporary timeline rather than a historical window it is critical to understand the educational antecedents that were the forerunners to the contemporary context. Familial cultural capital has been a source of research interest in recent years and the impact of familial cultural capital on educational outcomes has also been a source of interest to educational researchers over the past twenty-five to thirty years. In order to fully appreciate the contemporary context in which the research has been set this chapter explores at length and in detail periods of history which link directly to the research time-frame and to the research interests articulated in the research questions. Notwithstanding significant historical educational developments that preceded this timeframe in the history of Irish education and aligned to the specific purpose of this piece of research I have elected to focus this chapter in the main within the scope of the timeframe of the 1960s onwards on the basis of its immediate import to the focus of this thesis. Walsh et al. (2014)in their Editorial article "Investment in Education and the intractability of inequality" allude to Clancy's (1996) description of the Investment in Education report (1965) as being "probably *the* foundation document" of modern Irish education. They also give mention to the OECD's suggestion that the report was a "landmark both in the national and international memory" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1991). Acknowledging the breadth of literature that recognises the criticality of the period apropos the history of Irish education from the 1960s onwards I have chosen to use this platform from which to probe and examine what I consider to be the dominant historical context that underpins this thesis and the research questions within it.

The chapter also examines and delineates significant political episodes that have contributed to and impacted upon the formation of the Irish post-primary education setting in which the research is embedded and in keeping with the general orientation of the thesis refers briefly to

the historical structuring of the relationship between the family and schooling in Ireland. A basic preamble to the body of this chapter initially includes a brief discussion of the historical origins of the educational reform of the 1960s.

2.2 Framing the historical discussion- An overview of schooling in Ireland from 1922 to the 1960s
a) 2.2.1 Colonial antecedents

The Irish education system bore the structural hallmark of its colonial antecedents from its foundation in 1922 and changed very little in profile over four decades of independence. During this time, Church-controlled, state supported National Schools provided basic primary education to the majority of Irish children from the age of four to twelve years of age and up to fourteen years of age in some cases (Coolahan, 1981). Secondary schools, also controlled in the main by the Churches offered fee-paying education to students whose families could afford to pay for their education (Coolahan, 1981) while Vocational schools founded under the 1930 Vocational Education Act (Cooke and Irish Vocational Education Association, 2009), provided state supported post-primary technical education as an alternative provision to the fee-paying secondary sector. Coolahan (1981) argues that the National School was characterised by being authoritarian, both in terms of curriculum and ideology, features which manifested in a joint control of the schools by the Church, the State through the Inspectorate and the National School teacher (assistant teacher), although it is probably more plausible to argue that "assistant teachers"[10] were more the object of authoritarianism than its agents. The National school teacher was in a lot of cases the only teacher that children actually engaged with during their formal education experience. Walsh (2009) states that the school manager was the key agent of control on behalf of the church up to 1975, while the principal was the other main source of authority. Charles McCarthy (1968) while referring to the interconnected relationship between the Church, the State and the National school teacher emphasised the authoritarian nature that permeated through all facets of the educational arrangement at the time:

> These young men and women were drawn from the most academically able in the
> country, but, certainly in the case of the men, from a remarkably limited social group. It

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[10] All lay teachers were originally assistant teachers in the early 1900s, although this term fell into disuse from the 1950s (Walsh, 2009)

appears to me that they came primarily from small farmers and shopkeepers in the south and west and in many cases, had themselves left home as early as thirteen or fourteen years of age attending the first preparatory colleges (which have now fortunately been disestablished) and also the diocesan colleges, all residential in character. From there they went to a residential training college which was conducted along remarkably authoritarian lines (McCarthy, 1968).

Coolahan (1981) reminds us that despite the fact that the Primary Certificate became compulsory for pupils in sixth standard in 1943, and remained as such until it was abolished in 1967 that not all pupils who entered sixth standard sat for the examination. This, he attributes to the examination encompassing a very narrow range of subjects which focused on written work and rote learning.

b) 2.2.2 Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937

De Valera's allegiance to the Catholic Church is evidenced in the 1937 Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937) and is noteworthy in terms of this piece of research with particular reference to the Family and Education. Whilst acknowledging the influence of Catholic social teaching on de Valera himself it should also be declared that the Constitution reflected the dominant cultural and socio-political forces of the era, i.e. nationalism, traditional or integralist Catholicism and social conservatism. Walsh (2012) notes how the Constitution stressed the predominant rights of parents in relation to education while emphasising the subsidiary role of the State, a position that successive government ministers reinforced during this timeframe. The Family is acknowledged by the State in Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 42 as the "primary and natural" educator and the State recognises that parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools recognised or established by the State (Article 42.2, Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937). Article 42 goes on to assert that the State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience or lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or any particular type of school designated by the State (Article 42.3.1, Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937) but that the State "…as the guardian of the common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social." (Article 42.3.2, Constitution of Ireland- Bunreacht na hÉireann,1937)). Article 42.4 also addresses the requirement on the State to provide for "free primary education" and to "endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the

public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation". It is clear from the literature that at the outset parents did not exercise their rights in terms of management, setting up schools or impacting on policy (Coolahan, 1981), this makes for an unfamiliar position when compared to the current-day situation where parents currently occupy a formal decision-making position and are to the fore in their representation in Irish schooling at both primary and post-primary levels (Ireland, 1998).

c) 2.2.3 Administrative neglect and lack of educational reform

Pádraig Hogan in his article "An overview of the Educational Ethos" (Hogan, 1983) alludes to Akenson (1975), Coolahan (1981) and Mulcahy's (1981) consistency of interpretation with the regards to the theme of inattention to Irish educational reform by those in power as he attempts to explain the curricular pattern that Irish post-primary schools had been forced into since the foundation of the State. Hogan notes that the pattern at post-primary level was remarkable in that it epitomised "modern Ireland's rejection of the twentieth century's dominant intellectual trends" (Hogan, 1983). While Hogan questions the objectivity and balance of argument of Akenson's contribution he concedes that both Mulcahy and Coolahan highlight the lack of a "synthesising, coordinating statement on the overall curricular policy for second level, including the formal programmes offered, the pedagogy employed and the lifestyle of the schools" (Coolahan, 1981, p 205 quoted in Hogan, 1983). Hogan goes on to describe how Mulchay, Coolahan and others have documented the fact that there was a "perennial failure" to conduct any kind of a review or evaluation with regards to the main purpose and successes of post-primary education. From a government perspective Fianna Fáil, held power from 1932 to 1948 when they lost out to the first inter-party Clann na Poblachta led government administration (Keogh and McCarthy, 2005)and subsequently regained power from 1957 to 1973. In terms of education policy, Fianna Fáil prioritised the promotion of the revival of the Irish language as their main curricular approach. This approach originated in Minister Thomas Derrig's conservative focus on curriculum and the revival of the Irish language as a priority of that curriculum (Walsh, 2012).

Derrig served as Minister for Education from 1932 to 1937[11] but his conservative approach was maintained and continued by successive administrations up to 1968 as O' Buachalla (1988) recalls that there were just four secretaries of the Department of Education who worked as Secretary of State throughout this timeframe. Walsh (2012) also notes the fact that De Valera, a teacher by profession was Taoiseach throughout most of this time and by virtue of his professional and political position would have influenced Ministers and Department Officials with his own conservative views on the role of education.

d) 2.2.4 A new era dawns.

The election of Lemass on the 23 June 1959 as Taoiseach heralded a new dawn both in political terms and in terms of overarching, progressive reform. John Horgan in his biography of Lemass, "The Enigmatic Patriot" (Horgan, 1997) refers to " a different age dawning, in which the remote and somewhat forbidding figure of de Valera would be replaced by someone who would not be particularly affable but was unmistakably more in tune with the times" (Horgan, 1997, p. 189). Coinciding with Lemass's leadership came a softening of the sensitivity towards the Catholic Church in relation to educational reform (Walsh, 2012), an open critique of the Irish language revival methods and an openness and realisation of the potential of educational reforms in educational reforms in economic terms (Walsh, 2012).

2.3 The post-primary education milieu in Ireland from the 1960s onwards

a) 2.3.1 The Politico-Economic Context

The manifesto espoused by Lemass himself in preparation for the 1957 election promised much under the banner of the Programme for Economic Expansion, and was in essence "a blend of the ideas he had been canvassing in speeches before the election and those articulated by a group of senior departmental secretaries" (Horgan, 1997) chaired by T. K. Whitaker. Taking note of Lemass's election speeches Whitaker worked on his own document which was eventually presented at ministerial level and was called "Has Ireland a Future?" (Horgan, 1997). The follow up document "Economic Development" underpinned by Whitaker's work was delivered to

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[11] Derrig served as Minister for Education from 1932 to 1948 with short breaks while de Valera was Acting Minister, largely due to Derrig's ill health; De Valera was a politician by profession but he held strong educational views from his teacher training and early experience as a teacher Walsh, 2009.

government in 1958 (Brown, 1987; Horgan, 1997) and preceded the White Paper, "Programme for Economic Expansion" which gave life to the thinking and contemplations that had brought about its existence. The economic crisis of the late 1950s acted as a catalyst for the reforms of the 1960s, among which educational reform figured prominently. Central to that educational reform was Patrick Hillery.

Lemass's appointment of Patrick Hillery as Minister for Education in June 1959 was from Hillery's standpoint "a profoundly unwelcome one" (Walsh, 2008) as Hillery was at that time considering his political position (Walsh, 2008). Nonetheless his appointment as Minister was to prove fruitful as he set about addressing what previously had been an "ill-defined" (Walsh, 2008) policy towards education and transforming the educational landscape to expand the educational sector. Fleming and Harford (2014) describe the 1960s as "a decade of transformation following a period of inertia and insularity in Irish education" that served to democratise post primary education in Ireland.

It was during Hillery's second term as Minister for Education, (1961-1965) that he initiated a far-reaching process of educational reform which was extended and deepened under his successors (Walsh, 2009). His opening of the Irish education system "to international influences, disseminated especially by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Walsh, 2008) is noteworthy. Up to the 1960s participation in post-primary education was strongly differentiated by social class background (Darmody and Smyth, 2013), a fact which was verified by the OECD/ Department of Education *Investment in Education* report which also highlighted regional disparities in educational participation in an education system that was limited in producing a trained workforce necessary for economic growth (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). The promotion of education as a key factor in economic development by the OECD was significant for Irish education policy (Walsh, 2008) and economists at the time emphasised education as an economic investment as opposed to a consumer service (Coolahan, 1981). Coolahan notes that the prosperity of a modern technological society was dependent on an educated workforce (Coolahan, 1981, p. 131).

b) 2.3.2 Investment in Education and Equality of Access

Seizing the opportunity offered by the OECD to undertake a proposed pilot education study with the objective of devising guidelines for policy making (O'Connor in Walsh, 2008, p.93) for

Ireland, Hillery despite understanding the potential fall out and exposition of deficiencies within the existing system recommended the pilot study be undertaken. Historians (Brown, 1987; Coolahan, 1981; Horgan, 1997; Keogh and McCarthy, 2005; Walsh, 2008, 2009) agree that Hillery's decision to recommend to undertake the study was one of the most important policy decisions (O' Connor in Walsh, 2008) by any Minister for Education. Although it fell to both George Colley and Donogh O' Malley as Hillery's successors to implement many of the changes arising from the *Investment in Education* report the study and its subsequent findings which reflected radical ideological departure in Irish educational thinking (*Investment in Education* report, 1965) marked the genesis of a new era in educational policy planning in Ireland and its impact remains pertinent in the current day. Of particular interest in light of this thesis were the report's finding that related to entry levels to post primary education which showed that participation in post primary education was "marked by striking differences between counties and a clear association between class and educational advancement which became "the more marked the higher the age group and the higher the level" (Brown, 1987, p. 251).

A policy announcement by Hillery in May 1963 to introduce comprehensive post-primary schools heralded the first of two significant educational reforms during this decade. The introduction of comprehensive schools offered a broad curriculum combining academic and vocational subjects in a single school for the first time. Heretofore the system had been bipartite where vocational schools had offered practical subjects (Cooke and Irish Vocational Education Association, 2009) while secondary schools had focused on the provision of academic subjects. Mulcahy (1989) observed that the curriculum that emerged in secondary education "was one in which the literary and academic subjects occupied a central role" (Mulcahy et al., 1989, p. 78) while the distinctive feature of vocational education, also known as continuation education included the study of woodwork, metalwork, domestic and rural science and commercial studies (Mulcahy et al., 1989). As a result of not providing the more academic Intermediate and Leaving certificate course vocational schools historically acquired lower status and tended to enrol students from lower socio-economic groups (Hannan and Boyle in Darmody and Smyth, 2013). The hierarchy had opposed the establishment of state secondary schools fearing that it would undermine voluntary secondary schools (Walsh, 2008). In the absence of any agreement with the hierarchy the comprehensive schools policy was launched as a pilot initiative with the intention that the initiative would be first implemented in specific geographic regions of the

country and offer an opportunity for students to engage in a broad curriculum based education up to the age of fifteen or sixteen and then progress onto secondary or technical schools (Walsh, 2008). The comprehensive school initiative aspired to improve coordination between the secondary school system and the vocational schools by introducing a common examination (Walsh, 2008). This would afford students in the vocational sector the opportunity to take the Intermediate certificate after three years in the post primary sector. The first three state-run comprehensive schools were opened in 1966 (Keogh and McCarthy, 2005). The introduction of common courses and common examinations in secondary, vocational and comprehensive schools (and later in community schools) enabled schools to provide a greater range of subjects and enabled students to study both traditional vocational school practical subjects and traditional secondary school academic subjects together in one school (Mulcahy et al., 1989).

In September 1966 the second of the two significant educational reforms was introduced when the then minister for Education, Donogh O' Malley announced that "free post-primary education" (Coolahan, 1981) would be made available for the following academic year; 1967/1968. Fleming and Harford (2014) report that it was reported in the Irish Times that O Malley announced:

> *"...that I am drawing up a scheme under which, in future, no boy or girl in the State will be deprived of educational opportunity- from primary to university level-by reason of the fact that the parents cannot afford to pay for it"*
>
> The Irish Times, September 1966.

There were existing deep divisions between the vocational and secondary sectors and tensions remained throughout protracted and difficult negotiations between Hillery and the hierarchy (Walsh, 2008). The hierarchy, guided by Bishop Mc Quaid reluctantly conceded to the idea in principle as they did not wish to be seen to be obstructive towards the concept of free education (Fleming and Harford, 2014) although they did seek assurances at that time that there would be no co-education and that the new schools would not negatively impact on existing secondary schools (Walsh, 2008). Hannan et al. (1996) relate the principle of forbidding coeducation (which was to be applied in all schools in Ireland) but particularly "in the most delicate and decisive period of formation, that namely of adolescence" to the Papal Encyclical (Christian Education of Youth, 1929) (Hannan et al., 1996). Hannan et al. continue to discuss the provision of "gender appropriate" education whereby Home Economics was to be provided in all schools

attended by girls and the existence up to the 1960s of a lower level of Mathematics syllabus for girls; and different subject groupings for boys and girls taking the Group certificate (Hannan et al., 1996). They conclude that this led to significant differences in the type of education received by boys and girls up to the late 1960s, a factor that would have also impacted on family educational outcomes at that time.

Detailed negotiations took place between the minister and the school managerial authorities and with the hierarchy in relation to the free education initiative during which the Church authorities worked to maximise financial concession from the government in the form of the capitation grant whilst simultaneously conceding the bare minimum to the state in the running and management of their schools (Fleming and Harford, 2014). The introduction of the "free education" scheme also raised issues for Protestant schools who in most cases were operating as boarding schools. A separate funding scheme was devised for Protestant schools where an annual "block grant" was introduced to offset the fees for low income students (Darmody and Smyth, 2013).

Despite initial teething problems the free post-primary initiative got underway and was supported by the establishment of the school transport system for students living in excess of three miles from the school (Coolahan, 1981). The introduction of the school transport system offered an all-encompassing scheme that facilitated the inclusion of families in the education system who without transport would have been denied access due to lack of transport and remoteness from schools. The legacy of the scheme, which remains in place in the current day was a positive and reformist ingenuity that extended the opportunity of free education beyond those residing immediately adjacent to the schools but to rural dwellers who lived significant distances from the schools. The number of post-primary students enrolled in the system increased significantly in the school year that the free education scheme commenced (Fleming and Harford, 2014).

Fleming and Harford (2014) claim that an additional twenty-one thousand students enrolled in the system that year although O' Connor (in Walsh, 2009) quotes a Department of Education figure of an increase of fifteen thousand in secondary schools in 1967 and approximately three thousand in vocational schools. Coupled with the increase in numbers of students enrolled in the post-primary education system came a broadening of the range of educational and socio-economic family backgrounds of the students themselves. This in turn presented challenges in the system due to changes in the ability range of students, levels of educational attainment and in levels of aspiration and motivation to attend school (Mulcahy et al., 1989).

In October 1970 the concept of the community school was introduced into the post-primary education system (Coolahan, 1981). Community schools and community colleges emerged as a partnership between the VECs and religious orders under the responsibility of the Department of Education (Darmody and Smyth, 2013) and were considered more acceptable to the hierarchy than the comprehensive school model (Walsh, 2009). The community school continued the concept of the "comprehensive" educational provision providing a broad curriculum for students and are run by boards of management composed of representatives from different interest groups; religious orders, parents and local authorities while being seen to represent the traditions of both the vocational and secondary school sectors (Walsh, 1999 in Darmody and Smyth, 2013). While a battle for control between the different managerial bodies and the State which revolved around the management and trusteeship of the community schools continued throughout the twenty year period up through the 1980s increased enrolments and increased levels of participation in post primary education school completion rates (to Leaving Certificate) reached 60% by the beginning of the 1980s and by the early 1990s they had reached 81–82% (Department of Education and Science 2003; Higher Education Authority 2008 in O'Connor, 2014)).

Irish families gradually became more engaged in the post-primary education system as the opportunities for both boys and girls to enrol and attend post-primary schools was extended to all families.

c) 2.3.3 The "Capital" Context

The educational reforms of the 1960s were predicated on an economic imperative which forced the government to think and act strategically in an attempt to steer its way out of the economic crisis of the 1950s. The alignment of economics and education as being mutually dependent by the OECD and prominent economists at the time represented a seed-change in the disposition and thinking of successive government ministers and government department personnel. The conceptualisation of expenditure on education as an investment was revolutionary for Ireland in the 1960s (O'Connor, 2014).

Loxley et al (2014) draw on the human capital theories which they trace back to Adam Smith that they claim were developed in the extended form by Bourdieu. They argue that human capital theory emerged as a major strand of economic thinking in the early 1960s, due especially to the

work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz and in the case of the Irish context, the human capital theory replaced the previous dominant paradigm of education which was founded on Christian values by providing a detailed and succinct paradigm that offered a new way of looking at education with direction and clear purpose but on this occasion relative to employment and potential for future growth. The foresight of government personnel at that time incentivised the policy makers to drive on and enact significant educational reform that altered the educational and economic vista of the time allowing the economic potential of the state to be realised. The expansion of the human capital paradigm incorporated commercial, vocational, and market interpretations of schooling and the impact of these on the structuration of consciousness within educational policy-making (O'Sullivan, 1992). O' Sullivan's argument describes how a "theocentric paradigm" in Irish education was gradually displaced by a "mercantile" paradigm as the primary rationale for state action in education (Walsh, 2009).

As the trend towards coeducational provision gathered pace in the 1970s through the growth of "comprehensive" education provision in the community and comprehensive schools, amalgamations of single-sex schools (some more recently than others) resulted in the formation of many post-primary coeducational schools in Ireland. The increase in coeducational provision in the post-primary system brought the issue of gender equality issues in post-primary education to the fore and with it an increased awareness of the impact of coeducation on the students attending coeducational schools and on their educational outcomes. In terms of human capital and referring to the previous paragraph and the "mercantile" paradigm, it is important to acknowledge that while educational outcomes are a determining factor in relation to employment and career chances for both boys and girls that it is a complex task to establish how or if coeducational provision impacted on students' educational performance and personal and social development. A more detailed analysis of gender equality relative to the contemporary curriculum follows in chapter four and I refer to gender equality in this chapter mainly from a historical perspective that underpins the current context and is relevant to the case study school and to the research questions of this thesis.

The provision of post primary educational opportunities for everyone represented a new and innovative route of access to education for children who previously had not figured in the thinking of policy makers in either the education or economic sphere. In an era before free post

primary education, access to universities was dominated by the professional and managerial classes who accounted for two-thirds of entrants even though they made up just one-fifth of the national population (O'Connor, 2014). O Connor also points out that students from the semi-skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds who made up a quarter of the national population accounted for just 2% of university entrants in 1963.

d) 2.3.4 The legislative framework of Irish education

Coolahan (1981) noted that in spite of the Constitution setting forth some fundamental principles with regards to the rights and responsibilities of the state and its citizens relative to education that there has been a paucity of educational legislation. This observation is well made as he also notes how the system relied heavily on the use of memorandums, rules and circulars issued on behalf of the Minister for Education (Coolahan, 1981). This continues to the present day. The beginning of the 1990s signalled a tapering off in school completion (to Leaving Certificate) rates just when programmes to combat educational disadvantage commenced (O'Connor, 2014). During this time the publication of a Government Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World* (1992), followed by a comprehensive consultation process of the National Education Convention (1993) set within the framework of *The Programme for A Partnership Government* (1994 to 1997) ultimately progressed onto the publication of the White Paper, *Charting Our Future* in 1995. Again, economic progression underpinned the tenets of both Papers which effectively laid the ground work for the Education Act in 1998. The 1998 Act was and is the legislative framework within which the case study school operated at the time of the research. Section one, Part I of the 1998 Act reads:

> *"The Intermediate Education (Ireland) Acts, 1878 to 1924 and this Act may be cited together as the Education Acts, 1878 to 1998, and shall be construed together as one"* (Constitution of Ireland- Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937).

and provides for amendments of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1878 and the Vocational Education Act, 1930.

The introduction of boards of management in Irish schools has been a long and complex process, in the voluntary secondary sector (i.e. the case study school). The board of management consists of eight persons appointed by the trustees, four are nominated by the Trustees and the remainder are made up by two parent and two teacher nominees (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). The 1998 Education Act made boards of management a requirement for all schools where possible

(Darmody and Smyth, 2013) and conferred a statutory partnership role on parents/guardians of students attending all primary and post primary schools in the form of membership of the boards of management of the schools. In effect the Act unlocked access for all families through parent/guardian representatives to the decision-making platform of the post-primary school. Post-primary school boards of management include two parents / legal guardians (one mother, one father) of students currently attending the school who are democratically elected by parents / legal guardians whose children also currently attend the school. The Board of Management (BOM) are responsible for the management of the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents, i.e. the families and to provide an appropriate education for each student at the school (Ireland, 1998). Following the election of members to the BOM, members are appointed to the board by the trustees.

The inclusion of parents as decision-makers in the management of the post-primary school is significant and represents a democratic and inclusive approach to the management of schools in Ireland. The 1998 Act also recognises the import of the establishment of a parents' association of a school and membership of the association shall be open to all parents of students of that school (Ireland, 1998). Both the inclusion of parents/legal guardians as members of the board of management and the provision of an opportunity to establish a parents' association symbolises an important nexus at a juncture along the historical frameworks of the family and the school. The board of management also has to ensure that "...as regards that policy principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected and such directions as may be made from time to time by the Minister having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school and the constitutional rights of all persons concerned, are complied with" (*Education* Act, Section 15 [d]).

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 repealed the 1926 school attendance legislation and focused on addressing the needs of children and young people experiencing difficulties in attending school as opposed to penalising children for non-attendance. The Act also provides for the identification of children being educated outside the school system (home-schooled) to ensure that their education meets their constitutional rights. The Act also provided for the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board whose specific remit is to ensure that children of school-going age attend school or receive an appropriate education.

Also provided for in the legislative framework of the State, the Equal Status Act 2000 Section 7(c) allows exemptions to denominational schools where the objective is to provide education in an environment that promotes certain religious values (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) provides for the education of students with special educational needs in an inclusive environment with students who do not have such needs, where possible.

In recent years, voluntary secondary schools have joined under Education Trust companies who are responsible for running their schools (Madigan (2012) in Darmody and Smyth, 2013). In Ireland there are currently six main education trust companies; CEIST (112 voluntary secondary schools), ERST (61 schools formerly run by the Christian brothers); Le Chéile (51 voluntary secondary schools); Loreto Education Trust, Des Places Education Association for Holy Ghost Schools, the Presentation Schools Trust for schools formerly under the trusteeship of the Presentation Brothers and some single voluntary secondary schools are also run by Education Trust companies (Madigan (2012) in Darmody and Smyth 2013).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the major historical significant political episodes that have contributed to and impacted upon the formation of the Irish post-primary education setting in which the research is embedded. Loxley et al. (2014) refer to the influence of Investment in Education as being "profound". They argue that while the transformation in the state's policy cannot be attributed to any one factor, the influence of Investment in Education offered "a sustained critique of the traditional system and legitimated major policy change" (Loxley et al., 2014). Aligned to Clancy's claims that Investment in Education was "the" foundation document of education in the era since the introduction of economic planning in the late 1950s, the prominence and promotion of the human capital paradigm from that period of time to the current day confirms and enforces its criticality in the foundation of the modern education system in which the research is set. The actions and behaviour of the policy maker in the 1960s evidence a particular "habitus" that emerged during this period, linked to economic rationale for investment in education and social demand, and has proved exceptionally durable and if anything has become more entrenched over time. The chapter has also presented the legislative framework

aligned to which education policies have been enabled and enacted. The policy background is relevant not only from the schooling perspective but is critical to understanding the research questions which focus on the family perspective and family engagement in the education system. There is greater evidence of engagement and connection between families and schools in the literature of more recent years but heretofore the literature evidences sparse and meagre levels of participation by families in post-primary education.

The following chapter examines the literature relative to the theoretical framework underpinning the research piece.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Perspectives from the Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a selection of the theoretical perspectives which are relevant to the research questions of this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to examine and explicate an array of theoretical perspectives and arguments which are considered applicable to the corpus of the thesis and the underpinning theoretical constructs. Relevant concepts from the identified literature are prioritised and presented in the conceptual framework of the thesis (chapter five) which offers a focused explanation of the primary concepts and how the dimensions and properties of those concepts feature in the thesis.

The chapter examines the sociological constructs of the family, the school and schooling and the relationship between them, social class, capital, field theories and also considers the concepts of bridging and bonding and the contextual effect in education. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature prioritised as being most relevant to the thesis.

3.2 Family-School Relationships: The literature landscape.

This piece of research relates to family-school relationships and connections at post-primary school level in Ireland characterised by the specific role of cultural capital in that connection between the family and the school. I consider that is important therefore to clarify from the outset of my evaluation of the literature that the focus in this chapter is limited to the post-primary sector. I do however acknowledge relevant input within the literature at the primary sector level in Ireland and internationally where appropriate but my main objective is to assess and synthesise the literature most appropriate to the case study itself.

a) 3.2.1 A Paucity of Available Literature 1970s to 2000.

Ryan and Adams (p 3. 1995) note Lightfoot's observation (1978) in her book "Worlds Apart: Relationships between families and schools" that the home and the school, the two main

developmental contexts of childhood had been set into two separate spheres; which were separated by powerful barriers that had been erected between them. They further comment that that "schism" that existed between parents and teachers further extended to researchers in education and in child development who tended to focus either exclusively on the child in the school or on the child in the home (Ryan et al., 1995). Eccles and Harold (1996) observe and note that it has been known for some time that parents play a critical role in both their children's academic development and in their socio-emotional development (Clark, 1983; 1988; Eccles, Arbreton et al., 1993; Eccles-Parsons, Adler, and Kaczala, 1982; Epstein, 1983, 1984; Marjoribanks, 1979 cited in Eccles and Harold, 1996) but that it is only recently that researchers have studied the role schools play in encouraging and facilitating parents' roles in children's academic achievement. Critical to that role is the relationship and partnership between parents and teachers and between communities and schools (Eccles and Harold, 1996). Epstein argues that working in partnership benefits the home, the school and the community with the child being the main beneficiary (Epstein, 2001). From an educational psychological perspective Dowling and Osborne (1994) claim that most professionals in the mental health field recognise that two of the most influential systems in an individual's development are the family and the school. She also recognises that not enough has been done to bring the two systems together and how the application of systems notions to families and to schools have developed quite slowly and quite separately with insufficient cross-fertilisation between them (Dowling and Osborne, 1994). Lareau makes an interesting observation in claiming that the influence of family background on children's educational experiences has "a curious place within the field of sociology of education" (Lareau, 1987). She goes on to discuss how the literature has focused on educational outcomes alone with very little emphasis on the processes that led to the outcomes through which educational patterns were created and reproduced. This thesis is primarily concerned with the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships and connections in the Irish context and while the main focus of the thesis centres on the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships it would be remiss not to investigate and present literature that also considers other factors that impact on the family-school connection. My intention is not to view cultural capital exclusive of other determinants in the forging of family-school relationships but rather to site it within the overarching construct of the family-school connection. Significantly, initial reviews of the available literature lead towards the United States context where research into the concept of

family-school relationships has occupied a number of separated spheres of interest. The 1980s saw a breadth of research investigating family-school relationships conducted by individuals and groups of individuals (Emery and O' Leary, 1982, 1984; Forehand, McCombs and Brody, 1987; Epstein, 1987, 1992 and Marjoribanks, 1979, 1981 in Ryan and Adams, (1995) but the accumulated evidence resisted integration (Ryan et al., 1995, p. 5) and up to the early 1990s the balance of research in the area of family-school relationships shifted from status variables to process studies as scholars began to favour the study of risk mechanisms over risk indicators (Rutter, 1994 in Ryan and Adams, 1995).

b) 3.2.2 Models of Parental Involvement in Schooling, the International context.

Research originating from the United States context and evidenced in the literature offers a number of models which are useful in assisting our understanding of parental engagement with schools and the development of family-school relationships. Models which are noteworthy include Eccles and Harold (1993), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) and Epstein (1995, 2001). Ryan and Adams (1995) propose a seven-level model that is intended to encompass all of the relevant family characteristics and processes that might be implicated in children's school achievements while integrating the existing literature on family-school relationships (Ryan et al., 1995). In each of the models listed above the concept of the family-school relationships is predicated on the notion that a relationship exists between the school and the parents.

The Eccles and Harold model (1996) treats parental involvement as both an outcome of parent, teacher and child influences and a predictor of child outcomes (Eccles and Harold, 1996). Exogenous (indirect or more global and removed effects on parental involvement) variables including parent/family characteristics, community characteristics, child characteristics, teacher characteristics and school characteristics, teacher and parent beliefs and attitudes including general beliefs and specific child related beliefs and consequent teacher and parent practices including direct involvement of parents, volunteering at school, attending parent-teacher meetings, teachers providing meaningful ways to parents to be involved and providing meaningful individual feedback are assumed to directly influence the children's outcomes

(Eccles and Harold, 1996). The model proposes a cyclical overlap that enables recurring outcomes over time.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler proposed a parsimonious process variable model using five levels that links parents' initial decisions to become involved in their children's education with students' educational outcomes. Levels 1-2 address parents' decision-making processes and levels 3-5 outline the ways in which parental involvement may positively affect student achievement. A revised version of the model was published in 2005 by Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler and Hoover-Dempsey (Anderson and Minke, 2007). Parents' sense of efficacy in the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model was based on Bandrura's theory of self-efficacy referring to parents' beliefs that being involved in their children's schooling will have a positive impact on their children's educational outcomes (Anderson and Minke, 2007). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler asserted that when self-efficacy and role construction (parents' view of what they should do in relation to their children's schooling) were high that parents would be involved in their children's education regardless of competing demands (Anderson and Minke, 2007). The critical variable in the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model is at level 1 with respect to the parents' decision to be involved in their children's education in the first instance. All of the other variables are dependent on this variable being in place at the outset.

The Epstein model of parental involvement (1995) is a framework model that lists six types of involvement of parents in their children's education and lists sample practices and activities to describe the involvement more fully. The levels include:

   a. Parenting
   b. Communicating
   c. Volunteering
   d. Learning at Home
   e. Decision-making
   f. Collaborating with the community

   (Epstein, 2009).

In keeping with the underpinning principles of the 1995 model of parental involvement Epstein further proposed a model (Overlapping Spheres of Influence, 2001) that facilitated inquiry into the nature of relationships and the interactions and engagement between the family, the school

and the community. This model is conceptualised both at an internal level and at an external level with both levels being co-dependent. The model recognises the dynamic and intermittent nature of the relationships between the family, the school and the community (Epstein, 2001). Critically this model recognises the jagged and variable interface that can exist between the three sets and is both useful and valuable when applied in the Irish context.

The Ryan and Adams model proposes an alternative approach in that it presents a structure that is used to locate the relevant literature and to identify conceptual gaps in the literature. It uses a proximal-distal dimension where Child Outcomes are placed at Level 0 and it extends to level 6 which includes exogenous social/cultural and biological variables (Ryan and Adams, 1995). The levels include:

a) Level 0: Child Outcomes.
b) Level 1: Child's Personal Characteristics.
c) Level 2: School-Focused Parent-Child Interactions.
d) Level 3 General Parent-Child Interactions.
e) Level 4: General Family relations.
f) Level 5: Personal Characteristics of Parents.
g) Level 6: Exogenous Social/Cultural and Biological Variables.

Having conducted an audit of family-school connection literature Ryan and Adams have located the selected literature along the seven-level structure on the basis of relevance to the identified level. This model is a valuable instrument that co-locates the various stages and associated variables of family-school relationships and harmonises them with relevant research evidenced in the literature.

c) 3.2.3 The Irish perspective

From an Irish perspective, emphases within the literature have focused on educational failure and family disadvantage, parental involvement and school effectiveness and exploration of the gendered, classed and "raced" nature of parental involvement (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). The Department of Education and Science established the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme in 1990 proposing to work in partnership with the home/parents to achieve equality of educational outcomes. Conaty, who acted as National Coordinator of the programme is cited in

Galvin et al (2009) as claiming that "education is not something centred in the home or the school, but rather is seen as an ellipse in which there are two foci, the home and the school. The ellipse itself remains centred in the community." (Conaty, C, 2006 in Galvin et al., 2009). As was previously mentioned in the historical overview chapter the establishment of educational programmes to combat educational disadvantage and to address early school leaving came to the fore in the early 1990s as policy makers endeavoured to stem a tide of early-school leaving and lower participation rates at post-primary level specifically. The DES at that time popularised the concept of "partnership" in education between schools and parents, a strategy that is evidenced in the White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future (1995)*. The publication recognised that "there is continuing evidence of a desire on the part of parents and teachers to develop and foster constructive cooperation" (DES, 1995, p. 139). Successive governments throughout the 1990s and during the bountiful 2000s introduced consecutive educational initiatives aimed at addressing educational disadvantage at both primary and post-primary levels. Educational disadvantage during this timeframe was (and is) identified on the basis of high levels of deprivation as demonstrated by key socio-economic indicators (Smyth et al., 2015). Initiatives were aimed at targeting areas of greatest need and were also intended to address the "multiplier effect" where schools with significant numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds had specific dynamics (Smyth et al., 2015). This approach did little however to address the needs of students who were educationally disadvantaged but who did not live in DEIS non-designated areas. The 2009 ESRI report "Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage" indicates that 61% of young people from semi-skilled/unskilled manual backgrounds and 56% of those from non-employed households attend non-DEIS schools (2009) Table 3.1 below presents the most significant of these educational initiative programmes from the post-primary perspective.

Year	Name of initiative	Details of the initiative
1990	Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) initiated.	The Scheme was delivered through a co-ordinator (teacher), who was assigned to a school or group of schools. The aims of the scheme were
1999	Stay in School Retention Initiative All 211 post primary schools with *designated disadvantaged* status	To maximise active participation of the children in the schools of the scheme in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure To promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children

		were invited to join this scheme in 1999.	To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the education system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning and To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally
1999/2001	School Development Planning Initiative (SDP)	276 Schools grant aided in Phase One (1999) 85 Schools grant aided in Phase Two (2000-2001) Remaining 394 schools grant aided (2001-2002)	
1999	National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (Primary and Post-Primary)	NEPS had delegated authority to develop and provide an educational psychological service to all students in primary and post-primary schools and in certain other centres supported by the Department, paying particular attention to those with special educational needs (SEN).	
2000/2001	Disadvantaged Areas Scheme	Scheme benefitted 211 schools serving approximately 96,000 students by providing over quota teaching posts, additional funding to launch book rental schemes, additional capitation grants of €38 per pupil and a home/school liaison grant to develop links with parents. In the case of VEC schools and colleges, additional capitation funding corresponding to that for other schools, is built into the regular funding arrangements for VECs.	
2001/2002	Education of Non-nationals	Post-primary schools with an enrolment of fourteen or more non-national students with English language deficits are entitled to an additional teacher to address the needs of these students. An individual student was entitled to a maximum of two years language support. These teacher appointments are temporary, due to the transient nature of the non-national student population. In the case of a school having twenty-eight or more non-English speaking non-nationals, the school is entitled to a second additional teacher. Where a full-time teacher was sanctioned to provide English language support, a start-up grant of €635 was paid with a top-up grant of €317 where the appointment is continued for a second year. In the case of post-primary schools with fewer than fourteen non-national students with English language deficits, additional hours are sanctioned ranging from three hours for one student to nineteen and a half hours for thirteen students.	
2001/2002	Curricular Reform	*Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP)*: 2000/01 saw the continued expansion of this programme. It was available in 125 schools in 2001. Each of these schools receives an additional grant of €63 per pupil and an additional 0.25 teacher post. *Transition Year Programme*: Now available in over 500 schools with 23,269 students participating in 2000/01. *Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)*: Designed to meet the needs for which the traditional Leaving Certificate had been unsuitable. In 2000/01 7,197 pupils participated. *Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)*: Aimed to strengthen the vocational, technical, language and entrepreneurial	

| | | dimension of the senior cycle. Results from LCVP count for points for entry into university. There are currently 500 schools participating in the scheme each of which received once off start up grants of: €16,506 for computer and communications equipment, €5079 for equipment related to the teaching of the Vocational Subject Groupings and €1,270 for start-up consumables. Schools received an additional 5.25 hours for each group of twenty students participating in the programme.

The support services for JCSP, LCA and LCVP have now been formed into a cohesive group called the Second Level Support Service. |
|---|---|---|
| **2001/2002** | Guidance Services and Career Guidance | All schools had an ex-quota allocation in respect of guidance, varying from 0.36 posts to 2 posts depending on school size. The equivalent of 580 whole-time posts were allocated in 2000. €5m was provided in 2001/2 to augment existing provision by creating a Guidance Fund to enable increased guidance provision. Under the School Guidance Enhancement Initiative, 50 additional permanent posts were allocated for 2001/2002 benefiting 103 schools |
| **2001/2002** | Book Grant Scheme | A grant scheme for schoolbooks for necessitous pupils in second level schools has operated since the introduction of free post primary education in the 1967/68 school year.

Principals administer this scheme in schools. Subject to the annual financial allocation to individual schools and the terms of the scheme, Principals have discretion in the selection of pupils to be assisted and the level of assistance in each case. The means by which assistance is provided to pupils (financial assistance, vouchers or provision of books on loan) is a matter for the individual school authorities.

A necessitous pupil, for the purpose of this scheme, was defined as a pupil from a family in which genuine hardship exists because of – unemployment, prolonged illness of parent, large family with inadequate means, single parent family or other circumstances which would indicate a similar degree of financial hardship.

In addition to the grants paid to necessitous pupils, a special seed capital grant for the establishment of book rental/loan schemes was introduced in 1994. This seed capital was available to schools that were officially designated as disadvantaged (i.e. have at least one disadvantaged post and/or are in the home school community liaison scheme)
Did not already have a loan/rental scheme in place and
Gave a commitment to arrange for such a scheme. |
| **2001/2002** | Exam Fees Exemptions | Exam fees for Junior and Leaving Certificate were waived for candidates where the students, or their parent/guardian, were medical card holders. |
| **2001/2002** | Traveller Education | The capitation grant €426 was paid to schools to help them in the outreach necessary to help the children and families to successfully participate in the life of the school. There were approximately 1,178 attending post-primary schools. An ex-quota |

		hour of 1.5 per week was allowed per Traveller child enrolled and additional full time equivalent (teachers) appointed as a result. *Junior Traveller Training Centres:* A number of children aged 12 to 15 years, attend Junior Traveller Training Centres. A grant of £200/€254 per pupil is provided to cover overhead costs. Teaching resources are provided by the Vocational Educational Committees. 42 visiting teachers delivered a nationwide service to both primary and post-primary pupils. The National Education Officer for Travellers promotes and oversees the implementation of the education service (involves identifying the needs of Travellers, assisting in planning and establishment of education provision, consultation with Traveller families and ensuring optimal use of existing educational facilities).
2001/2002	Special Needs	Children of post primary age with milder forms of disability are catered for on an integrated basis in mainstream post-primary schools. Such students are supported by special support teachers and/or special needs assistants. The level of need is based on the assessed needs of the individual student. In 2001 approximately 370 whole time equivalent resource teaching posts and 135 whole time equivalent special needs assistants were allocated to support students with disabilities in post-primary schools. Children with more serious disabilities are catered for in special schools or special classes attached to ordinary schools. All such facilities operate at specially reduced pupil teacher ratios which are in line with the levels recommended by the Special Education Review Committee. Revised arrangements for students with special needs taking Certificate Examinations allow for an increased allocation of 20 minutes for papers in Irish, English, History and Geography in line with the Advisory Group on the Certificate Examinations.
2002	School Completion Programme	The focus of the School Completion Programme is on young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years who are educationally disadvantaged and at risk of leaving school early. The School Completion Programme incorporated the elements of best practice established by the 8-15 Year Old Early School Leaver Initiative (ESLI) and the Stay-in-School Retention Initiative at Second Level (SSRI), the pilot phases of which came to an end in August and July 2002 respectively. It was designed to deal with issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage and is a key component of the Department of Education and Science's strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving. The programme was funded on a multi-annual basis under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social Fund.
2008	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)	The DEIS Action Plan brought together a range of school-based supports, including SCP, aimed at improving educational outcomes in some 878 targeted schools throughout the country.

		The SCP predominantly serves schools participating in the DEIS strategy, although a number of non-DEIS schools are included in local cluster arrangements.
2009	National Education and Welfare Board (NEWB)	Four education services were integrated under the responsibility of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB): SCP, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), the Visiting Teachers Service for Travellers (VTST) and the Educational Welfare Service (EWS).
2011	Government Department transfer	May 2011 responsibility for the NEWB and the Integrated Education Services was transferred to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The VTST was subsequently discontinued with effect from September 2011.
2014	Child and Family Agency (Tusla) established	NEWB disbanded and responsibility for the Integrated Educational Welfare Services, comprising the EWS, the HSCL Scheme and the SCP, were transferred to the new agency. Funding for SCP was €26.456 million in 2013 and reduced to €24.756 million in 2014 (Tusla Business Plan, 2014).

Table 3.1 Educational initiatives and programmes from the post-primary perspective (DES, 2003, Smyth et al, 2015)

Table 3.1 also indicates the educational consequences of austerity measures post 2008 in the reorganisation and re-evaluation of many of the initiatives which have since been reduced, renamed or removed in response to the fiscal crisis of the last eight years. While the disengagement and/or exclusion of children and young people from education has been a long-standing concern for policy-makers, school principals and teachers, and other practitioners working with children and young people (Stamou et al., 2014 in Smyth et al., 2015) it is reasonable to suggest that the evidence base for targeting educational initiatives at post primary level in Ireland has been very narrowly focused on key socio-economic indicators and fails to recognise the deprivation fluidity within student cohorts in particular over the last six to seven years as a result of turbulent economic times. It could well be the case also that students from a family who are educationally disadvantaged attend two different post-primary schools in the same area but do not have access to the same supports by virtue of the DEIS or non-DEIS designation of the school. With reference to the research questions of the thesis the literature does not reveal much in terms of how families who do not avail of government supported or initiated provision actually succeed in the education system and attain favourable outcomes. The emphasis in the literature focuses in the main on retention of students in the post primary system, attainment levels and targeted learning support programmes through the concentration of additional resources to schools and communities with concentrations of disadvantage. The continued direction of the initiatives at the family or the individual rather than at the school system itself has led to the suggestion that they are largely informed by deficit and dissonance

(Tonra, 1994 in Hanafin and Lynch, 2002.) This policy approach is veiled within an inclusive paradigm of equality of access to education. For the purpose of clarity, it is not my intention to suggest that such supports are unnecessary or unwanted, having worked in the system I am more acutely aware than many of how desperately supports are required and in increasing levels over the past number of years. While the focus of this thesis is not retention within the post primary system to Leaving Certificate level it is also worth investigating what other factors outside of the designated supports positively impact on student retention, attainment within the system and progression onto further education.

d) 3.2.4 Dominant variables in the family-school relationship paradigm

Epstein argues that school-based involvement can be defined as parents' active participation in any school setting which provides parents with behavioural interaction opportunities with teachers, school administrators and other parents (Epstein, 2001). Despite the aforementioned dearth of research related to family-school relationships, the evidence generated from research conducted on family-school relationships which specifically concentrates on parental involvement in their children's education is largely positive from the child's academic development perspective and from the child's personal perspective. Stacer and Perucci (2013) refer to Coleman (1988) and Lareau's (2003) assertions that time spent with children can have positive instrumental and emotional benefits that may provide access to social and cultural capital that is seen to confer advantages in social and intellectual development (Coleman, 1988, Lareau, 2003 cited in Stacer and Perrucci, 2013). Children recognise that their parents place a high value on their education on the basis of their attendance at parent teacher meetings and volunteering in school activities (Giles, 1998 in Stacer and Perrucci, 2013) while Di Maggio (1982) and Benson and Mokhtari, (2011) assert that parent reading activities with children at home or playing games can strengthen parent-child emotional bonds, expand parental influence and strengthen achievement skills (Stacer and Perrucci, 2013). The literature agrees on a number of relevant variables that are utilised to explore the structures of family-school relationships, among which cultural capital figures prominently. Having reviewed and synthesised the literature from an international and a national perspective I have selected the following variables on the basis of what I recognise as most relevant for the purpose of exploring the research questions of this thesis:

- Family variables (including family structure, ecological environment, socio-economic status, parent education, parent employment, parental involvement and time spent at home and in school, capital within the family, family characteristics, community engagement)
- School variables (including school characteristics, teacher beliefs, teacher practices, capital within the school, school policies, school ethos, community engagement)

In order to fully explore the viability of the selected variables in this study the following segments investigate the validity of the identified variables relative to the research questions drawing on evidence from the literature. The pillars of the Family, the School and Capital are expounded through a conceptual lens in chapter five, my intention at this point is to explicate the tenets of each pillar that are to the fore in the literature and to weave a convergence between them guided by the research questions.

e)

3.3 The Family

a) 3.3.1 The Ecological approach

Bronnfenbrenner's ecological approach to understanding children and families (1979) espouses an ecological view of separate environments or ecosystems within which children develop. Bronnfenbrenner conceptualised five environments; the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem, the Macrosystem and the Chronosystem (1979). The theory focuses on how the child's development may be affected by the social relationships around them. Each of the systems is interrelated, the microsystem and mesosystem relate to the direct environment in the child's lives and accounts for the setting in which the child has direct access to those included in the microsystem. The meso-setting refers to the relationships between the microsystems in the child's life. This is particularly relevant to the school experience where their experience and their habitus as instilled in them from home comes into direct contact with the school experience and the disposition of the school. The connection of the child's values and dispositions and the values or dispositions espoused and activated within the school may be incongruent and jagged and this can be challenging for the child. The exosystem refers to a setting that does not involve the

person as an active participant, but still affects them. The macrosystem addresses the cultural environment in which the child lives and how they are affected and influenced by this, this system is of particular interest in this thesis. The chronosystem represents a system that changes over time and is impacted on by various influences in the child's life over a period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). (Loxley et al., 2011) refer to Bronfenbrenner's ecological and ecosystemic theories of child and adolescent development as being influential in representing space as a context in which social relationships are formed and impact on the developing self and how the internalised self relates to the larger environments surrounding them, they caution however that psychologists have also proceeded aspatially in the same manner as their sociological colleagues in the construction of sociological research and theorising. The Bronfenbrenner ecological approach is most used and apparent in literature that focuses on the younger child rather than the adolescent. The Growing Up in Ireland Study (GUI,) utilised the ecological approach from Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective on child development which took as their main focus the effect of social structures on individual outcomes and supplemented it with work from other disciplines (GUI, 2010). The focus of the Growing Up in Ireland study was on two cohorts of children, a nine-month old cohort of 11,000 children (infant cohort) and a nine-year old cohort of 8,500 children (child cohort) and is a longitudinal study (2010). The age range of the GUI study is outside the age range of the students in this research study but nonetheless the study is a valuable national study that investigates child outcomes (including educational outcomes) relative to international studies. The study findings assist in informing and contributing to policy formation that will benefit children and their families. Stimulated by the persuasive theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), developmental research emphasized the importance of context in shaping the course of development (Petersen and Epstein, 1991) and research on adolescence has capitalised on this trend and proceeded to the processes where the feature of the contexts interact with the features of the individual. The next segment in this section on the family focuses on adolescence.

b) 3.3.2 Adolescence

Wall (1968) argues that following 1939 that adolescence became democratised (Wall, 1968, p. 4). Such a seminal claim is worth exploring as it represents a change in the historical mind-set

that preceded it that was largely dominated by Freudian genetic thinking that aligned adolescence to the biological development of the young person from their childhood years. (Lalor et al., 2007)cite G. Stanley Hall's preface to his work *Adolescence* in which they describe his "eloquent description of "coming of age" the turmoil, change and sheer potential:

> The social instincts undergo sudden unfoldment and the new life of love awakens. It is the age of sentiment and of religion, of rapid fluctuation of mood, and the world seems strange and new. Interest in adult life and vocations develops. Youth awakes to a new world and understands neither it nor himself (p. xv)

They aptly describe adolescence as "an inherently interesting time of life, a time of energy, dynamism and potential" (Lalor et al., 2007). They make reference to the fact that adolescence is a less clearly defined period than childhood and that it while it refers to the transition between childhood and adulthood that transition timeframe is contingent on the society in which the adolescent lives.   A social constructivist view views adolescence as a construct rather than an exclusively biological or psychological state. If we view adolescence as a construct then the culture within which adolescence is experienced becomes a critical factor in defining the nature and characteristics of adolescence itself which is "shaped both by the legal framework and by the social and economic world within which a young person grows up" (Roche, 2009). Lalor et al. cite a DES report (2003) that states that "Social and cultural boundaries distinguishing youth from childhood on the one hand and adulthood on the other, which have never been rigidly fixed in any case, are being blurred further".

Youth culture has its origins in the 1950s in the aftermath of the Second World War and was characterised by a heavy focus on delinquency and troublesome youth (Lalor et al., 2007; (Petersen and Epstein, 1991) . The literature in this way reflects adolescents as being troubled and troublesome, an unfortunate connotation that neglects to identify other positive traits and characteristics. Negative stereotyping of adolescents has a significant impact on their social identity on their roles, their relationships and cultural activities (McElwee et al., 2002) Muncie (2002) refer to the "moral panic" induced in the public mind through media representation of the sub culture of youth and how that can contribute to increased hostility and alienation of adolescents (Muncie, 2002). Epstein and Petersen remind us however that it is incorrect that adolescent-parent are inevitably conflictual and that the belief that peers replace parents in importance to adolescents is overstated. They go on to describe how values of an adolescents'

peer group are more likely to support or complement parental values than to be in conflict with them (Brown, 1990; Epstein, 1983; Youniss and Smollar 1985 in Petersen and Epstein, 1991). Aligned to this thinking Gwiewosz and Noack in discussing the role of early adolescents' perceptions in the intergenerational transmission of academic values concluded that adolescents' perceptions of their parents' academic values inferred from the perceived parental involvement in turn predicted students' own values (Gniewosz and Noack, 2012). The study highlights that students/adolescents' perceptions operate as a decisive filter of their parents' and possibly other socialisation agents' effects on their disposition towards school.

Petersen and Epstein, (1991) refer to a number of studies that have focused on the many changes that occur during adolescence, Linn and Songer examine conceptual change during adolescence with a particular focus on the effects of the social context in which learning occurs. Larson and Richards explore boredom in and out of school, highlighting both context effects and individual characteristics that endure across contexts while Dubas, Graber, and Petersen study the effects of pubertal change on school achievement and achievement orientation (Petersen and Epstein, 1991). Bronfenbrenner and Ceci suggest that adolescent's outcomes are related to proximal processes, which are enduring forms of interaction occurring in immediate settings such as families and schools and also distal contexts in which immediate settings are embedded. They also contend that the influence of the proximal processes on outcomes are more powerful than the influences of distal contexts.

Neymotin (2014) notes that one possibility for the scarcity of available literature relating to family-school relationships with families of adolescents is that it is difficult to define precisely what parental engagement is at this level. The following segment focuses on parents and the role of parents as seen as relevant to this research study.

c) 3.3.3 Parents

The literature places parents at the centre of the concept of family-school relationships and investigates and explicates numerous characteristics of that relationship. The characteristics that I have prioritised in this section having consulted with the literature include; barriers and opportunities to parental engagement, parents' choices in relation to their children's education and factors that mediate the relationship between the family and the school. It is also worth

noting at this point while acknowledging the growing recognition that parental time with children and parental engagement with the school is a critical family asset that may have important consequences for children (Epstein, 2001; Lareau, 1987) that it is challenging to measure parental engagement and even more so that it is difficult to define parental engagement at high-school (Neymotin, 2014) or post-primary level.

Parents can be informally involved in their children's education in a myriad of ways including supporting their learning, providing help with homework and advising and encouraging in relation to post-school choices (Byrne and Smyth., 2010a). The other route identified for parental involvement and engagement in school is the formal route whereby parents can participate in school-based activities and involvement in the formal parent-school structures (Byrne and Smyth., 2010 b). Lyons et al (2003) conducted a study that highlighted the variety of cultural capital, social capital and economic capital that parents possessed. In their study, they categorised the parents as "Insiders", "Intermediaries" and "Outsiders". Insider parents were characterised by their comprehensive knowledge of the education system, their own high levels of education and the interventions they made with regard to their children's education. Intermediary parents represented those who were between the Insider and Outsider group and while they understood certain aspects of the education system they did not have the cultural or financial resources of the Insiders. The Outsiders are described by Lyons et al (2003) as being "outside the system" and characterised by lower levels of knowledge of the education systems, lower education levels themselves and low levels of intervention. Hanafin and Lynch (2002) note that despite the contemporary literature on parental involvement in school implying an undifferentiated parental voice that the reality is that there are two distinct strands with two distinct rationales. One strand of parental involvement is directed at working-class parents and involves interventions to address educational disadvantage, as were referred to earlier in this chapter and is derived from a cultural deficit model seeking to involve parents on the periphery while the second strand is targeted at all parents and includes such initiatives as the parents' association, board of management and parents' representative bodies that is underpinned by the belief that "positive home-school partnership" is a key factor of school effectiveness (Hallgarten, 2000 in Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). The linkages made by Hanafin and Lynch to social class will be further discussed in this chapter but suffice to say at this point that emphases within the

literature on parents have actually focused on educational failure, parental involvement and school effectiveness relative to the classed nature of parental involvement (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). The presence of proximal parents in Hanafin and Lynch's paper recognises that at that point in time (2002) it was considered that not all parents were actually part of what was considered a homogeneous group. Harris and Goodall in Byrne and Smyth (2010 b) are cited as confirming that informal involvement of parents has a greater influence on their children's outcomes. Identified barriers to parental engagement in school include socio-economic status and associated resources of time, money and education and institutional practices of schools that may be mismatched to parental resources (Stacer and Perrucci, 2013). Studies examining the effect of socio-economic status on parental involvement indicated that low-income parents were less involved in their children's education than high income parents (Griffith 1998; Grolnick et al, 1997; Heymann and Earle, 2000; Lareau, 1987; Lareau and Shumar 1996, Trotman, 2001 in Stacer and Perrucci, 2013). Lareau and Horvat (1999) indicated that low income parents face greater no-financial barriers to involvement than high-income parents in relation to time constraints, paid leave, work flexibility and parents' views of their own role in the education of their children (Stacer and Perrucci, 2013). In Byrne and Smyth's 2010 b study work commitments were less frequently cited by parents with lower levels of education and those with children attending working-class schools. Childcare commitments also emerged as an issue for a significant minority of parents, with three in ten citing such difficulties (Byrne and Smyth., 2010 b).

Homework also can present as a barrier for parents with lower educational attainment as they are less likely to be involved in homework because they felt that they lacked the knowledge to assist their children and to successfully participate in their children's education (Balli et al., 1998; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Trotman, 2001 in (Stacer and Perrucci, 2013). In the Irish context, Byrne and Smyth (2010 b) report that first year students reported getting help with homework and study at least occasionally from their parents or siblings but the reliance decreased over time, with the majority of fifth year students reported getting no help. Byrne and Smyth relates the difference in seeking help with homework and not to greater independence among older students and also the more specialised nature of the subjects at senior cycle where parents or siblings may not have been in a position to help. The report (Byrne and Smyth., 2010

b) also states that reliance on family assistance varied by social background, gender and initial academic ability levels. Students from unskilled manual or non-employed households were more likely to report relying on frequent help with homework; this difference was evident in first and second year but appeared to disappear over time. Byrne and Smyth. observed that there were no marked differences in perceived involvement found across different groups of parents in terms of educational level, social class mix of the school, whether they have a son or daughter, and whether their child is in fifth or sixth year. Perceived involvement was related to some aspects of actual involvement. There was no relationship with attending meetings at the school regarding their child's behaviour and, those involved in the parents' association did not feel any more involved in their child's school life than other parents (Byrne and Smyth., 2010 b).

The issue of school choice in Ireland and especially at post primary level is a live and contentious one. Parental choice of school may be influenced by the school's curriculum, academic reputation, ethos, social status of the school and the socio-economic status of the students attending the school (Madaus et al., 1979 in Byrne and Smyth., 2010 b). Transition to higher education from post-primary school is seen as a priority in Ireland. Young people who attended socially mixed schools and, even more strikingly, middle-class schools were more likely than those from working-class schools to go on to some form of post-school education and training (McCoy et al., 2014 b). The results highlight the importance of a culture of high expectations and support in promoting successful post-school transitions for post-primary students. In line with earlier research (McCoy et al., 2010 a; Smyth and Banks, 2012 cited in McCoy et al., 2014 b), higher education assumed a more 'taken for granted' status in middle-class school settings, enhancing the chances of successful progression for these students. Parents in Ireland subscribe to the "taken for granted" status and are ambitious for their children to progress to further and higher education. Lyons et al, (2003) describe how parents began the process of choosing a post-primary school when their children were very young. They discuss how in a number of cases there appeared to be "an established pattern of transfer from certain primary schools into certain secondary schools, so strategic decisions were being made very early in the child's life" (2003, p 332). Aligned to their categorisation of the parents in their study as 'Insiders", "Intermediaries" or "Outsiders" they claim that the "inside knowledge" that parents possessed about the education system was very important in choosing a school for their

children. While the "Insider parents" utilised their privileged positions to find schools that "best suited" their child. Lyons et al (2003) align this to Gewirtz et al (1995) who describe this process as "child-matching".

Family has a strong influence on the educational and career choices of young people (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). The literature relative to young people's post-school planning decisions consistently identifies parents as a key source of information and influence (McCoy et al., 2014 b). (McCoy et al., 2014b) also cite Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (Hossler et al., 1999)who claim that parental expectations and encouragement have the greatest impact on students' developing aspirations, particularly with respect to planning for further education. Parental support increases students' confidence to explore options, including options that they may previously have thought to be inaccessible, and to engage in career planning (Turner and Lapan, 2002 in McCoy et al., 2014 b). One of the main drivers behind parental choice of school for their children at post primary level in Ireland is therefore progression to further or higher education. Although research on school choice generally focuses on the preferences of parents, Smyth et al. (2004) the Post Primary Longitudinal study reported that the majority of first year students had discussed the choice of post-primary school with their parents (Byrne and Smyth., 2010 a)

Factors that mediate the relationship between the family and the school include parent-teacher meetings, homework, parental perceptions and experiences and parental expectations. In the Post-Primary Longitudinal study students were asked about the contact that their parents had with the school over the first year. The vast majority of students reported that their parents had attended a parent-teacher meeting while a third reported that their parents had attended a concert, a play or a sports event in the school, a third of parents reported that their parents had met the principal or other teachers (Byrne and Smyth., 2010 b). Internationally Stacer and Perucci (2012) research suggests that school practices or policies may have the effect of encouraging or discouraging parental involvement. They also cite Balli et al., 1998; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 1995; Lareau, 1987; Trotman, 2001 who note that one of the reasons that parents with lower educational attainment are less likely to be engaged in their children's education is that they believe themselves that they did not have sufficient knowledge to participate in their children's education and felt separated from their children's school Stacer and Perucci (2012).

d) 3.3.4 Family structures

The effect of family structures on children's educational outcomes and occupational success has tended to focus on the influence of the socio-economic status of the family and the family resources (Anderson and Minke, 2007; Biblarz and Raftery, 1999). Sociological theory regarding the consequences of family structure on children's educational outcomes predicts that children from alternative families get fewer economic, social and cultural resources which help facilitate success (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999), while family structure and circumstances are also considered important factors in determining educational outcomes and attainment of children. Biblarz and Raftery (1999) reported that the main predictor of sociological perspectives is that the two-biological-parent family is generally the optimal form for the successful socialisation of children in modern society and that children from any kind of alternative family will, on average, do less well (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999). Such an assertion in the current timeframe seems exaggerated given the myriad of changes in family types and structures in contemporary families from the period of Biblarz and Raftery's research, nonetheless Myers and Myers (2015) also claim that biological married parents had the highest level of variety and frequency of involvement in school-based activities which as previous literature cited in this chapter suggests is a strong determinant of positive educational outcomes for their children. Myers and Myers clearly assert that there is an association between family structure and the highest levels of school based parental involvement within biological married households. They also assert that differences in economic, human, social and cultural capital across family structure types account for most of the higher levels of school-based engagement among biological married households (Myers and Myers, 2015). Comparisons between non-biological, cohabiting, step-parents or one-parent families and biological married parents revealed statistically significant large differences in relation to levels of parental engagement in children's education. They concede however that some of the negative associations between family structure and parental involvement were reduced in size or became non-significant after statistically adjusting for differences in family capital across family types. They clarify that there was no longer differences between biological parents and those who were cohabiting, although all other family types continued to exhibit lower levels of engagement compared to biological married parents (Myers and Myers, 2015).

Nixon (2012) cites Simons and Associates when she reports that with all other things being equal, two-parent families are generally better off than one-parent families, and one-parent families have a consistently higher risk of poverty (Simons & Associates, 1996). She also refers to McLanahan's review (1997) of 12 studies, which concluded that coming from a non-intact family (including single-parent and stepfamilies) reduces a child's chance of success, even after low income is accounted for; thus family structure effects persisted after income was accounted for (Nixon et al., 2012).

From an Irish perspective, studies by Ryan (1966) cited in Fahey et al's (2009) study, focusing on early-school leaving among 14 to 16 year olds and McCafferty and Canny, 2005 which focused on family patterns in Limerick revealed contrasting pictures of family types in Ireland at that time. Fahey et al., (2012) argue that the families included in both Ryan and McCafferty and Canny's studies were unrepresentative of the national picture since both sets of families were selected into social housing on account of having low incomes and high needs (Fahey et al., 2012). Irish family types have changed over time, an aspect of the evolution of the family that is documented by demographers as a two-stage process underpinned by fertility decline coupled with mortality decline and the later rise of family instability (Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn in Fahey et al., 2012), demographic transitions that Fahey et al. conclude was in the Irish case simultaneous rather than consecutive.

The Growing Up in Ireland study data has been used by Fahey et al. (2012) to examine family structures and family types in the Irish context. While the data used in their study focuses on the nine year-old cohort only and therefore is not directly related to the age profile of the students in the case study there are nonetheless useful indicators within the study that identify various family structures and family types that assist in our understanding of the Irish context. The main identifiers I have selected from the Fahey et al. study which are relevant to my case study include:

- Family Type (married (bio-adopt parents), cohabiting (bio-adopt parents), married (step-family), cohabiting (step family), lone mother (never married), lone mother (divorced/separated), lone mother (widowed), lone father.
- Family Size

- Socio-Economic Status
- Levels of parental education

Nixon et al. (2012) emphasise research to date (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994) that indicates that growing up in a family structure headed by a single parent carries negative implications for children's developmental outcomes while Amato (1995) has argued that what is disadvantageous about single-parent families relates to the child's access to social networks and resources. On a practical level they point out that two parents provide more direct practical assistance, care, supervision and economic resources than and the indirect effect of support from one parent to another confers benefits for children' development (Nixon et al., 2012). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to interrogate fully the implications of the associations of the mother or father separately on children's educational outcomes, however I do wish to focus briefly on the association between mothers and their children's education. Gniewosz and Noack (2012) cites Williams, Williams and Ullman, 2002 in noting that mothers are more strongly engaged in school-related matters than fathers, research that parallels results from other research (Masciadrelli, Pleck and Stueve, Zuzanek, 2000) that indicates that mothers are more generally involved in child-rearing (Gniewosz and Noack, 2012). Hannan et al (1996) also draw attention to mothers' educational level in predicting children's educational achievement and the effect of more "direct transmission" through greater time involvement and more emotionally supportive relationships with younger children of maternal "cultural capital" (p 14).

A pathology of matriarchy hypothesis cited in the Moynihan report (1965) in (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999) claims that the absence of a father is destructive to children, particularly boys. Evidence both for and against the "pathology of matriarchy" argument has posed counter arguments that show children from single mother families achieve lower educational attainment levels while other research indicates that when other factors are taken into account that children from single mother homes do approximately as well as children from two-biological parent families (Biblarz, Raftery and Buar, 1997, McLanahan, 1985 in Biblarz and Raftery, 1999). Fahey et al. (2012) investigated the correlation between family stability and levels of education of the main care giver. They claim that better educated mothers are likely to marry, to be together since before the child was born and to avoid relationship breakdown. They add that

early-child bearing plays a strong role in mediating the effect of the educational level on the family outcomes, that is to say that women with lower educational attainment are more likely to start child bearing before 25 and this effect was intensified if their partners also had low levels of educational attainment.

3.4 Schools and schooling

The school as a concept relative to the research questions is explicated in chapter five but my intention in this segment of this chapter is to briefly examine the school as a sociological construct. Sociologists view the role of the school as an instrument within the social stratification system. Parsons (1959) in Ballantine and Spade (2015) view is that it is the function of schools to help hold society together by passing on the knowledge and skills necessary for children to fit into society. Hargreaves (1999) alluded to the knowledge creating school in response to the demands of a knowledge-based economy which required the introduction of new and innovative methods and pedagogies in school classrooms (Hargreaves, 1999). Parsons takes a functionalist point of view and is of the view that the school class can be treated as "an agency of socialisation" (in Ballantine and Spade, 2015, p. 36). Meighan agrees with this view and adds that schools and schooling are an important part of the process of becoming socialised, "of experiencing cultures and sub cultures, of transmitting, perpetuating and developing attitudes and ideologies" (Meighan, 1986, p. 288). Meighan also asserts that schools also hold a complex function in that schools and schooling "process people" by screening, assessing, grading and significantly influencing life chances and occupational opportunities (1986). Meighan also proposes that the Marxian perspective of the analysis of education does not see schooling as a process which serves to socialise new members into collectively established consensual moral order but rather as a phenomenon that is related to the distribution of resources and opportunities in a society (Meighan, 1986, p. 272). Bowles and Gintis claim that the education system legitimates economic inequality through a meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals to unequal economic positions. They see education functioning as a transmission and a control mechanism to reproduce the social order and that schools therefore are based on relationships of dominance and subordination in a similar way to the world of work (Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

Irish post-primary schools are organised into two cycles, the junior cycle phase which is a three-year cycle culminating in a terminal examination and the senior cycle which is a two or three-year cycle if Transition Year is available and this also culminates in a terminal examination. In the Irish context, studies support the view that the social mix of the school has an impact on student retention (Byrne, 2008; McCoy, 2000 in Byrne and Smyth, 2010 a). Smyth (1999) also found that the social class composition of a school has a significant impact on the intention to leave school before the end of senior cycle, with higher rates reported in predominantly working-class than middle-class schools, even controlling for the individual social background of students, school policy and practice are found to have a significant influence on student drop-out, with greater retention in schools where there is a positive school climate with good relations between teachers and students, and a greater sense of ownership on the part of students over school life. The quality of relationships with teachers emerges as a crucial component in the narratives of early school leavers (Byrne and Smyth, 2010 a). For Meighan another interesting feature of schools from a sociological perspective is the links and connections between schools and other institutions within the social structure including family, political, economic and religious sectors (Meighan, 1986).

This leads to consideration in the next section of this chapter which addresses social class.

3.5 Social Class

The next two sections featuring social class and capital are interconnected and feature prominently in addressing the research questions of the thesis. Social class is a highly ambiguous concept (Meighan, 1986). My use of the term in the context of this thesis is as a sociological construct that is useful when used in an interconnected manner with the concepts of education, family and schools. Social class in the lexicon of sociologists is usually associated with the social and economic status of an identified group and is used to stratify society. Byrne and Smyth, (2010) refer to earlier studies of social inequality which focused on social class differences in the role of aspirations in educational attainment. They cite Hyman, 1953; Kahl, 1953; Riessman, 1953 and the body of literature was grounded in the observation that class differences exist in levels of aspiration. They assert that these class-based differences in educational and

occupational aspirations were viewed as contributing to the reproduction of inequality (Byrne and Smyth, 2010 a, p. 27).

The parent typology constructed by Lyons et al (2003) highlighted the differences in the three groups from the perspective of knowledge of the education system, educational levels of the parents themselves and the interventions they made in their children's schooling. Where the Insider parents possessed the cultural and financial capital to ensure that they could support their children in all aspects of their schooling, including regulated their schooling the Intermediary parents and the Outsiders did not have the "package of cultural, social and economic capital that would enable them to assume control over their children's learning environment" (2003, p 356). These differences also contribute to the reproduction of inequality as referred to by Byrne and Smyth (2010 a). Bourdieu, a theorist of interest in this thesis maintained a role for social class within the context of a mainstream and culturally focused sociology (Crossley, 2008). Bourdieu did not engage in detail with other key contemporary theorists of social class such as Goldthorpe or Wright nor did he offer a typology of classes in parallel to any others discussed in the literature. Instead he maintained a subdued and implicit veil around his theory of social class, if indeed he had one (Crossley, 2008). For Bourdieu, there were four associated aspects of social class; social space; positions, dispositions and class unconsciousness; reproduction, distinction and the symbolic struggle and group formation (Crossley, 2008). Family-school relationships are socially constructed and are historically variable (Lareau, 1987) and the concept of social class is a prominent trait within the literature which researchers use as a predictor to describe how best parents engage or may engage with the school and schooling. Social class characteristics provide parents with unequal resources with which to engage in the school system, with one of the strongest observations in the literature concluding that lower class and working class families do not value education as highly as middle class families (Deutsch, 1967 in Lareau 1987). In the previous sections I described how the literature evidences that engagement by parents in their children's schooling is predicated on social and economic factors and on their access to resources that enable optimal engagement. Myers and Myers (2015) emphasise that in their view it is the education levels of the parents that are the most important of all the variables relative to engagement with the school.

Lareau concluded that the evidence from her 1987 study indicated that the level of parental involvement in schools and schooling was linked to the class position of the parents and to the social and cultural resources that social class yielded in American society. Where the working-class parents had poor educational skills and limited time or disposable income the middle class parents had educational skills and occupational prestige that matched the teachers and critically they had the economic resources to purchase additional supports that enabled them to be fully engaged in their children's schooling (Lareau, 1987). Anecdotally there is evidence in the Irish post primary system that parallels the findings from the Lareau study and confirm her conclusions to be accurate and relevant in the Irish system.

The above discussion prompts the next segment of the literature review to focus on capital and the various forms it manifests in.

3.6 Capital

Bourdieu considered capital to be "accumulated labour" (Tzanakis, 2011) whereby in its incorporated or embodied form when appropriated enables an appropriate social energy in the form of reified labour. Capital manifests in many forms. Bourdieu's theory of capital may be seen as an extension of the economic term of "capital" to a wider sense where various forms of capital are exchanged and where assets of different types are exchanged and transformed across different networks and across different fields (Moore, p. 102 in Grenfell, 2008). Capital may present as economic, social or cultural capital.

Although there is no universal definition of social capital, it is generally agreed that it includes a complex mix of trust, social participation and norms of reciprocity (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000). In the field of education, social capital is generally used as a way to describe the relationship between the micro-level of education and the macro-level processes in society (Lareau 2001in Darmody et al 2012).

Putnam defined social capital according to trust, norms and networks that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit in order to secure effective democracy and economy (2000).

The form of capital of interest in this thesis is cultural capital. While Bourdieu is the most recognised "capital" theorist the literature also includes proposals by other researchers and theorists that merit attention. Hofferth et al. (1998) proposed that social capital resided at intra-familial and extra familial levels as proposed by Coleman (1988). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) emphasise the influence of families' social, economic and cultural capital in shaping students' educational choices. Myers and Myers (2015) argue that social capital within the family is usually measured by the quality and activities of the parent-child relationship whereas social capital that is external to the family is measured in terms of parents' connections to other parents and to institutions that promote educational outcomes. Bourdieu's Reproduction theory (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), focuses on the unequal distribution of economic, social and cultural resources across classes and their transmission from parents to children. Familiarity with the dominant culture operates as a form of 'cultural capital' and school success is predicated on such cultural capital (McCoy et al., 2014 a).

a) 3.6.1 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital may be seen as existing in three forms; the embodied state, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, in the objectified state in the form of cultural goods and in the institutionalised state in the form of educational qualifications and rankings (Bourdieu, 1988). The notion of cultural capital is primarily associated with Bourdieu but it is not without critique. Kingston (2001) examines the implementation of the concept of cultural capital in educational research that focuses on home-school relationships and connections. Kingston proposes that when defined in terms of exclusionary class-related practices that cultural capital does not account for the relationship between social privilege and academic success and that there are too many conceptually distinct variables that have been labelled as cultural capital, creating a distorted sense of what accounts for academic success (Kingston, 2001). Kingston claims that Bourdieu's own statement regarding cultural capital lacks clarity and that his explanations are often vague and possibly contradictory (Kingston, 2001). He goes onto articulate a definition presented by Lamont and Lareau (1988, p. 156) which claims that cultural capital is "institutionalised, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goals and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion" (Lamont and Lareau, 1988). It is interesting as Kingston notes that the definition includes an

"exclusionary character of cultural capital". Lamont and Lareau pose two interesting questions in their work which ask: is cultural capital related to achievement net of other determinants of achievement and to what extent do endowments of cultural capital explain the relationship and connection between social privilege and school success. Lamont and Lareau ultimately rejected a continual deterministic model of social reproduction as espoused in Bourdieu's presentation of cultural capital while accepting that culture is important. Myers and Myers, referring to Lareau's 2003 study acknowledge that cultural capital is centred on the idea of inequality based on the fit between an individual's culture and the culture of an institution within a society (Lareau, 2003 in Myers and Myers, 2015). Lareau and Calarco also cited in Myers and Myers contend the most common measures of cultural capital are class based that tap into specialised characteristics that allow individuals to enter into interactional processes (Calarco and Lareau, 2012). Byrne and Smyth (2010 a) also clarify Lareau's argument (2000) that people are not 'passive' since social class provides individuals with resources which they can effectively utilise in the social sorting process. Boudon (1974) distinguished between primary and secondary effects which arise within the rational action theory. The secondary effects are probably of greatest interest here as they refer to the choices that families from various social classes make at various points along their educational careers. He sees these choices being made on a cost-benefit basis by children and their families relative to the potential success they may achieve in whichever route they pursue (Boudon, 1978).

b) 3.6.2 Habitus and Field

Another concept defined and developed by Bourdieu is a concept called 'habitus'. This concept is closely connected with class origin and lies at the centre of Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Habitus and field are more closely examined in the conceptual framework chapter but my intention here is to review the available literature and synthesise the most relevant aspects of it.

Habitus formation initially takes place in the home as a domestic habitus and it is from their families that students form their initial viewpoints or dispositions. Barrett (2015) reminds us that habitus primarily develops within the context of childhood and possesses relative durability. Cultural capital embodies the sum total of investments in aesthetic codes, practices and dispositions transmitted to children through the process of family socialisation or through habitus (Tzanakis, 2011). Children internalise and carry these views with them to the environment of

school. In this case, the views expressed by the student are very much in agreement with the habitus of the school. Whilst acknowledging the transmissible parental cultural codes and practices as referred to by Bourdieu and also the early evidence that parental cultural capital affected children's early (Di Maggio, 1982) and later educational attainment (Di Maggio and Mohr, 1985 in Tzanakis 2011) highlights the lack of quantitative empirical evidence about the effects of family based cultural capital and habitus on students' educational attainment and also the role of schools and teachers in the social reproduction mechanism. Tzanakis takes issue with Bourdieu's hypothesis that education plays an important part in assisting the reproduction of social inequality and social exclusion. He cautions that strong non-spurious associations are needed between parental social class and parent's and offspring's cultural capital and between parent's and child's cultural capital and educational achievement. He states that there is no conclusive empirical evidence to date that these associations exist (2011).

Reay (2004) refers to habitus as something that is difficult to uncover or investigate, as it represents a set of deeply embedded and unthought-out dispositions. Sweetman 2003 (in Sweetman 2009) defines habitus as referring to "our overall orientation to or way of being in the world; our predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving in and through the social environment that encompasses posture, demeanour, outlook, expectations and tastes". He refers to the latency of habitus as something that is implicit and hidden and an orientation that has to be operationalised (Sweetman, 2009). Gaddis (2013) investigated the influence of habitus in the relationship between cultural capital and academic achievement. Gaddis refers to Bourdieu's definition of habitus as a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which integrating past experiences and actions, functions at every moment *as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*.''(Bourdieu, 1977 pp. 82-83). Gaddis' study found that educational outcomes of the cohort in his study were enhanced by cultural capital which was mediated by habitus. Familiarity with the dominant culture operates as a form of 'cultural capital' and influences an individual's 'habitus', that is, an individual's predispositions in terms of values, motivations and so on (Lareau, 2000; Reay, 2004 in Byrne and Smyth., 2010 a).

(McCoy et al., 2014 b) refer to Bourdieu's uses of the analogy of the game to explain how habitus functions. He argues that 'the feel for the game' enables some people to effortlessly

move within a certain (familiar) field, feeling at ease. The notion of habitus is helpful in understanding how middle-class families and their children find it easier to navigate within a formal educational system which transmits and reproduces middle-class values.

Mc Coy et al. (2014 b) in conducting a review of the literature relative to habitus also refer to Reay et al. (2001), using Bourdieu's idea of 'habitus' develop the concept of 'institutional habitus' in order "to facilitate the understanding of social processes within educational institutions. The concept refers to school effects such as the ethos, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships among students and between students and teaching staff. Elsewhere, Reay (1998) argues that in educational institutions, institutional habitus and family background may produce a certain mismatch. She maintains that the more affluent and privileged middle-class students are more likely to experience congruity between these two worlds compared to working-class students" (McCoy et al., 2014b, p. 5).

3.7 Bridging and bonding and the contextual effect in education

There has been considerable debate about whether or not the social mix of a school has an effect on the educational outcomes of the students over and above the effect of individual social background (McCoy et al., 2014 a). The interaction between residential patterns, parental choice and school admissions policies means that individual primary and secondary schools, and types of schools, in Ireland vary, often markedly, in their student profile Smyth et al, 2011., Byrne and Smyth 2011). The McCoy at al. (2014 a) study used standardised test results in mathematics and reading at primary level and the test results showed that different dimensions of student background have independent effects on achievement in both reading and mathematics. They claim that this indicates that achievement is significantly influenced by social class, household income, maternal education and the number of books in the home. Putnam (2000) describes bridging social capital as bonds of connectedness that are formed across diverse social groups, as in the diverse enrolment of a school while bonding social capital is described as cementing homogenous groups (Putnam, 2000). It is important to note that both approaches recognize that "bonding and bridging are not either-or categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but more or less dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital (Coffe and Geys, 2007).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed and assessed the literature that I have prioritised and synthesised as being most relevant to the research questions of the thesis. The field of literature associated with the peripheral issues connected to the thesis is too extensive to evaluate within this single chapter and may form the basis of further study at a later point. It has been my intention to focus on the sociological constructs of the family, the school and schooling and the relationship between them, social class, capital, habitus and field theories and also considers the concepts of bridging and bonding and the contextual effect in education. The following chapter assesses and evaluates the contemporary educational policy perspective in Ireland and associated practice at the time of the research and in the current climate with a view to future considerations and recommendations that arise later in the thesis.

Chapter Four

The Contemporary Educational Vista

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters examined and detailed the historical context which established the historical antecedents of the context of the thesis and also elucidated the theoretical perspectives considered most relevant to the research. It is now appropriate to present a final layer of contemporary educational policy-related aspects drawn from the available literature as a wrap-up to complete the suite of cogitations reflected in the literature. This chapter assesses and evaluates the contemporary educational policy perspective in Ireland and associated practice at the time of the research and in the current climate with a view to future considerations and recommendations that arise later in the thesis.

In keeping with previous chapters the chapter is presented thematically in three sub-sections and addresses the following themes, considered to be most relevant in light of the research study:

Sub-section one:

Gender and Coeducation, Curriculum and Assessment, Student Voice.

Sub-section two:

Teacher Education.

Sub-section three:

Family-School engagement in post-primary education- some conclusions.

The chapter concludes with a segment that prioritises what are considered to be the most relevant aspects of each theme evidenced in the literature.

Education plays a central role in developing human capital and thus is crucial to our long term economic prosperity. It also matters because it is a strong predictor of adult life chances, influencing access to, and quality of, employment, income levels and even health (McCoy and

Smyth, 2013). In contrast to the paucity of available research related to the earlier sections of this thesis there is now a large body of contemporary national research which shows how policy and practice at the school level can make a substantive impact on student outcomes (O'Toole and Association of Secondary Teachers, 2013). The next number of segments examine the contemporary literature available relative to a number of prioritised themes.

Sub-section one

4.2 Gender and Coeducation

Internationally and in Ireland, much of the research around gender and educational engagement has centred on the academic differences between boys and girls (Warrington and Younger 2000; Francis 2009; O'Connor 2007 in Frawley et al., 2014) despite the fact that children and young people emphasise the affective or emotional as much as the learning aspects of school life (Alexander 2008 in Frawley et al., 2014). Frawley's paper (2014) draws on data from the GUI study and examines self-concept among boys and girls in Irish primary schools and the findings show important differences in terms of the affective elements of school engagement, with boys more likely than girls to score significantly lower levels on measures of 'good' behaviour and intellectual school status. In this study Frawley et al offer an alternative viewpoint on gender and educational engagement and focus on the affective element rather than the academic element of engagement with the primary school. At post-primary level however the literature focuses in the main on the themes of gender and coeducation with specific reference to choice of school, subject choice and gender stereotyping relative to subject choice. Smyth (2015) observes how there is a degree of selectivity in the profile of those attending single sex schools relative to social class and income which she claims is likely to influence achievement and other educational outcomes. She adds that the majority of research on single sex schools focuses on academic achievement in terms of measurement of examination results rather than other educational or social-psychological outcomes. Darmody and Smyth (2005) found that students are very reliant on their parents and friends in making their subject choices, especially in schools where they have to make their choices at the beginning of junior cycle. If parents do not have up-to-date information about what the different subjects involve, this may lead to greater gender stereotyping. I referred in chapter two to the historical origins of coeducation in the comprehensive schools and the influence of the Catholic church on coeducational provision.

Hannan et al.'s publication (1996) concerned itself with coeducational effects on educational achievement and examined to what extent schools had differential effects on educational achievement irrespective of background differences in the ability level and the socio-economic and socio-cultural background of the student bodies. They referred to school effectiveness studies that emphasise studies on gender differences in educational achievement which have isolated features of school management and organisation that appeared to be related to gender inequalities in achievement and to gender differentiation in the type of education received. In Ireland the gender-role stereotyping characteristics of the Irish post-primary school remains, although it is more subtly textured than previously (Hannan et al., 1996). Darmody and Smyth (2005) noted that strong gender stereotyping is evident in student attitudes to the technological subjects, even though recent changes in the curricula have made the subjects potentially more 'girl-friendly'. Many girls are reluctant to take technological subjects because: they see them as 'dirty', 'noisy' and requiring physical strength; they do not intend to go on to craft jobs, such as mechanic or plumber; and they do not want to be the only girl in a class of boys. Furthermore, they noted that Schools can make a difference to the numbers of girls taking technological subjects, for example, through the way they timetable subjects. Some schools continue to timetable technological subjects against traditionally 'female' subjects, such as Home Economics, thus facilitating gender stereotyping (2005) Both male and female students in coeducational settings are more positive about their schools and about the developmental aspects of their schooling (Smyth, 2015).

Hannan et al. (1996) reported that coeducational and single-sex schools differed in a number of ways; single –sex schools tended to be more selective in their intake while coeducational schools were more likely to allocate students to classes on the basis of their academic ability ("Streaming or banding"). The report recommended that the use of "streaming" and "banding" within schools should be looked at with an emphasis on moving towards mixed ability classes and the wider use of separate higher and ordinary level classes in particular subjects (Hannan et al., 1996) although research has indicated that the majority of base classes in Irish post primary schools are now mixed ability in composition (Smyth et al., 2004) in McCoy and Smyth, 2013).

Darmody and Smyth (2005) reported that greater gender equity in subject take-up could be achieved by: encouraging a wider range of schools to provide technological subjects; allowing students to try out their subjects before making a final choice; providing clear information to students and their parents on the content of subjects and the opportunities they offer; discouraging stereotyping in subject timetabling and challenging gender stereotypes in school subjects Darmody and Smyth (2005). One of the more reported aspects in the literature cited by Hannan et al. was that on average girls in co-educational schools did not achieve as well as girls in all-girls schools and that girls on average have lower levels of (academic) self- confidence, body image and senses of control than boys and that this gender difference is more marked in the coeducational setting (Hannan et al., 1996). The views expressed in Hannan et al.'s study remain articulated in the current climate but with the amalgamation of schools in the last number of years there are more coeducational schools which offer an array of subjects at both junior and senior cycle. Smyth (2015) reports that despite there being little evidence of overall differences in achievement between boys and girls in coeducational schools there is some evidence that certain subject areas (Mathematics and Science) may be more gender-stereotyped in the coeducational setting that in the single-sex setting.

Gender and coeducation in Ireland is closely related to school choice, subject choice and curriculum provision.

4.3 Curriculum and Assessment

The curriculum for Ireland's primary and post-primary schools is determined by the Minister for Education and Science who is advised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The curriculum sets out not only what is to be taught, but how, and how learning in the particular subject area is to be assessed (NCCA, 2016). The NCCA was established on a statutory basis in 2001, having been a non-statutory body prior to that time (Harford, 2010). The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment for early childhood, primary and post-primary education (NCCA, 2016). It is beyond the scope of this section of the thesis to elaborate hugely on the role of the NCCA but it is relevant to the body of the thesis and therefore merits inclusion in this section. From September 2014, the new junior cycle featured revised

subjects and short courses, a focus on literacy, numeracy and key skills, and new approaches of assessment and reporting giving schools more freedom to design junior cycle programmes that meet the learning needs of all students (NCCA, 2016).

Research to date has clearly indicated that the Junior and Leaving Certificate models tended to narrow the range of student learning experiences and to focus both teachers and students on 'covering the course' (Smyth et al., 2011). The Post-Primary Longitudinal Study (mentioned in chapter three) identified a number of elements which should be considered in any curriculum reform: ensuring continuity between primary education, junior and senior cycle in the standards expected of students; moving away from the very detailed content of many subjects, which currently appears to contribute to a pace of instruction not always conducive to student learning and to a more teacher-centred approach (McCoy and Smyth, 2013). Research highlights the relationship between high stakes tests and educational inequality. It is generally accepted that there is a disproportionately negative effect of these tests on lower income and minority students (Ladson-Billings 2006 in Smyth and Banks, 2012b), with test score distributions consistently varying by dimensions of socio-economic status, including parental education and family income (Grodsky, Warren and Felts 2008 in Smyth and Banks, 2012b). The introduction of junior cycle reform has been controversial to say the least and it represents a significant change in the nature of Irish post primary education. It involves a shift away from an exam-dominated mode of assessment, less detailed curriculum specifications, fewer subjects to be assessed than currently, a focus on embedding key skills in teaching and learning, and a concern with more innovative approaches to teaching and learning (NCCA, 2011). Key skills are central to the development of education systems internationally. The focus on key skills in Junior Cycle reform is aligned to changes in assessment strategies that are built on learning outcome attainment. Key skills are embedded in the learning outcomes of all specific curriculum specifications (NCCA, 2012) and post-primary teachers are encouraged to build them into their lesson planning, methodologies and assessment.

The NCCA consulted with students to inform their work in preparation for Junior Cycle reform in post-primary education. The NCCA conducted two student voice fora: one in October 2015 and a second one in March 2016. Students are best placed to provide informed perspectives

about what it is like to be students at different stages of their education. The concept of student voice as evidenced in the literature is explored briefly in the section below.

4.4 Student Voice

The literature reveals that student voice is a normative project which has its basis in an ethical and moral practice which aims to give students the right of democratic participation in school processes (Taylor and Robinson, 2009). Over the last 20 years successive UK governments of varying political persuasions advocated and supported the increasing involvement of young people in a wide range of ways in the development opportunities in education and schooling. As a field of educational endeavour student voice has been largely seen as oriented to action, participation and change. This has often led to a relegation of theory to the for developing solutions (Fielding, 2004). Espousing a children's rights based approach (Welty and Lundy, 2013) developed a model which helps duty bearers (such as educators and policy makers) involve children meaningfully in decision making. According to this model, in order to successfully implement Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNRC United Nations, 1989) and give children a role in the decision-making process, four separate factors require consideration: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence.

Flynn (2015)reports that such a consultative practice has been shown to encourage student engagement in learning (Sebba and Robinson, 2010) and to improve teacher-student relationships (Flynn 2015) and that the facilitation of student voice is a key component in constructing discourses of respect, empowerment and citizenship in schools (Busher, 2012 in Flynn, 2015). Flynn established the "Learner Voice Research Study" supported by the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) in Ireland which involved a volunteer group of students in three participating post-primary schools identifying an issue which they believed could be addressed through listening to student voices and opinions. The project was so successful that it was expanded to include the NCCA and from September 2014 volunteer groups of students have shared insights on student voice activity, curricular design, the language of learning and aspirations about creating and improving the culture of listening in schools. The second year of the study saw the establishment of the NCCA National Student voice forum (referenced above) which met in October 2015 and March 2016 (Flynn, 2015). These initiatives represent an important development in education discourses and afford students the opportunity

to be democratic stakeholders in the education process. The student voice literature also resonates with the inclusion of the student focus groups in this piece of research.

Sub-section two

4.5 Teacher Education

a) 4.5.1 PISA and BOLOGNA

The publication of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 (Cosgrove et al., 2010; Perkins et al., 2010.) reading literacy results heralded a crisis of confidence in educational standards in Ireland (Conway, 2012). The policy response to the perceived crisis at national level generated a response that represented a system shift toward the global education reform movement (GERM) characterised by standardisation, narrowed curriculum focus, and stricter accountability (Conway, 2012). One of the attentions of the response nationally was on teacher education in Ireland. Prior to this response and underpinned by the Bologna process teacher education systems across European countries had begun to converge along a parallel structural path (Harford, 2010) which was epitomised by a "universitisation of teacher education and the concomitant professionalisation of teaching" (Harford, 2010).

The Bologna Process (European Higher Education Arena, 1999)was the genesis of a more outcome-based approach to teaching and learning in higher education. Traditional assessment paradigms favoured a teacher-centred, norm-referenced approach but Bologna enacted a paradigm shift that saw the focus shift from teacher/tutor-centred teaching and learning processes to a more transparent system of qualifications and qualification frameworks supported by clear and identifiable student-centred learning outcomes. Essentially, Bologna sought to establish a three-cycle system of bachelor, master and doctorate qualifications, transparent quality assurance and recognition of qualifications and periods of study to institute a comparable and compatible system of European higher education. The European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEP), also established in 1999 and coinciding with the Bologna declaration, "exists to promote co-operation among European Union Member States regarding their teacher education policies in relation to initial, in-service and continuous professional development programs" (Brendel et al., 2010).

b) 4.5.2 The Scandanavian model

In other jurisdictions, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) was organised over a longer timeframe than was the practice in Ireland pre-2010. Divergent conversations distinguishing concurrent and consecutive models of teacher education programmes in Ireland and internationally (Conway et al., 2009) identified that there were lesser opportunities for consecutive ITE student teachers to galvanise and consolidate existing programme components during their school placement phases given the short timeframe of existing consecutive programmes. At a European level special attention was paid to Finland, where teacher education for primary and secondary schools involved a combination of a three-year bachelor's degree and a two-year master's degree (Niemi and ukku-Sihvomen, 2009). The provision of two years postgraduate study in Finland was reported to afford student teachers the opportunity to engage in a high-quality programme of ITE focusing on breadth, width and depth of knowledge while supporting an inclusive but differentiated approach, facilitating all learning styles. This was further supported by a noticeably smaller achievement deficit between higher and lower achievement levels of post- primary level students in Finland (Caldwell, 2012; Walsh, 2015) which was attributed to high-quality, purposeful ITE programmes that afforded student teachers optimum time and professional placement engagement within the field to develop their expertise as practitioners. Evidence from the literature (Conway, 2001; Conway et al., 2009; Kitching et al., 2015) confers substantial benefits on societies, individuals and economies that enjoy high-quality teacher education provision that subsequently informs the quality of teaching in schools. Scandinavian nations have been lauded for their performance at international student achievement tests and much of the credit for this accomplishment has been attributed to the quality of ITE provision in those countries where the focus has long shifted from basic teacher competence utilising didactic methodologies to teaching for the higher-order key skills of critical thinking and problem solving.

Two key reviews of teacher education at both primary and post-primary level were commissioned in 1999, both of which recommended significant reform of existing teacher education programmes to prepare teachers to deal with the educational change agenda (Harford, 2010). Among the recommendations made were the extension of initial teacher education courses, the restructuring of course content to allow for more cross- curricular integration, greater emphasis on the development of reflective practitioners and closer links with school

personnel on teaching practice (Harford, 2010). In 2014, the first cohort of students registered on reconceptualised two-year ITE programmes (Professional Master of Education (PME) in Ireland.

c) 4.5.3 Legislative provision

From a legislative perspective the passing of the Teaching Council Act (2001) represented a significant stage in the professionalisation of the teaching profession in Ireland in that it developed a framework for the continuous education and training and professional development of teachers (Ireland, 2001,29 1). Arising from the Act the Teaching Council was established in March 2006, whose remit includes responsibility for entry standards, in-service provision, research, professional codes of behaviour and the review and accreditation of teacher education programmes. In accordance with section 38 of the Teaching Council Act (2001) the Teaching Council have developed a set of criteria and guidelines which are integral to the Council's policy on the *Continuum of Teacher Education* and are integral to the Council's Strategy for the *Review and Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education.* Providers of ITE must be professionally accredited by the Teaching Council (having previously secured academic accreditation at institutional level) to provide and deliver programmes of ITE. Irish ITE programmes are characterised as either concurrent models (240 credits) or consecutive models (120 credits, following the completion of an undergraduate degree) (Teaching Council, 2011). Emphases throughout the literature (Conway et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010) refer to flexible pathways into teacher education in order to ensure a diverse teaching force representative of contemporary societies. Under-representation by some minority groups and low socio-economic status (SES) groups at ITE stage (post primary) of the continuum remains an issue however within the PME as student financial constraints over the lifetime of a two-year programme limit access and research into the actual diversity of the programme entrants is required to fully validate what currently presents anecdotally. However, a report just published by the ESRI (Darmody and Smyth, 2016) explores the issue of entry into ITE in Ireland. The report is concerned with proposed changes to entry requirements to ITE programmes (Teaching Council, 2012) and whether or not the current entry standards are seen as problematic by key stakeholders. The report reviews the perceived purpose of using these entry criteria; and the

possible trade-off between raising existing entry standards and having a diverse profile of applicants to ITE programmes (Darmody and Smyth, 2016). The report acknowledges that it is difficult to argue that more stringent entry criteria are required in Ireland, especially in a context where entrants already have high levels of prior achievement and that more stringent entry criteria are also likely to lead to less diversity in the teaching profession. The report acknowledges that there is a lack of a strong evidence based on the link between specific entry criteria and performance within and/or after initial teacher education programmes. The authors conclude from this that it would be difficult to argue that more stringent entry criteria are required, especially in a context where entrants already have high levels of prior achievement. Of greatest significance is their contention that the proposed criteria are likely to lead to a reduction in the pool of potential entrants to initial teacher education, at a time when demographic trends mean that more teachers are likely to be required in the years to come and that any deficits found need not only be addressed through changing entry standards but could be dealt with through redesigning the content of initial teacher education programmes (Darmody and Smyth, 2016). The positioning of teacher education in Ireland within the academy and the emphasis on core disciplines like history, sociology, philosophy and psychology of education have significantly strengthened the knowledge base of teacher education (Harford, 2010) and perhaps there is scope within the existing PME programme to develop supplementary or bridging programmes to raise entrants' skill levels in particular subject areas (Darmody and Smyth, 2016).

The newly reconceptualised programmes of ITE, graduated the first cohorts in Autumn 2016 with a Professional Master of Education (PME) 120 credit qualification.

The Continuum of teacher education also provides for induction and probation of newly qualified teachers through the Droichead programme and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of practising teachers. A recent review of the Droichead Teacher Induction Pilot Programme (Smyth et al., 2016) concluded that it is that a set of factors rather than one single factor alone that is critical for the effective induction of newly qualified teachers. The literature on teacher induction illustrates the many ways in which school culture matters in the successful implementation of induction. The Teaching Council launched the national framework for teachers' learning "Cosán" in March 2016 which recognises that while teachers are committed to professional learning and the framework provides an accessible framework for ongoing

professional learning to be recognised in the context of teachers' status as registered professionals (Teaching Council, 2016).

In 2016, the Teaching Council enacted the final part of the Teaching Council Act (2001) which is concerned with fitness of teachers to practice. The Teaching Council is responsible for promoting high professional standards in teaching for the benefit of students, teachers and the profession (Teaching Council, 2016).

The Teaching Council Code of Professional Conduct (Teaching Council, 2016) makes explicit reference to the following standards:

- Professional Values and Relationships
- Professional Integrity
- Professional Conduct
- Professional Practice
- Professional Development
- Professional Collegiality and Collaboration

d) 4.5.4 Teacher identities

It is accepted that the concepts of social, cultural and academic capital are significant in teacher education. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to an overarching concept of professional capital that builds on its various forms within the field of education amplifying the value of conversations, connections and relationships at all levels in teaching. Programmes of ITE are in a privileged position to shape and influence a diverse teaching profession, which in turn will mould and build a teaching context in which future diverse generations will be educated. Within the Irish education system, teaching is seen as a key social activity. A number of sociological arguments pervade the concept of teaching both nationally and internationally. These include functionalist, rationalist, feminist and interactionist perspectives. While functionalist perspectives have historically determined the shape of teaching in Ireland in maintaining the stability of society through socialisation and training initiatives, recent developments of the teacher education continuum have challenged functionalist paradigms and have focused on the

concepts of teaching and learning. Interactionist perspectives emphasise personal growth and development within the profession and teacher identities are seen as being dynamic and multiple (Share et al., 2007).

4.6 Family-School engagement in post-primary education- the contemporary vista

This thesis has located the literature that I consider to be most relevant to the corpus of the research across three chapters; chapter two interrogated the historical overview, chapter three considered theoretical perspectives from the literature and chapter four focused on the contemporary educational vista. My intention in separating the chapters as such was to focus and synthesise the literature thematically while making some chronological connections along the way.

Despite a paucity of available literature from earlier eras both nationally and internationally it is reasonable to conclude that there has been a concerted effort nationally over the past twenty-five years to research, investigate and explore the national and local educational context in Ireland. This work has been guided by international literature and informed at a local level by significant project work, carried out in the main by the ESRI. The Post-Primary Longitudinal study and the Growing Up in Ireland studies represent two major educational studies that offer explanation and understanding into the contemporary education vista in Ireland.

Theories espoused by Bourdieu, Putnam and Coleman facilitate our understanding of the interplay between social capital and other forms of capital including cultural capital which is central to the research questions of this thesis.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter is the final literature review chapter in the thesis. The following chapter presents the conceptual framework of the thesis utilising concepts identified in the literature. The conceptual framework chapter is followed by the Methods and Methodology chapter which completes part one of the thesis.

Chapter Five

The Conceptual Framework

5.1 Towards the construction of a conceptual framework

Within this chapter I shall explicate my rationale for the shape of the conceptual framework of the study and how it has influenced the subsequent research design, which I shall discuss in more detail in the Methodology chapter (Chapter six). The role of the conceptual framework in this thesis is to bind and focus the study into an organised and logical progression which has evolved from the relevant concepts and constructs identified in chapters two, three and four through to the research design and research questions progressing onto the generation, gathering, presentation and analysis of data and finally onto an explanatory and interpretive elucidation of the findings of the research.

I considered that the role of my conceptual framework was to provide a robust shape to work within with due reference to the identified concepts and constructs.

I adopted a focused but slightly fluid approach to the identification and construction of my conceptual framework with appropriate theoretical reference where possible. I have been sensitive to local idiosyncrasies that manifest within this single case study and the resultant relationship between the research context and the concepts and how they co-mediate each other. I will endeavour to validate and transform the conceptual framework into a more precise and explanatory framework in the later Discussion chapter.

My conceptual framework was the preliminary structure by which I initially mapped out the key constructs and concepts to be studied and the presumed inter-relationships between those concepts (Miles et al., 2014). Maxwell, (2013 a) likened a conceptual framework to a "tentative theory of the phenomena that you are investigating". The literature generated the concepts from which I constructed the frame which informed the research design and this was used to inform the analysis and subsequent narrative based on the former.

Creswell (2013) refers to philosophical assumptions that inquirers may make at the genesis of an inquiry. I acknowledge that I made a number of philosophical assumptions informed and guided by my own beliefs and worldviews from the outset of this inquiry. My own views about how what I assume to exist can be known are made more explicitly in the following chapter. As a preparatory reference, however and for the purpose of clarity in this chapter it is useful to clarify which paradigm I utilised to position myself within the research. I adopted a Social Constructivist (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 2000, Neuman, 2000; Schwandt, 2000 in Blooomberg and Volpe, 2016) or Interpretivist (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) approach as I attempted to understand the multiple realities of the participants. This approach formed the basis from which my epistemological and methodological decisions in this study were made.

5.2 **Cultural capital as a Concept in the literature**

As I argued in chapters three and four, conceptually speaking, there is an abundance of literature available about the phenomenon of cultural capital and consequently there are many supporting theories and discourses worthy of reference (Bourdieu, 2009; Bourdieu and Nice, 2008; Grenfell, 2008, 2008; Meighan, 1986; Prieur and Savage, 2013; Putnam, 2000; Rawls, 1999; Tzanakis, 2011). Similarly there are numerous references throughout the literature and in sociological and educational discussion (Booth and Dunn, 1996; Byrne and Smyth., 2010 a; Feinstein et al., 2008; Meighan, 1986; Share et al., 2007) referring to the concept of family-school relationships with particular emphasis on the bi-directionality of influence (Booth and Dunn, 1996; Raftery et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 1995). Whilst much has been documented and recorded from a deficit perspective (Benson et al., 1985; Byrne and Smyth b, 2010; Hanafin and Lynch, 2002.; Lynch, 1988; Lynch and Baker, 2005; Lynch and Lodge, 2002) that contributes to and augments our knowledge and understanding of the concept and the influence of familial cultural capital in an Irish context, there is a paucity of knowledge and understanding about the concept of "successful",

engagement of families and achievement of positive educational outcomes within the Irish education system at post-primary level.

The focus of this study has been to delve into the layers of connectivity and the relationships between the Family and the School, which are underpinned and infused by waves of cultural capital and to investigate the role of cultural capital in those connections. As such, conceptually the study focused primarily on the following concepts and their inter-relationships:

1. The family
2. The school
3. Cultural capital

The interface created at the intersection of the Family and the School, which is sometimes jagged and sometimes harmonious while suffused by the cultural capital of both was of particular interest to me as a researcher as I attempted to disentangle and clarify the processes engaged in by both the family and the school to achieve educational outcomes.

5.3 The Conceptual framework of the Inquiry

A concept is an idea that is expressed in words or in a symbol. Concepts are regarded as the building blocks of social theories. Theories in turn specify the relationships between concepts and why these relationships exist (Blaikie, 2000, p.129). Borrowing from Blaikie's explanation of concepts I have set out my conceptual framework in figure 5.1 (below) in an attempt to visually refine and represent the main conceptual ideas about my study and how the conceptual ideas interact and interplay with each other (Miles et al., 2014). My intention here is twofold; firstly to identify the main concepts that I as a researcher am interested in in this study and secondly to identify those concepts' properties and dimensions as relevant to my study.
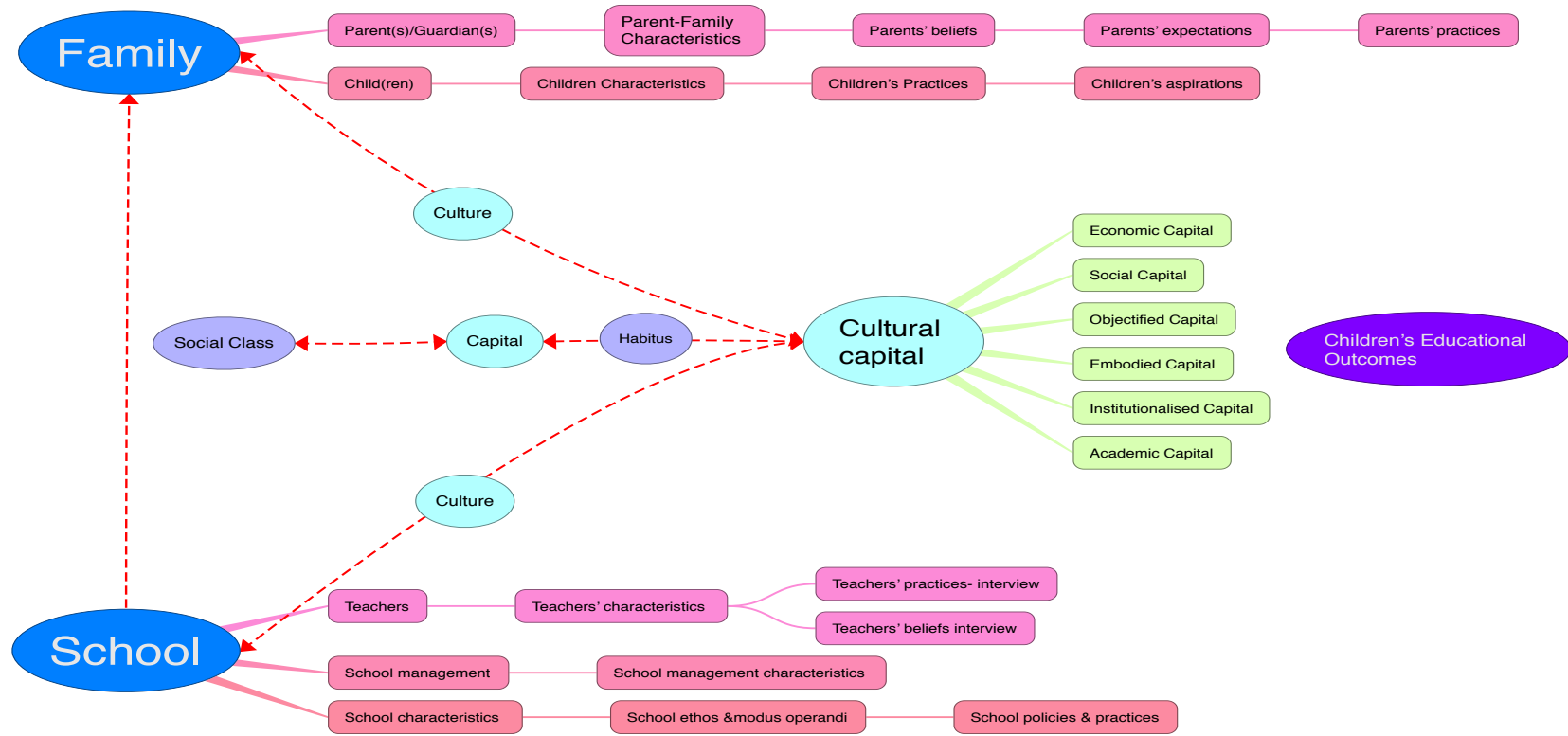
Figure 5.1 Conceptual framework of the research study

5.4 Family as a Concept

It is beyond the scope of this chapter and indeed this thesis to indulge in an extensive sociological critique of the Family. Nonetheless it is my intention in the following sections to identify the dimensions and properties of the contemporary Irish family as aligned to the research questions and in the context of the case study itself.

a) 5.4.1 The Family from the Irish Constitutional perspective

Giddens and Griffiths, (2008, p. 206) define the family as a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members (a culturally specific socio-legal interpretation) of which assume responsibility for caring for children. Whilst acknowledging that a diversity of family forms exists globally and that modernity has contributed to the emergence of a diverse and heterogeneous blend of family types my focus within the scope of this thesis is to concentrate on the concept of the Family in contemporary Ireland. Irish family types include; the traditional nuclear or extended family, single parent families, "blended families" resulting from a number of different relationships involving different partners to groups of unrelated people living together in "family-like" arrangements (Share et al., 2007); same-sex couples with children and people living alone. I referred in chapter two to the fact that the Family is acknowledged by the State in article 42 of Bunreacht na hÉireann, as the "primary and natural" educator (Bunreacht na hÉireann,1937). The preceding clauses from the Constitution recognise the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society[12]. This nexus between the Family and the State within an educational framework posed a fascinating juxtaposition for me as a researcher when considered in light of the research questions of this thesis. While the Family is recognised as the primary and fundamental unit group of society and the primary educator it is the State as "the guardian of the

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[12] Article 41.1.1 reads: The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law. Article 41.1.2 reads: The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State. (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937).

common good", that dictates that children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social [13].

b) 5.4.2 Financial dimensions

Daly and Clavero (2002) in their comparative review of Contemporary Family Policy between Ireland, France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom refer to the "Family" both in terms of policy, and in terms of "general values" (Daly and Clavero, 2002, p. 21) which are represented in law and the Constitution. This is a useful framework to look closely at the dimensions of the Family. Acknowledging that in some ways it took a long time for the view of family as a concept to become recognised in Irish social policy Daly and Clavero delineate the family from an income perspective. They make particular reference to various pillars of income support to families with children including; child benefit, child dependant allowance, family income supplement (FIS) and child tax allowances. The prioritisation of families' income protection is discussed at length by Daly and Clavero (2002) with due regard to provision for widows (underpinned constitutionally) [14], provision for families within the tax code where married couples are taxed as a unit compared to single tax payers and the presence of dependants within the family subsequent financial implications. Despite the review being fourteen years old the main tenets analysed by Daly and Clavero remain relevant in the current day. The payment of maternity benefit[15] to women on maternity leave from work and covered by social insurance

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[13] Article 42.1.1 reads: The State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State.

Article 42.1.2 reads: The State shall, however, as guardian of the common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social. (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937).

[14] Article 41.2.1 reads: In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

[15] The entitlement to a basic period of maternity leave from employment extends to all female employees (including casual workers), regardless of how long they have been working for the organisation or the number of hours worked per week. Mothers also avail of additional unpaid maternity leave. The Maternity Protection Acts 1994 and 2004 provide statutory minimum entitlements in relation to maternity at work including maternity leave. Mothers are entitled to 26 weeks' maternity leave together with 16 weeks additional unpaid maternity leave, which begins immediately after the end of maternity leave. (http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

(PRSI) and more recently the introduction of paternity benefit[16] (2016) whereby parents (employed and self- employed) who are on paternity leave from work and are covered by social insurance represents a financial commitment from the State to provide a source of income for parents at the time of the birth of a child into the family. These income supports are a defining characteristic of the contemporary Irish family.

c) 5.4.3 Patriarchal familism

Daly and Clavero (2002) cite Fahey's (1998) view that with reference to the Family that Irish social policy has been shaped by two contrasting principles, patriarchal familism and egalitarian individualism. They refer to Fahey's (1998) assertion that Ireland has been depicted as a patriarchal society where by there were distinct roles for men and women within families where the father is the head of the household and the needs of women and children take second place to those of men (Daly and Clavero, 2002). The authors are critical of Fahey's combination of patriarchy and individualism to depict a second stage of family policy in Ireland underpinned by individual rights and not contingent on family status. They believe that such a view of social policy in that mode has implications for the protection of the "family" as a unit (Daly and Clavero, 2002). Rush (2009a) contends that patriarchal familism perspectives represented by religious denominations in Ireland were characterised by "ill-liberal attitudes towards family diversity, gender relations, child-rearing outside marriage and same sex unions" (Rush, 2009a). While the concept of patriarchal familism has undergone a huge paradigm shift over the past twenty-five years in Ireland the place of fathers who are not recognised within the constitutional definition of marriage endure an invisibility in terms of being recognised as members of the Family. Rush (2009) believes that American social science beliefs about the salience of natural fatherhood to child development and the benefits of marriage to social reproduction have provided Irish patriarchal-familism with a unifying set of arguments in favour of the Constitutional "status quo". The thirty-fourth amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality Act) 2015 permitted marriage to be contracted by two persons without distinction to their sex. Prior to this the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 (Source) was passed to amend

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[16] The Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 introducted a new Paternity Benefit together with statutory paternity leave of two weeks. The combined package of paternity leave and Paternity Benefit can start at any time within the first six months following birth or adoption of a child. The provisions apply to births or adoptions on or after 1 September 2016. (http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

parental rights and responsibilities of "non-traditional" families. Both of these relatively recent developments represented a seismic shift in the interpretation of the Family as defined constitutionally.

d) 5.4.4 The Irish family at the time of the research

At the time of conducting my research (2009) I developed my research design including my instruments relative to the Central Statistics Office 2006 census categorisation. Lunn and Fahey's publication, *Households and family structures in Ireland* publication (2011) describes how approximately one-in-three families in Ireland departed from the traditional model of a married couple both of whom were in their first marriage and how one in four children under 21 years of age lived in a family that did not conform to this model (Lunn et al., 2011). They also describe how "Alternative family structures are dominated by never-married cohabiting couples and lone mothers (both never-married and divorced or separated). Together with first-time marriages, these four family types account for 92% of families". At that time, they (Lunn et al., 2011) reported that second relationships and step-families, though they exist in diverse forms, remain relatively rare in Ireland. The 2011 census statistics revealed that a total of 1,159,989 households (70.1%) contained families (Ireland and Central Statistics Office, 2012a). Rural families were larger on average than those in urban areas. The average number of children per family was 1.5 in rural areas as compared to 1.3 in urban areas (Ireland and Central Statistics Office, 2012a).

Figure 5.2 below identifies family characteristics that were incorporated as indicators into research instruments in the research design of this study.

Figure 5.2 Family characteristics identified in the study

5.5 The School as a Concept

The complexity and intricacy of the Irish education system is both challenging and daunting. While education is manifold and may be regarded through both abstract and empirical lenses, its connection and entanglement in the tapestry of Irish social life is considerable. A snapshot of educational provision in Ireland reveals a multi-layered structure originating at a pre-school stage, followed by the formal education stages of primary, post primary and higher education and inter-layered by second-chance education initiatives, further education and life-long learning

opportunities. At post- primary level students undertake a three-year junior cycle programme (lower secondary) at the end of which students take a nationally standardised examination, the Junior Certificate. The Senior cycle (upper secondary) programme comprises an optional 'Transition Year' and students have the opportunity to take one of three two-year programmes; the traditional Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme culminating in a nationally standardised examination. In comparative terms, the Irish educational system can be characterised as 'general', rather than vocationally specific, in nature. Central in this intricate entanglement is the school. Irish schools typically deliver a national curriculum through prescribed subject syllabi and are usually characterised by patronage, ethos, gender and fee requirements.

In terms of how I have conceptualised the school in my research I recognized the school as an Irish voluntary secondary co-educational school (described in detail in chapter four) that offers a two-cycle curriculum to students; a junior cycle and a senior cycle. I have conceptualised the school from the perspective of a number of interconnected layers that are characterised by various aspects including but not limited to; school management, patronage, teachers, ethos, gender and finance. I was particularly interested in investigating what the cultural capital of the school "looked like" and how it manifested and was evidenced. I was interested in unveiling the cultural elements of the school and how they contributed to developing practices and processes in the school. Using the research instruments, I examined the organisation of the school day in terms of timetable, I analysed the structures of the year groups and class groups in terms of teaching and non-teaching activities, the subject choices offered, the curriculum offered, rules and regulations and how they are implemented and I explored how the school promoted progression to further and higher education through the accumulation of academic capital. I also categorised parental engagement in the school as an identifier aligned to the research questions and I focused on the students as a distinguishing feature and how they engaged in the school also as aligned to the research questions.
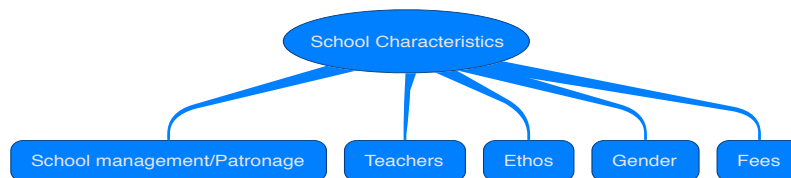
Figure 5.3 School Characteristics identified in this study

a) 5.5.1 Teachers and School Management

The structure of the Irish education system is underpinned by statutory provision that dictates the functions, shape and arrangement of the various components within the system. An elaborate discussion on the specifics of this statutory provision has been described in Chapter four, however for the purpose of clarity within the conceptual framework I will concentrate at this point on the characteristics of both the teachers and school management within the conceptual framework.

(i)   Teachers

Teachers who are eligible to be employed in the Irish education system hold a teaching qualification having studied a recognised concurrent or consecutive programme of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in a higher education institution (HEI) in Ireland or abroad. Teachers who have undertaken their ITE course abroad normally have to complete additional specific modules to be eligible to register with the Teaching Council in Ireland. Qualification awards are conferred by the Higher Education Institution attended and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) must register with the Teaching Council (Ireland) in order to acquire a teacher registration number, which entitles them

to be remunerated for teaching duties.[17] The Post-primary education sector is comprised of voluntary secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed. Vocational schools are state-established and administered by ETBs while community and comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions (http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Post-Primary/). Recruitment and employment of teachers in the primary sector, the voluntary secondary sector and the community and comprehensive post-primary sector in Ireland is the direct remit and duty of those schools' Boards of Management[18]. Education and Training Boards (ETBs)[19] act as patron to designated vocational schools, centres for education and education and training facilities and are directly responsible for the recruitment, employment and remuneration of each of the schools' and centres' staff. Individual ETB schools' Boards of Management are sub-committees of the ETB (Darmody & Smyth, 2013) and are not tasked with the recruitment or employment of staff.

Teachers' professional characteristics identified in my study are aligned to the Principal CSO Statistics categories of population by age group and sex, and teacher variables identified in the Stat Central [20] education data-base. Concomitant with these professional characteristics are a number of variables, which I intend to examine relative to the study research questions. With regards to the main research question around the successful engagement of families with schools I consider teachers to be significant stakeholders in the process. Teachers occupy a significant role in the lives of students and families as they engage with schooling. Teachers hold professional views and beliefs that determine and shape their practice both in terms of their subject methodologies and in

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[17] The Teaching Council is the regulator of the teaching profession and promotes professional standards in teaching. It acts in the interests of the public good while upholding and enhancing the reputation and status of the teaching profession through fair and transparent regulation (www.teachingcouncil.ie, 2016).

[18] Boards of Management are appointed by the School Patron to manage the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an appropriate education for each student at the school for which that board has responsibility, (Education Act, 1998; Part IV).

[19] Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were established under the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013 which dissolved the Vocational Education Committees established under the 1930 Vocational Education Act. 16 ETBs act as patron to recognised schools, centres for education and education and training facilities.

[20] StatCentral is the portal to Ireland's Official Statistics. It provides information about statistics produced by government departments and state organisations. The site is maintained by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (www.statcentral.ie).

terms of their pastoral practices and development of their relationships with their students. Figure 5.4 below identifies teachers' beliefs/views and practices that I consider relevant to my study.
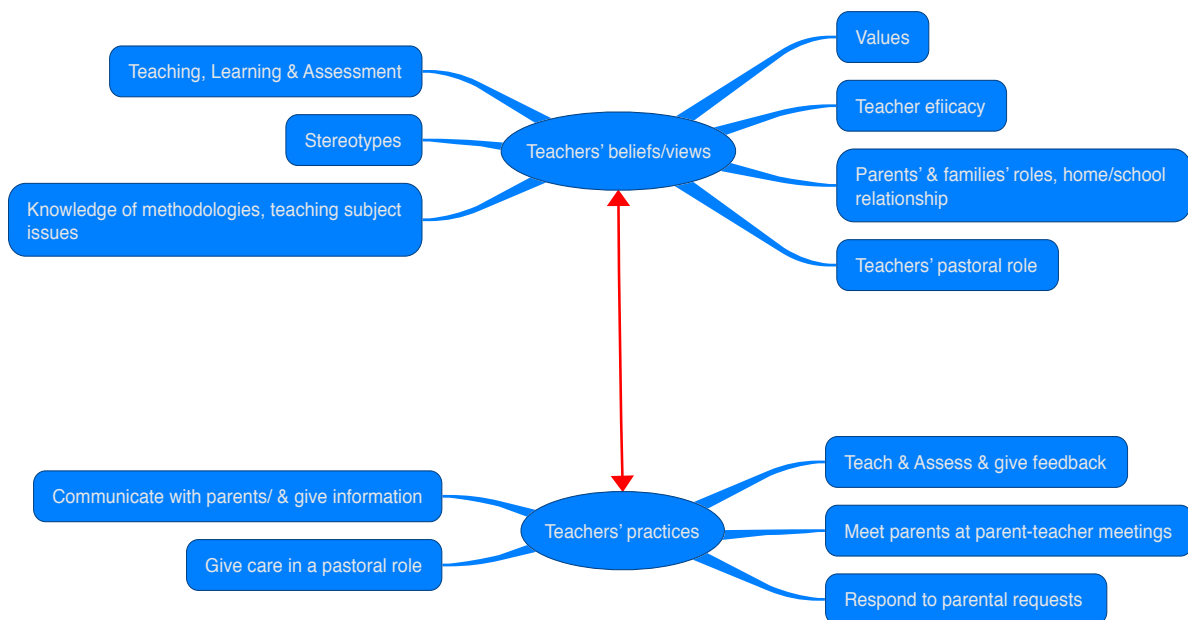
Figure 5.4 Teachers' beliefs/views and Teachers' practices

(ii)   School management

School management in the post-primary sector is comprised of in-school management, which includes the Principal, Deputy Principal and post of responsibility holders and the external Board of Management. The Principal is ultimately responsible for the day-to-day running of the school and is assisted in this role by the Deputy Principal and post of responsibility holders. Overall school management is the role of the Board of Management who hold statutory responsibility for the

management of the school on behalf of the patron or trustee for the benefit of the students and their parents and provide, or cause to be provided an appropriate education for each student in the school (Education Act, 1998). Boards of Management are also charged with upholding the characteristic spirit of the school.

5.6 Cultural Capital as a Concept

a) 5.6.1 Cultural Capital

In their paper "Emerging Forms of Cultural Capital" (2013), Prieur and Savage state that the concept of "cultural capital" was originally developed as a tool to explain how the success of children in school depended on the levels of education of their parents. Bourdieu described capital as accumulated labour (Tzanakis, 2011) in an embodied form but when appropriated on a private individual basis may be transformed to living or reified labour which when accumulated confers an ability to produce profit for the individual. Prieur and Savage (2013) explain that the children of educated parents enjoyed advantages, not only as a result of the help they got from their parents but also as a result of their intimate familiarity with "highbrow culture such as fine arts and classical music (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979 [1964], 1996 [1970] in Prieur and Savage, 2013). The concept of cultural capital is itself contentious and it is challenging to pin down exactly what is meant by it and how it sits within an Irish context where local idiosyncrasies create additional local connotations. It is difficult to explain how exactly or if cultural capital alone can explain the connection between social privilege and educational success given the many other determinants in the equation. In the case of the case study I have borrowed the term from the work of Bourdieu and I sensitised it to "fit" in the Irish post primary education context of the case study school. Prieur and Savage's explanation of cultural capital has some resonance in terms of the conceptual framework and research questions of this study and while the conceptual framework relies on this original explanation of cultural capital a more elaborate definition of its scope and appropriateness in terms of this study is required.

For the purpose of this study I specifically focused on cultural capital which Grenfell (2008) describes as a subset of the general symbolic form of "capital". Moore in Grenfell (Ed) (2008) adds that cultural capital is a specific type of capital as are social, linguistic and scientific capital (Grenfell, 2008, p. 101). Bourdieu further distinguishes symbolic capital from economic capital in

that symbolic capital, of which cultural capital is a form confers an intrinsic value whereas economic capital alone is a means to an end and normally manifests as wages, payments and finance with no associated intrinsic value. Economic capital and Cultural capital operate on an exchange basis however as economic capital confers possibilities that allow people to purchase additional educational services and resources that in turn confer greater cultural capital and I have utilised the exchange concept in my study also. Bourdieu considered that cultural capital existed in three forms; embodied capital which presents in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind, objectified capital in the form of cultural goods and objects and institutionalised capital which is measured in educational qualification and certification (Grenfell, 2008). In this study, I have prioritised the concepts above in the following way; by embodied capital I mean the knowledge and understanding acquired by the research participants over time through their socialisation in the education system and how that is "acted out" in their behaviours and actions. I consider that objectified capital is represented through material objects, buildings, facilities, spaces, books, sports equipment, dress, educational resources, desks, chairs, computers with internet access and much more. In terms of institutionalised capital, I mean academic qualifications, attitudes, preferences, goals, credentials, certifications and ranking of the school in terms of the numbers who progress to higher and further education or take subjects at higher and ordinary levels.

b) 5.6.2 "Habitus" and Field

Intrinsic to the concept of capital is the concept of "habitus". Again, this is a contested concept as it is invisible, latent and lacks clarity and is therefore difficult to measure or evaluate. Maton in Grenfell (2008, p 49) comments that the term habitus is an enigmatic concept that has become part of the sociological lexicon of a range of disciplines including sociology, education and cultural studies even though it is one of the most misunderstood, misused and hotly contested of Bourdieu's ideas. Habitus refers to an individual's overall orientation to or way of being in the world, predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving in and out of a social environment (Sweetman, 2009). I sensitised the concept of "habitus" and used it to explore how the participants from the case study school were predisposed in their thinking, how that thinking informed their actions and rationale for acting or behaving in a particular way. Smyth and Banks (2012a) consider the "habitus" relative to educational decision making and add to the extensive research of Shavit and

Blossfeld 1993; Shavit, Arum and Gamoran, 2007 in their paper on young people's agency, "institutional habitus" and the transition to higher education. They focus on the contrasting theories of the rational theorists who focus on educational decision-making at the level of the family and/or the young person and on Bourdieu's theory which focuses on the effects of "institutional" habitus on post-school choices as exemplified by Reay (2004). Habitus is contingent on the field in which it originates. In this study it is in the fields of the family home and the school that the different habitus (family, students and school) originates. Smyth and Banks note that how institutional habitus plays out at the school level has not been fully unpacked. My inquiry is not limited to a focus on cultural capital in terms of educational decision-making in relation to post-school choices alone but it does include this thinking within its scope.

The fundamental concepts of the Family and the School are juxtaposed alongside the broad concepts of cultural capital and habitus, in the mesh of this inquiry into the inter-relationships of all of the concepts relative to the educational outcomes of the students.

5.7 Conclusion

The overarching objective of this chapter was to identify a selection of apposite concepts and constructs that inform the conceptual framework of the study. The chapter described the conceptual framework of the research and has identified the dominant concepts within the framework, namely; the Family, the School and Cultural capital. The research questions of the study which shaped the research design were developed with due regard to the concepts identified supported by the literature which has been discussed in detail in chapters two, three and four. The next chapter (chapter five) addresses the methodology of the study and describes in detail how the research was operationalised ballasted by the conceptual framework.

Chapter Six

Methods and Methodologies

6.1 Introduction and Overview of this chapter

My intention in this chapter is to clarify the methodology through which the relevant concepts and frameworks were explored, interrogated and operationalized and later progressed onto an in-depth analysis in the study, arising from which I constructed conclusions and recommendations. I will begin by presenting an overview of the research questions of the thesis followed by a description of the selection and sampling of participants supported by a discussion on ethical considerations. I will then address the empirical elements of the methodology including my selection of the case study approach and the selection of appropriate methods and instrumentation used to generate data.

This segment is followed by a detailed description of the actual research process of this study including the, the pilot and main studies using the research instruments and the design of the research analysis.

The chapter concludes with an overview of the challenges and limitations of the study and also details triangulation within the study, validity and reliability of the study itself.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the Overarching Methodology of the Study.

Research Questions
- What does familial cultural capital "look like" in the Irish context?
- How does familial cultural capital influence the ed. outcomes of post-primary students in the Irish context?
- What influences children from families experiencing social and economic circumstances to aspire to & attain different ed. outcomes?
- How do the connections and relationships between families and schools contribute to the development of ed. patterns & paradigms in Irish education?

Sampling & Study Participants — Parents — Students (Children) — Teachers — School Management

Research Design (Qualitative Mixed Methods) — Layer 1-Parents — Layer 2 Students — Layer 3 The School

The Case Study

Instrumentation — Parents' Questionnaire — Teacher Questionnaire — School management interviews — Focus groups — Student visual diaries- Participant generated — Teacher Interviews — Visual diary-Researcher generated

Research Ethics — TCD Ethics Committee & Ethics — School Consent — Parental Completion of Questionnaire — Parental Consent for children's/students' participation — students' consent — Teachers' Completion of Questionnaire — Teachers' Consent to Interview — Management Consent to Interview

Figure 6.1 Overview of the Methodology of the Study

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The conceptual framework presented in Chapter Five laid the foundations for this chapter. Within it I described and weaved the ontological and epistemological approach of this study through the identified concepts and constructs, out of which the research questions and subsequent research design emerged. The ontological assumptions which I identified in the conceptual framework articulated, what I considered to be the social reality of the lives of the research participants; students, parents, teachers and school management. These assumptions and claims are influenced and supported both by my own experiences as a practitioner, and by prior theorizing and empirical research (sources) about the social reality of the participants. Stake (1978) while explaining the purpose of a formal inquiry refers to Bohm (1974) and Schon (1977) cited in Stake, 1978, who consider that if we are to help people to understand social problems and social programs (sic) we must perceive and communicate in a way that accommodates their present understandings. He continues to say that "those people have arrived at their understandings mostly through direct and vicarious experience" (Stake, 1978). His argument arose in his paper; "The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry" (1978) and was founded in his belief that it was reasonable to conclude that "one of the more effective means of adding understanding for all readers is by approximating through words and illustrations of our reports, the natural experience acquired in ordinary personal involvement". This piece of research investigates the "ordinary personal involvement" of the participants.

Epistemologically I have made explicit my own views about how what I assume to exist can be known in the conceptual framework chapter. These views form the basis from which my epistemological and methodological decisions in relation to this study have been made. The purpose of this study is to investigate and explore the influence of family culture and associated capital (social, embodied and economic) on the educational outcomes of the students by looking at the daily activities, interactions, values, norms and mores of the selected families in their engagement and interaction with the school and with the cultures of the school. As part of my research strategy I opted to use a mixed methods approach in the methodology of this study to add rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth (Flick, 2009) to my inquiry.

6.2 The Research Framework of the Enquiry

The following table, (Table 6.1) sets out the research framework that bounds the study. The identification of the fundamental concepts within the framework has clarified what concepts the

study focused on and how that focus will be mediated through various research instruments. Building from the conceptual framework the research framework supports the carving up of the implicit and explicit research questions underpinned by the philosophical beliefs and assumptions articulated. The research questions in turn operationalize the conceptual framework and activate the initial theoretical assumptions (Miles et al., 2014). The choice and selection of instrumentation, study setting, sampling, participants and follow through to the interrogation, analysis and discussion of the data is defined and determined by the original concepts identified in the conceptual framework

Constructivist Paradigm	Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology
Methodology	Single Case Study supported by approved Ethical guidelines
Methods	Questionnaires, Semi-structured interviews, Focus group interviews, Visual records and Visual diaries
Data Analysis	Thematic discourse analysis, analysis of questionnaires using SPSS, analysis of visual diaries
Discussion	Creation of linkages and explication of data aligned to literature creating an explanatory framework

Table 6.1 Research Framework of the Inquiry

6.3 Research Questions

a) 6.3.1 Research Questions- A brief overview

Research Questions represent the facets of inquiry that the researcher most wants to explore (Miles et al., 2014). Maxwell (2013a) argues that the research questions include what the researcher specifically wants to understand by doing the study and that they are "at the heart of the research design" (Maxwell, 2013b, p. 73). I identify with Maxwell's viewpoint in that my research questions underpinned my research at all times from the beginning of the study through to the end. I constantly referred back to the research questions and I continually returned to the research questions to guide me through each of the phases of the research. Maxwell further articulates the criticality of the research questions as being the "component that most directly links to all other components of the design". He also states that the "research questions will have an influence on, and should be responsive to every other part of your study" (Maxwell, 2013a, p. 73).

I referred earlier to Yin's emphasis on the criticality of selection of a research method based upon contextual conditions. The primary factor identified by Yin in selecting an appropriate research method is the type or form of research question being asked at the outset. The formulation of the research questions of a study, whether quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods presents in itself a number of challenges for the researcher regardless of when the research questions are conceived; at the outset or at a later stage of the study and may require reframing or redefining as the study progresses. This was my experience in formulating the research questions for this particular study, I had to frame and reframe the research questions a number of times as the study progressed but ultimately the original two research questions prevailed and the second two questions emerged and were refined as I progressed through the phases.

The research questions of my study are identified in figure 6.2 below;
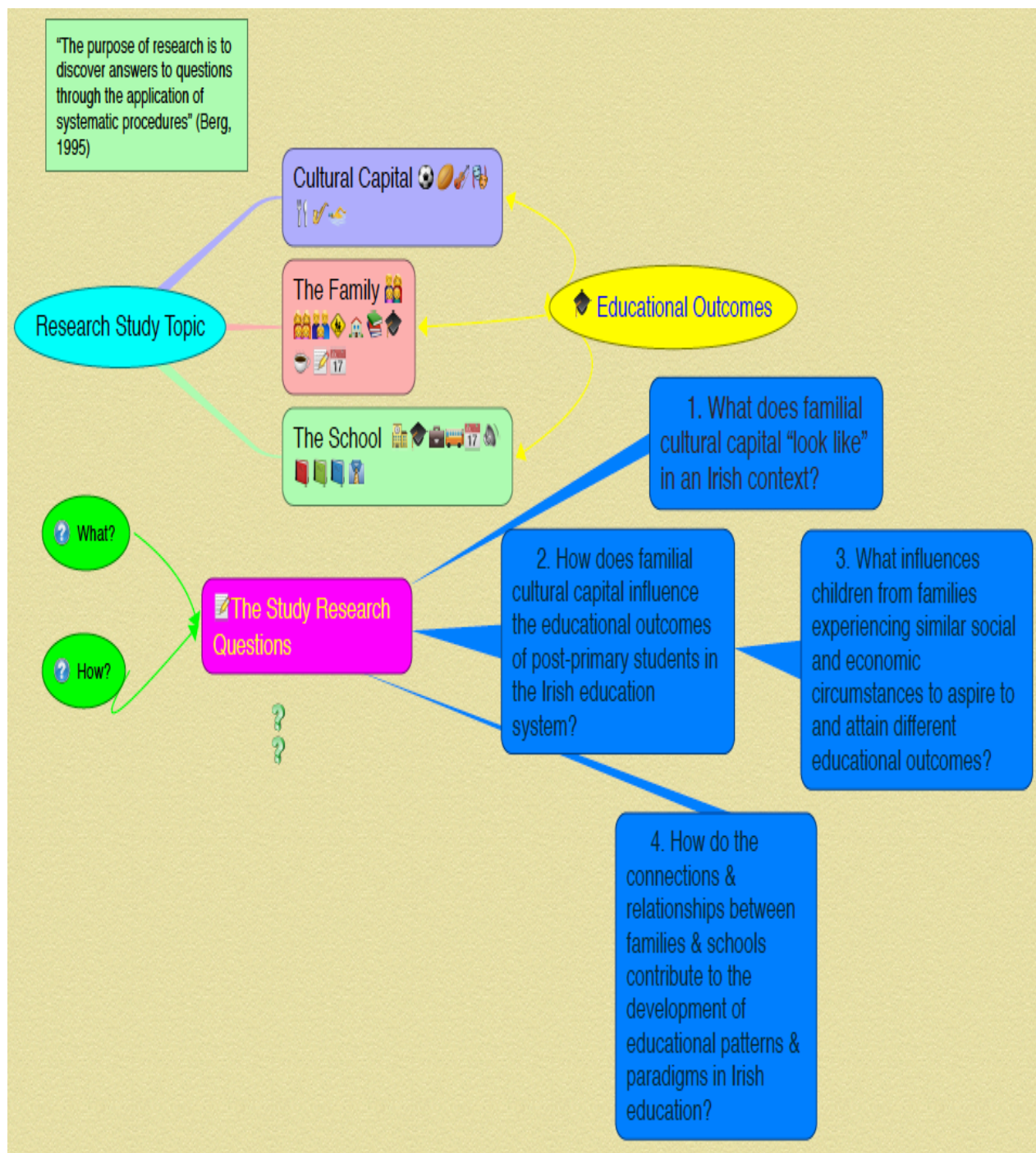
Figure 6.2 The Research Questions

6.4 Selection and Sampling of Participants

a) 6.4.1 The Research Setting

The research setting was a single co-educational post-primary school within which there were a number of participant sub-sets. The data collection was conducted in various indoor settings on the school premises. The settings were non-adjacent to neither the teaching spaces nor the recreational spaces and were conducive to both semi-structured and focus group interviews. The spaces were special purpose meeting rooms with comfortable chairs in a circular formation and without desks. There were no school intercoms or electronic bells in the spaces and there were no interruptions. I present a detailed description of the full research setting in chapter seven, immediately in advance of the presentation of findings chapters.

b) 6.4.2 The Participants

The study participants included post-primary adolescent students, the students' parents, teachers and management employed at the research school. All participants brought their own meanings and viewpoints to the study as defined by their role, interactions, interpretations and understandings. Each of these factors was back-grounded and bounded by a combination of individual and group historical and cultural contexts that shaped and defined the participants' responses and articulation of viewpoints. For the purpose of this piece of research the participants of most interest to me as a researcher were the students foremost and their families. At the time of the research there were seven hundred and seventy-two students enrolled at the school. There was a total of four hundred and sixty-seven families registered at the school. The families represented the largest sample group in this research. The age distribution of the parent/family respondents varied from 30 years of age to 69 years of age (Chart 6.1). One hundred and eighty-eight of the families responded and returned the parent questionnaire. Twenty-nine males and one hundred and fifty-eight females of the parent respondents completed the parent/family questionnaire. One of the respondents did not indicate their gender when completing the questionnaire.
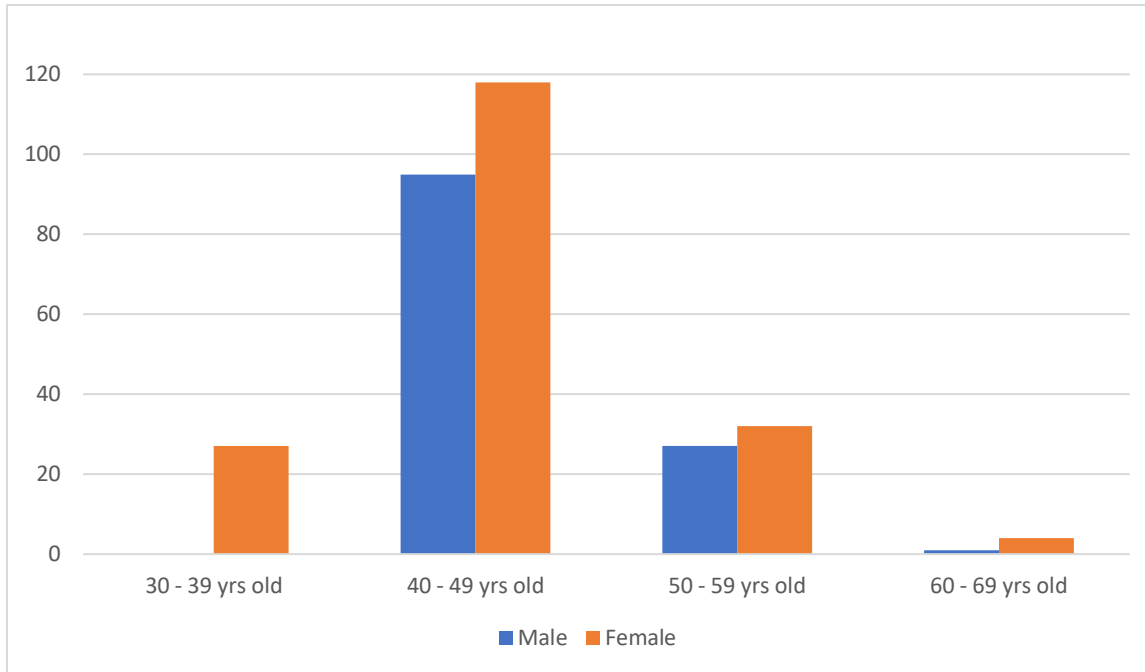
Chart 6.1 Age Range and Gender of Parent Respondents

29.8% of the parent respondents reported a family income of twenty-one to forty thousand Euros (gross). This represented the highest income of the parent respondents. The full range of income of the parent respondents reported in the parent questionnaire is illustrated below in chart 6.2. Income has been grouped into bands of twenty thousand euros as there were numerous ranges within the data.
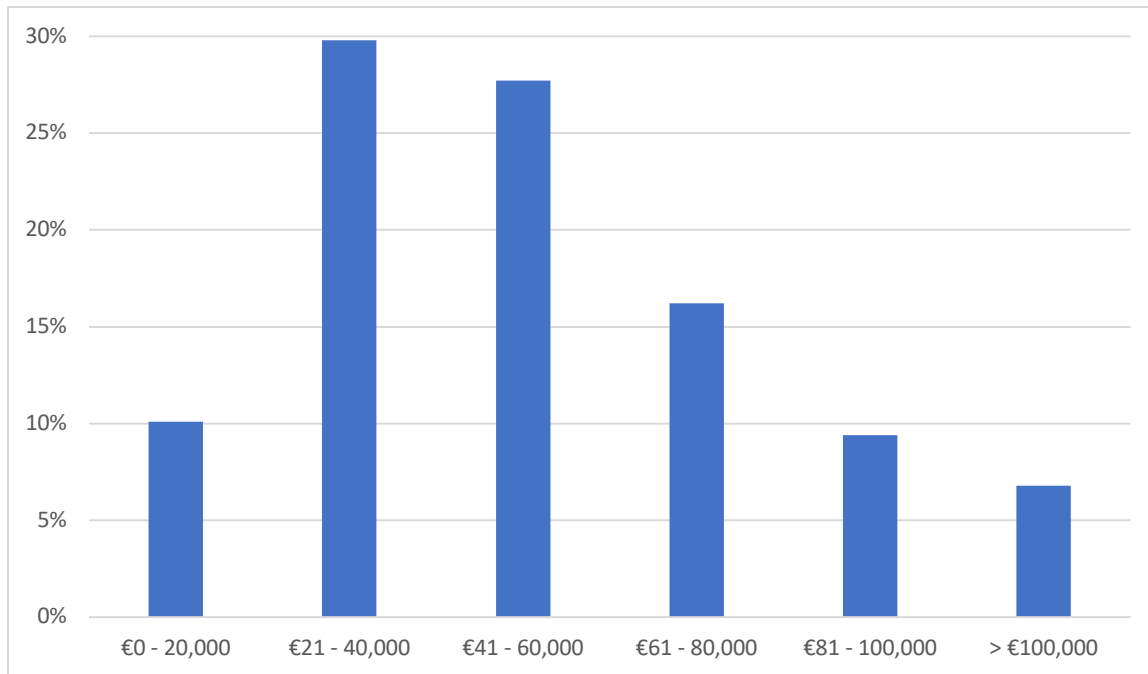
Chart 6.2 Income levels of Parent Respondents

There were sixty teaching staff and five Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) employed in the school with one Deputy Principal, one Principal and one Guidance Counsellor (ex-quota). I used convenience sampling to sample from all of the participant sub-sets.

Chart 6.3 below illustrates the age, gender and years of service profile of the staff who responded to the teacher questionnaire while chart 6.4 illustrates the hours timetabled per week and gender of participating teachers.
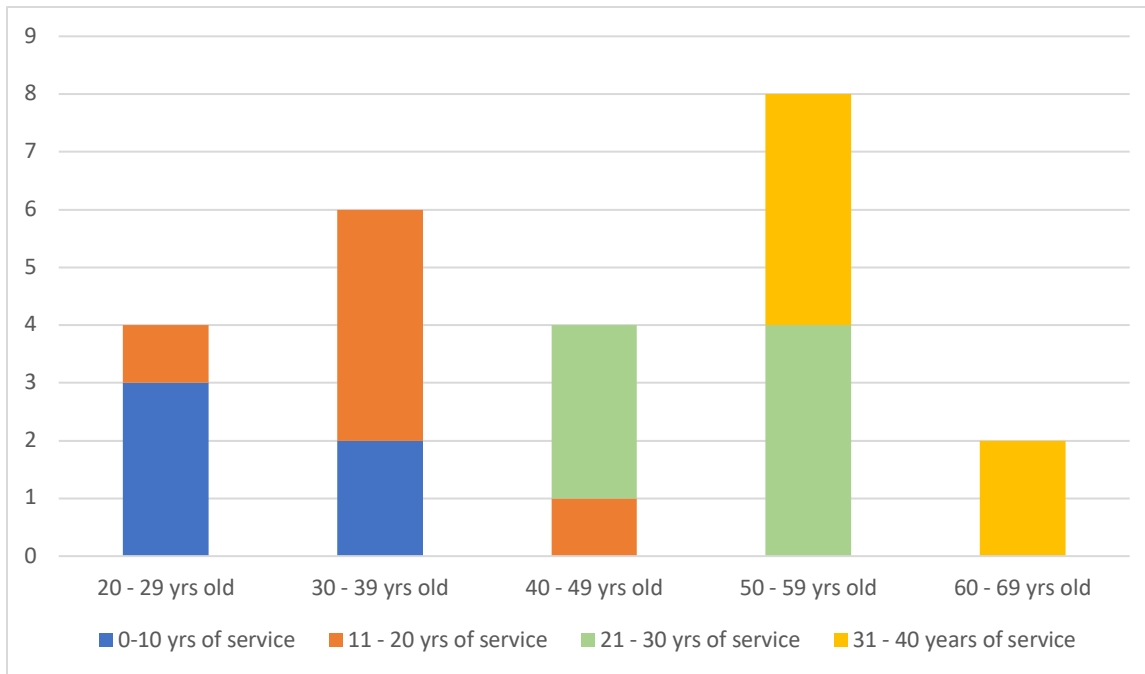
Chart 6.3 Age Range and Years of Service of Participating Teachers
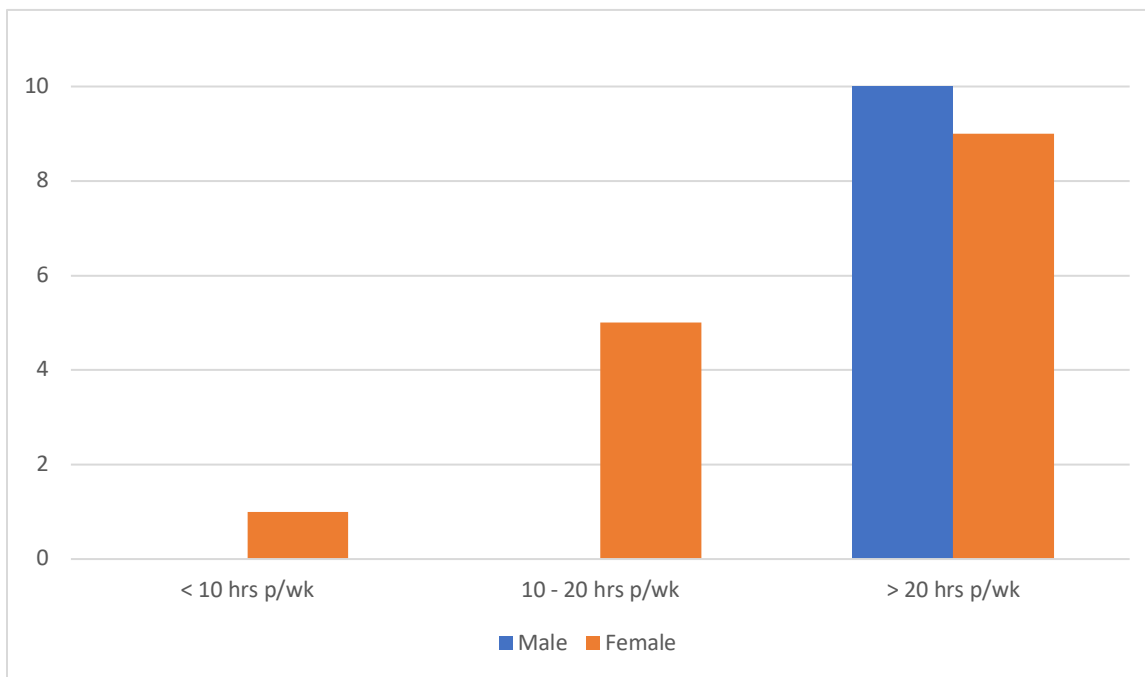
Chart 6.4 Hours per week and Gender of Participating Teachers

c)
d)
e) 6.4.3 Criteria used for Selection of Participants

 All families were invited by letter (Appendix Four) to participate in the research. Each family received one questionnaire and were invited to complete the questionnaire and return it through their child who returned it to the class teacher at a designated time. The sampling of the families was stage one of a two stage sampling process whereby the families were asked to register their interest for the next stages of sampling either in a semi-structured interview for parents or in a focus group for students. Parents who wished to further participate in the research interviews self-selected. In the original research design, I intended to conduct semi-structured interviews with parents in order to afford the parents an opportunity to elaborate on the details they had entered on the questionnaire and to elicit any further relevant information that might help triangulate the findings. Following the administration of the questionnaire it became apparent to me that the potential sample size for parent interviews was small and would not be representative of the sample who actually completed questionnaires or of families in the school. I contacted all those who indicated that they would participate further in the research and the number of parents who committed to making themselves availability diminished even further. I made a decision at that point not to proceed with the parent semi-structured interviews. I was satisfied that the questionnaire had generated sufficient data to allow me to profile the families themselves and I elected to focus on the student focus-group interviews to generate more in-depth data.

Parents were asked to indicate on the parent questionnaire and to give consent if they wished their son or daughter to participate in the student focus groups.
Students whose parents had given consent for them to further participate in the research (n=34) were also asked to complete a consent form giving their consent. Of the thirty-four students nominated by parents, twenty-seven students (n=27) volunteered to participate in the focus groups. Students who were in exam years, ie. third or sixth year were not eligible to participate. This was by prior arrangement with school management who requested that exam year students would not be included in the research process.

Students who participated in the focus groups were invited to participate in the generation of the visual diaries phase of the research. A small number of students (n=4) volunteered to participate in the visual diary phase.

All teaching staff (n=60) and Special Educational Needs assistants (n= 5) employed at the school were invited to participate in the research (Appendix Eight). Teaching staff (n=25) completed an initial questionnaire (Appendix Nine) and staff (n= 13 teachers + 1 SNA) indicated in the questionnaire that they wished to participate further in the semi-structured interviews. The correspondence to staff (Appendix Eight) and the questionnaire (Appendix Nine) were presented as "for Teachers" to both teachers and SNAs by agreement with school management. A random sample of teaching staff (n=4) who completed the questionnaire and the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and one SNA were purposely chosen by the researcher to participate in the semi-structured interviews.

6.4.4 The Sampling Process

I was invited to attend a section of a scheduled staff meeting in early February 2010 to address the staff and to introduce my research proposal to those in attendance. The meeting was attended by all of the teaching staff, Special Educational Needs assistants, the Principal and Deputy Principal. I made a short presentation to the staff about the research which was followed by a short question and answer session. I indicated to the staff at that meeting that I would be distributing a questionnaire to the staff which I would also collect from the staff room. I also indicated that it was my intention to conduct some semi-structured interviews with staff who volunteered to participate in the interviews. For the purpose of clarity in this thesis the questionnaire is named the teacher questionnaire (Appendix Nine) and was distributed to all the teaching staff in the school, including the special educational needs assistants and guidance counsellors.

Four hundred and sixty-seven hard copy questionnaires were distributed to the families in the school through the class tutor system. Class tutors met their form class every day for registration and this time was ordinarily used for announcements and distribution of communications from the school to students' parents. The questionnaire and supporting documentation formed part of a

package of communication (including other school related correspondence) from the school to parents on the day of distribution. I was provided with class lists by the school and the number of families were identified by the school. Each family received one questionnaire and were invited to complete the questionnaire and return it through their child who returned it to the class teacher at a designated time. I collected the questionnaires at the school. For the purpose of clarity, the questionnaire was designed to elicit information about the family but as it was to be completed by the Parent(s) it is described in this thesis as the Parent Questionnaire (Appendix Five). The students returned the completed questionnaires (n=188) through the class tutor system and I collected the questionnaires from the main office in the school where they were deposited by each class teacher. The Principal appointed a liaison teacher to work with me in relation to all aspects of carrying out the research in the school and that teacher communicated with the class teachers directly in person and assisted me to ensure that I received the completed questionnaires in a timely manner and as planned. It was communicated to the class teachers that participation in the research was voluntary for the families. A date was communicated to the parents regarding the collection of the questionnaires and the majority of the questionnaires were returned on that date. I did not list an additional return date but some questionnaires were returned after the stipulated return date. These were collected and collated by the class teachers and I collected them directly from the school after the liaison teacher contacted me to inform me that additional questionnaires had been returned.

The Teacher Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the school in spaces that were non-adjacent to the teaching spaces or social spaces. Participating teachers had provided me with their individual contact details and I contacted each of the participants by telephone to arrange their interview and I sent a text message to confirm the interview time. The teachers attended their interviews individually at different allocated timeslots. The interviews were all electronically recorded (using a Zoom, H2 Handy Recorder and SD card) and the recordings were then transcribed from the wav files into a Word document.

The Student Focus Groups were conducted at the school in spaces that were non-adjacent to the teaching spaces. I organised the timeslots for the focus groups which were conducted over a number of days (n=3) in consultation with the liaison teacher. I contacted the parents of the students participating in the Focus Groups (n= 27) by telephone in advance of the focus groups

and notified them of the time of the focus group slot for their son/daughter. The liaison teacher arranged for the students to be released from classes at the designated times. The Focus Groups were electronically recorded onto an SD card and were then transcribed from wav files into a Word document.

The researcher generated visual records were created by me during a school day. I had previously walked around the school buildings and grounds and identified spaces within the school and outside the building that were of interest to me and were relevant to the research questions. By agreement with the Principal I recorded the images as the daily classes were taking place and when there were no students or staff on the corridors of the school. I used a Nikon D80 Digital SLR camera using a Nikon D series lens in auto mode to capture all of the school visual records. My brief (agreed with the Principal) for capturing still photographs included social spaces, teaching spaces (empty), recreational spaces, external facilities, parking areas, school entrances. I did not capture teaching spaces or classrooms where students were being taught. An inventory of the visual records captured is included in Appendix Fifteen.

The student visual diaries were captured by the students (n=4) using Samsung S1070 digital cameras using a 1 GB SD card. The students captured the images after the focus groups were conducted. I made the students aware of the visual diary phase at the end of the focus group. Students volunteered to participate in this phase of the research. Students were requested to capture up to 10 still photographs using the digital camera of spaces in their homes that represented for them a connecting space between family life and school life. Students returned the digital cameras and the SD cards to the me at the school. I met the four students together and using a laptop to view the photographs they captured (n= 19) and had a brief discussion with them about the photographs and why they had selected and included the photographs. The discussion followed a loose discussion framework (Appendix Seventeen). The discussion lasted approximately forty five minutes.

The population in my study was both complex and multi-factorial given the different subsets within the case. The diversity of the sample cohorts provided me with sources that generated rich data-sets. While my sampling strategy in the main followed a convenience sampling model I did

employ some purposive sampling in my inclusion of the Deputy Principal, Principal, Guidance Counsellor and Special Needs Assistant in order to optimise my investigation.

Figure 6.3 below illustrates the sampling processes of each phase of the research.
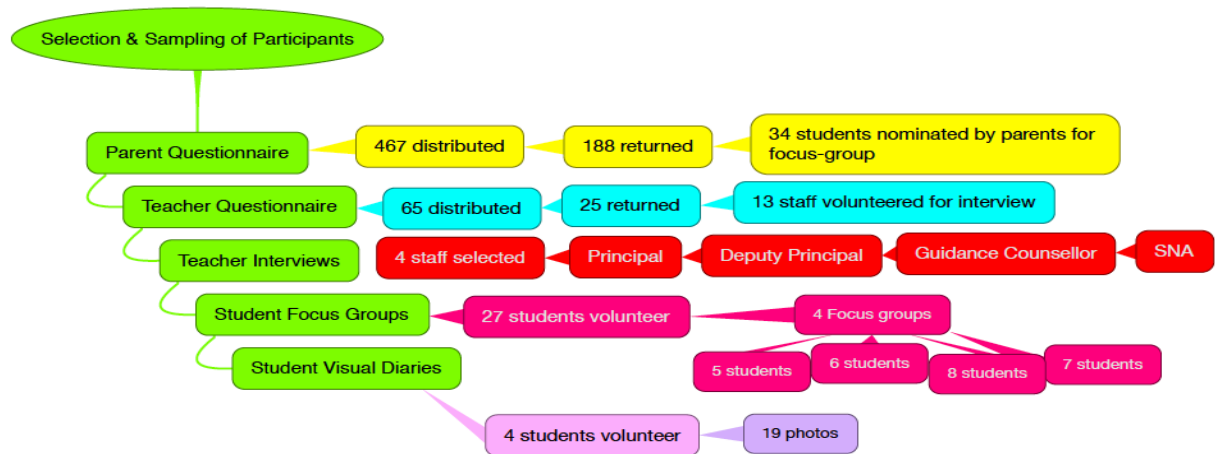
Figure 6.3 Selection and Sampling Processes

6.5 The timeline of the research process

Newby's view is that mixed-methods research is pragmatic[21] and therefore presents an opportunity for educational researchers through a multi-layered research approach through different levels of enquiry. The layering of my research methodology generated immediate timeframe implications of an extensive and drawn-out timeframe using the selected instruments to generate the data. The timeframe issue was further compounded for me as a researcher by difficulties in gaining access to a school in the first instance. Once access had been secured the

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[21] Pragmatism in a research context involves problem solving. Pragmatism originated with the American philosopher Charles Peirce in the 1870's. Mixing methods to obtain and analyse data generated by research questions may answer the research questions and as long as the answer is acceptable to the audience, mixed methods is acceptable within a pragmatic paradigm (Newby, 2010).

research process commenced and involved various stages of implementation, as described earlier in this chapter. Figure 6.4 below illustrates the timeframe of the overall research process.

Research Timeframe

- Research Timeframe
- 2. December 2009 Research Proposal submitted to BOM 2 Rejected December 2009
- 1. August 2009 Research Proposal submitted to BOM 1-Rejected November 2009
- Meetings with 3 schools
- 3. January 2010 Research Proposal submitted to BOM 3 **Accepted** January 2010
- Permission granted by BOM 3 to undertake research, January 2010. Meeting set up with school staff Feb 2010.
- Questionnaire for Teaching staff distributed 1 Mar 2010, Collected 22 March 2010
- Preliminary Analysis of Teacher Questionnaires April 2010
- Teacher Interviews May 2010
- Data Input into SPSS & Preliminary Analysis of Teacher Questionnaires July-December 2010
- Preliminary Thematic Analysis of Teacher Interview Data January 2011-April 2011
- Researcher generated Visual Records of School October 2010
- Analysis of Researcher Generated Visual Records January 2011
- Questionnaire for Parents/Families distributed 1 April 2010, Collected 30 April 2010
- Preliminary Analysis of Parent/Family Questionnaires May 2010
- Parent Interviews scheduled for June 2010, Postponed due to non-availability
- Data Input of Questionnaire Data into SPSS & Preliminary Analysis of Parent/Family Questionnaires July 2010-December 2010
- Student Focus groups x 4 February 2011
- Preliminary Analysis of Student Focus Group Data April- October 2011
- Student Visual Diaries recorded, March 2011
- Analysis of Student Visual Diaries September 2011
- Examination of Findings and Synthesis of Analysis March 2012 - June 2012 (Off Books Sep 2012- Sep 2014)
- Thesis write up, Submission December 2016

Figure 6.4 The Research Timeframe

6.6 Overview of Methodology and Methods

a) 6.6.1 Methodology of this study

As a researcher, I hold the view that methodology, approaches and methods are inextricably linked. I am cautious not to suggest that method can be reduced to technique alone, but should be considered as multiple techniques and procedures used to generate and analyse data (Blaikie, 2000) which are chosen based on a transparent and open epistemological position and in response to the research questions. I remain acutely aware of Nixon and Sikes (Sikes et al., 2003) reference to method as being a "matter of history and morality both of which inform and prescribe the epistemological assumptions underlying its application" (Sikes et al., 2003, p. 5). I am conscious therefore in my engagement in the methodology of this research study that I reveal my methodology not only as an explanation of how the research was done or as a critical analysis and appraisal of the methods of research but primarily one that is underpinned and anchored by a well-articulated rationale for undertaking the educational research in the first instance.

As a researcher, I understood that the social reality of the participants in my study was very complex and multifarious and it was this complexity which brought with it some challenging methodological implications. From a methodological perspective, it was particularly perplexing to try and attempt to understand, as well as explain, all of the participants' experiences and the situations from which they 'emerge' (Corbin et al., 2008). I am in agreement with Corbin et al (2008) when they state that " to understand experience that experience must be located within and can't be divorced from the larger events in a social, political, cultural, racial, gender-related, informational and technological framework and therefore these are essential aspects of our analyses" (Corbin et al., 2008, p. 8). In order to best describe and understand the experiences of the participants my study utilized multiple methods to generate a broad variety of data sets within what is best categorised as a case study approach (Blaikie, 2000; Creswell, 2003; Macdonald and Walker, 1975; Merriam and Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Newby, 2010; Wilson, 1979; Yin, 2014). In summary, this involved the use of questionnaires to construct a profile of the families and teachers. The data from the questionnaires was also used to form sub-samples for the focus groups, individual semi-structured interviews with school staff, and researcher and participant generated visual diaries.

b) 6.6.2 Research Design: A preamble

From a research design perspective the purpose of the research questions is to focus the study (the questions' relationship to the study goals and conceptual framework) and to guide how the study will actually be conducted (the questions' relationship to methods and validity) (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp 22-25 in Maxwell, 2013a). Yin (2014) states that the research design "is the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of the study" (Yin, 2014, p. 26). Conducting a mainly qualitative case study within the social sciences presents both design challenges and opportunities from the outset, the extent of which depend on the complexity and uniqueness of the social phenomenon being studied. I experienced many challenges in designing the case study for this study. Miles et al (2014) ask how much shape a qualitative research design should have. They are of the view that highly inductive and loosely designed studies are appropriate where researchers are exploring unfamiliar cultures, understudied phenomena or very complex social processes and have the luxury of an abundance of time, which was not appropriate in this case. They state that in the case of the researcher looking at better understood phenomena within a familiar culture or subculture and within a limited timeframe they are of the view that a tighter design is preferable (Miles et al., 2014). This represents my case study more closely. Striking a balance on the continuum between a loosely constructed design and a tighter almost confirmatory design represents the ultimate challenge for the researcher and from my experience in this study establishing an equipoise between both design types within a case study approach presented unique challenges for me as a researcher.

As a practitioner, I came to the study with background knowledge and understanding and my constructivist epistemological platform placed me within a sphere of understanding that viewed the social phenomena I had chosen to study through distinctive lenses. My conceptual framework afforded me a base from which my decision to opt for a case study approach was made. My research design emerged within the case study approach but as was the case with my research questions the definitive design in its confirmatory form was the product of many iterations and redefinitions. While an initial tighter design may have ensured more economical yields perhaps and possibly allowed for a more time-efficient model of data collection I was cautious to focus on the specific aspects of my case study and in my design, I was anxious to attend to specific

variables and constructs and the relationships between them in order to address my research questions. My attention to various sensitive details of the case pushed me to employ a variety of methods to generate data that I believed would assist me in addressing the research questions and that would construct multiple data sets that when integrated would inform my findings and my observations and recommendations from the findings.

c) 6.6.3 Focusing on the Case Study as an element of the Research Design

Case study research is one of a number of types of social science research and therefore represents one of the many research methods available to researchers (Yin, 2014). Mac Donald and Walker (1975) define the case study as the examination of an instance in action while Stake (1988) prefers to recognize the case study as the study of a bounded system. In challenging what he perceives as a commonly held misconception predicated on a view of a hierarchical array of research methods, Yin (2014) states that case studies are not only appropriate as an exploratory phase of an investigation but that as is the case for other research methods in the social sciences that the case study is also appropriate in the descriptive and explanatory phases (Yin, 2014). Gary Thomas (Thomas, 2011) counters Yin's view by stating that the case study is not a method but rather a focus with the focus on one thing (the case) that is looked at from a variety of angles. Thomas substantiates his view by concurring with Stake (2005) who declares that the;

> 'Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied…by whatever methods we use to study the case. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically of culturally, and by mixed methods, but we concentrate, at least for the time being on the case." (Stake, 2005, p. 443).

Thomas is of the view that the researcher must focus on the case while selecting methods that help inquire into the subject.

Historically the case study has been considered in a number of different ways and over time a variety and a number of definitions of the case study have emerged. Goode and Hatt (1952) provided a definition of the case study that focused on the notion of a social unit and the manner in which it is studied. They considered that the case study was not an actual technique but more a way of organizing social data "...so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being

studied…. Almost always this means of approach includes the development of the unit, which may be a person, a family or other social group…..." (Goode and Hatt, 1952, p. 331). The significance of this definition according to Blaikie (2000) is that it claims that the case study attempts "to keep together, as a unit, those characteristics which are relevant to the problem being investigated" (Goode and Hatt, 1952, p. 333 in Blaikie, 2000). Hammersley (1992) rejected the view that case studies use particular methods of data collection or particular logic of enquiry that "…set them apart from surveys and experiments…" He contended that "the same methodological issues apply to all three (case studies, surveys and experiments); the different strategies simply vary in how they deal with these issues." Hammersley believed that case studies involved "the investigation of a relatively small number of naturally occurring (rather than researcher-created cases)" (Hammersley, 1992, p. 185).

Blaikie (2000), in describing the case study refers to a perceived relationship between the case study and clinical studies in both medical and psychological settings and also to case histories as used in the social work profession. He cautions however that there are discernible differences between the case study and clinical studies or case histories. He contends that case studies may be considered as a particular type of research design; as involving the use of particular kinds of research methods, which are usually qualitative or as being a method of selecting sources of data (Blaikie, 2000). Yin (2014) describes the case study as a research method used to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena. He comments that a case study allows investigators to focus on a "case" and retain a holistic and real world perspective. Yin presents one of the most salient definitions of the case study. His definition (Yin, 2014, p. 16) considers the case study to be an empirical inquiry that

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident
- and where multiple sources of evidence are used

He further clarifies his definition while referring to his previous work (Yin & Davis, 2007), which asserts that a researcher may elect to do case study research in order to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the case. As a researcher, I have identified with and utilised Yin's

definition (Yin, 2014, p. 16) of the case study as the most relevant definition for my research study. Yin's description of case study work as a linear but iterative process (Yin, 2014) best describes the approach I have taken in this research study and I have adapted his process chart (Figure 6.4 below) to best suit my study's needs against the context of the Irish background.
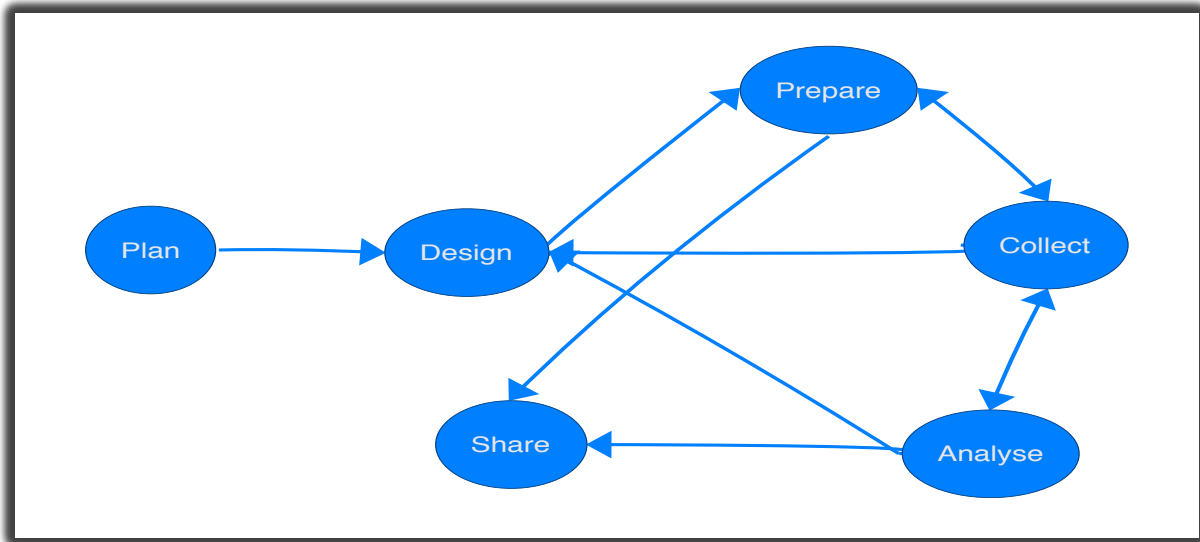
Figure 6.5 Doing case study research, a linear but iterative process (Yin, 2014)

Miles et al (2014) define a case study as being "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" with the case being the unit of analysis.
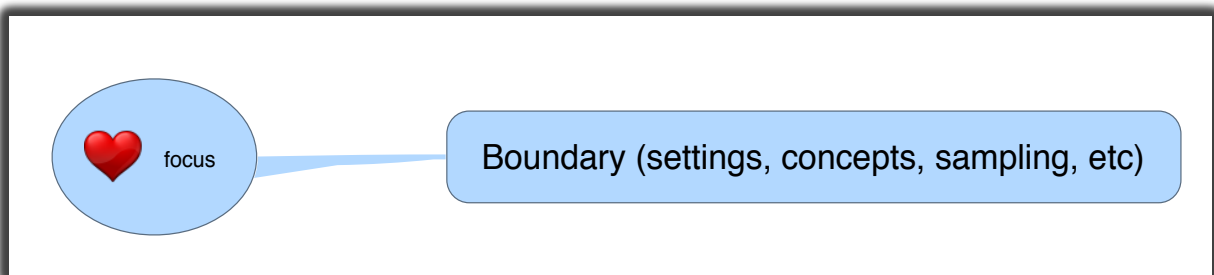
Figure 6.6 The Case as the Unit of Analysis (Adapted from Miles, M. B, & Huberman, A.M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (2nd edition) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications in Miles et al., 2014)

The boundary determines what will and will not be studied and may be defined further by "sampling operations" which determine exactly who will be interviewed, surveyed or asked to complete questionnaires. Bounding also includes and defines the timeframe of the actual data

gathering in the study. The focus of this study concerns everything within the phenomenon being studied (Family and School cultural capital) as one main case (holistic) rather than a number of smaller cases (multiple case-studies) that make up the overall case. The possibility of having one holistic case with embedded subcases within the overall holistic case (Yin, 2014) is also an option for consideration when opting for a case study approach but I have opted for the holistic case.

Creswell (2008) provides a similar definition for the case study as a single bounded entity, studied in detail, with a variety of methods, over a period of time. Merriam (1998) offers a definition that draws on the notion of the case study producing an *end* product. Her definition also draws on Wolcott's definition (1992) which also focuses on the "end-product of field-oriented research" (in LeCompte et al., 1992, p. 36) as opposed to a research method or a research strategy. The concept of an end product elicits a connotation of a process that may reveal a causal explanation for the phenomenon being studied. Merriam (Merriam and Merriam, 1998) cites two associated meanings of process within a case study situation; firstly that process is a form of monitoring; and secondly of process as a causal explanation. From an epistemological perspective however, an interpretivist approach as articulated by Silverman (2013) indicates that we cannot understand cultural phenomena in causal terms because of the sheer complexity of viewpoints, cultural backgrounds and values within the social reality of what we are studying.

In the same way that there are many definitions of the case study itself there are also a myriad of definitions of the types of case studies. Case studies may be recognized by significant features. Eckstein (1975) presents a five-way classification of case studies founded in their use in theory development. These classifications include; configurative-ideographic studies, disciplined–comparative studies, heuristic case studies, plausibility probes and crucial-case studies. Merriam (1998) alludes to three types of case study; particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Particularistic case studies focus on a specific event or situation and are useful for practical problems that arise in everyday practice. Descriptive case studies generate a rich and complete description of the entity being investigated while heuristic case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the problem (Merriam and Merriam, 1998). On the basis of the foregoing discussion I opted to work within a heuristic case as it was the most appropriate to address the research questions and best suited the context.

6.6.4 The case study in this research study.

Having distilled the methodological options available to me to best examine and investigate the research topic and with specific reference to the theoretical evidence regarding case studies I set about designing the shape of my research. Yin in his publication "Case Study Research Design and Methods" (2014) proposes the case study design as the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to the research questions and thereafter to its conclusions. He claims that;

> Colloquially, a research design *is a logical plan for getting from here to there* where *here* may be defined as an initial set of questions and *there* is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Between *here* and *there* may be found a number of major steps, including the collection and analysis of relevant data.(Yin, 2014, p. 28).

 The research design for this study was constructed with reference to Philliber et al (1980) who refer to four considerations to be made in the research design, which include; what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect and how to analyse the results. In galvanising my research design I also drew on the five components of research design utilised by Yin (2014);

1. Case-study questions
2. It's propositions (if any)
3. It's unit of analysis- the case
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions
5. Criteria for interpreting the findings.

as illustrated in figure 6.5 below. The structure for this case study has followed a linear-analytical (Yin, 2014) approach and is in the main, descriptive in character
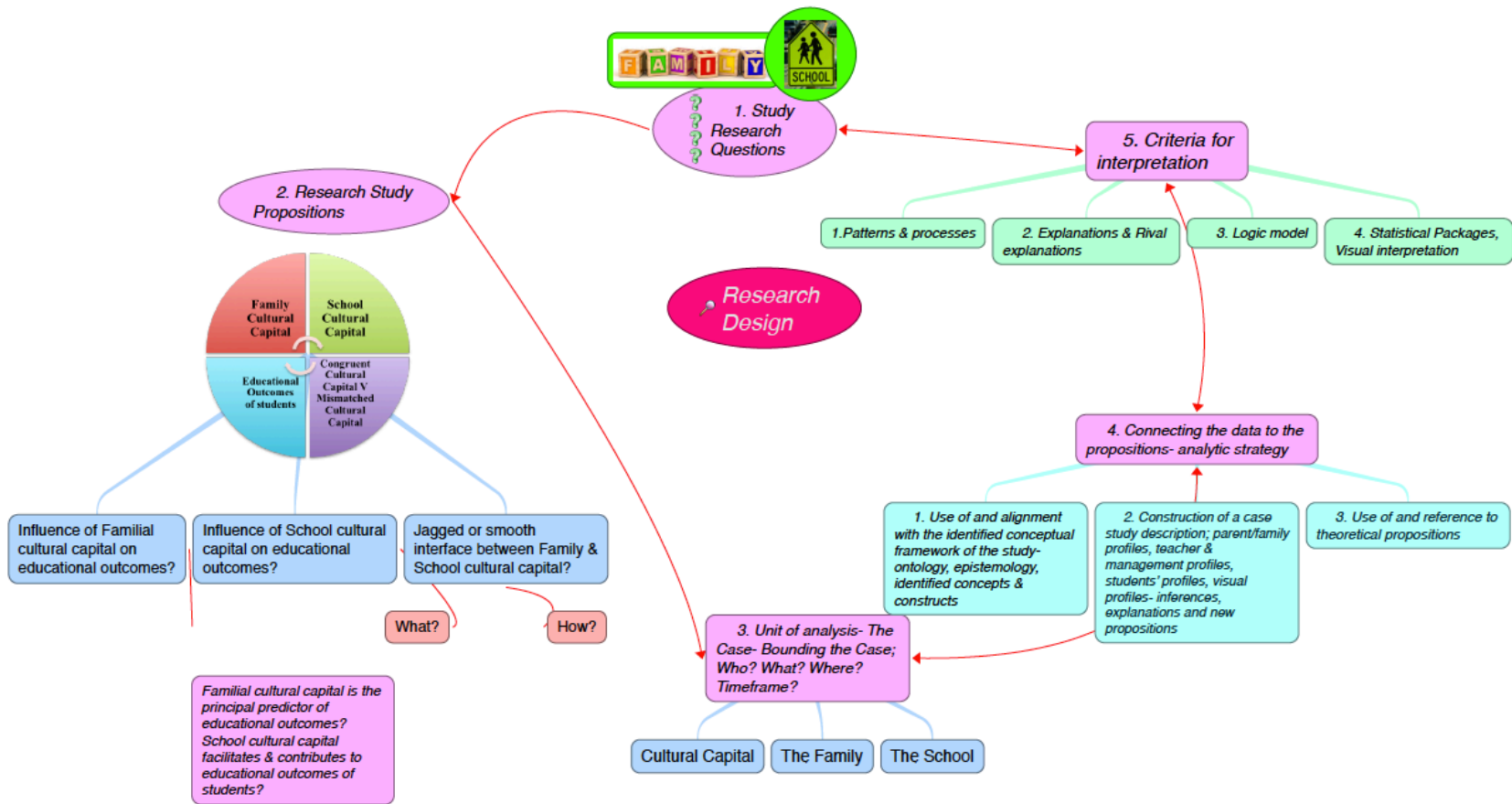
Figure 6.7 Study Research Design (model adapted from Yin

While there are many definitions of the case study the definition that I have drawn on in this study focuses primarily around the notion that the case study concerns itself with a piece of research that restricts itself to the object of study or the phenomenon, namely the case. In this study, I have opted for an overall holistic case; cultural capital within the family and within the school and its influence on educational outcomes with a number of associated embedded subcases; the family, the school, family-school links and connections. Yin originally observed (1994) that the case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. This view was and is also held by a number of writers (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Macdonald and Walker, 1975; Wilson, 1979; Yin, 2014) whose thinking is aligned to Yin's thinking (1994) with regards to the suitability of the case study. This was the case in my research as the study propositions of family cultural capital, school cultural capital, educational outcomes and congruent and mismatched capital underpinned the context of the case but were in actual fact variables within the context. These study propositions became the unit of analysis and assisted me in deciphering what bounded the case and what data was relevant, what data I needed to collect and how to analyse the results (Philliber et al, 1980) in order to address the research questions. Following a number of drafts of the initial design of the research (Figure 6.5) I proceeded to select the most appropriate methods to enable me to examine the case at a practical level.

6.7 Empirical elements of this methodology

a) 6.7.1 The Research Process and Instrumentation

Creswell (2015) takes the stance of looking at mixed methods as a method in itself, giving it a distinct methods orientation in which data generation, analysis and interpretation "hold center (sic) stage" (Creswell, 2015). He further defines mixed methods as:

> An approach to research in the social, behavioural and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems. (Creswell, 2015, p. 2)

My study utilises a relatively small amount of quantitative data (evidenced in the Parent and Teacher Questionnaires) to build a contextual background against which the qualitative data from the student focus groups, teaching staff and school management interviews and the visual records is embedded in a layered presentation of findings and subsequent analysis which address the research questions. Newby (2010) focuses on the concept of the research paradigm as a way of thinking about a particular subject and researching that subject in a way that will be accepted by people working in that area. Newby's thinking in relation to a paradigmatic approach is further accentuated when he states that within a paradigmatic approach both purpose and process are widely agreed within a discipline or as part of a discipline and "that what is delivered through research enables researchers to understand the world more effectively" (Newby, 2010, p. 44). The concept of a paradigm as espoused by Thomas Kuhn (1962) brings with it an understanding of operating within a set of rules of a scientific nature. It is important to recognise that my research does not follow a causal paradigm that attempts to generate theory from the data yet follows a heuristic approach characterised by an inductive-deductive methodology that is guided by a pragmatic theoretical framework. Paradigms may also be considered on a small scale and are applicable in educational research where evidence of competing paradigms or paradigms that co-exist offer opportunities for educational researchers to research issues by utilizing appropriate "rules" and procedures that have become models of good practice (Newby, 2010).

There are a variety of methods of data collection possible in qualitative research which include observations, textual or visual analysis (eg from books or videos) and interviews (individual or group)(Silverman, 2013). The next sections identify the empirical methods used to generate the data for this thesis.

b) 6.7.2 The Questionnaire

Questionnaires are amongst the most popular of data gathering instruments (Newby, 2010). Creswell (2003) describes the questionnaire as a research instrument which can be best used to focus the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 108). The questionnaires in this study were the primary research instrument used during the research process and were created with the intention of generating data that would set the background context of the family perspective and the teacher perspective against which the student data would be embedded. In designing the questionnaires I referred to Newby's classifications on information types and questions types

(Newby, 2010) as I sought to access the information I considered that would be useful to me as a researcher to assist me to answer my research questions. I found the following categories, presented in table 6. 4 of information and question types (Newby, 2010) useful in my construction of the questionnaires;

Information type	Question Type
Factual knowledge	Closed & Open questions. Eg; age, behaviour, events of experience. Knowledge
Understanding	Conjecture (Why do you think that happened?)
Schemas and mental constructs	Give examples, assess situations, open and closed questions
Analysis	Explain choices, preferences or explore alternatives
Implementation of ideas: capability and values in action	"How would you?, What would happen if? What is the best way?
Values and Judgements	Exposing people's judgements, exploting their judgements. Express agreement or disagreement.

Table 6.2 Information types and Question types in Questionnaires (Newby, 2010)

The wording of the questions presented a challenge for me as a researcher as I was conscious of the potential diversity of the respondent groups' command of language and vocabulary, their familiarity with educational terminology and their appreciation of the issues/topics included in the questionnaire. I was also cognisant of my own inherent biases from a professional perspective and I endeavoured to curtail any potential bias by restricting the questions to the bare minimum without adding "additional triggers to the stimuli of the questions" (Newby, 2010)

c) 6.7.3 The Parent Questionnaire
d)
Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire on behalf of each family in the school (n= 467).

The parent questionnaire was piloted initially with a group of twenty-five parents of students attending a different school. All families were sent a questionnaire and each family who chose to

participate for the next stages of the research process were include in a random selection of participants.

One hundred and eighty-eight families returned the questionnaires representing a 40% rate of return on the baseline questionnaire. From the questionnaires that were returned, ten parents indicated that they wished to participate in a semi-structured interview and thirty-four parents indicated that they consented to their children participating in a focus group interview. When I contacted the ten parents only three parents were prepared to participate in an interview and I took a methodological decision at that point not to proceed with the parent interviews on the basis that three parents would not be representative of the parent cohort and I was confident that I had secured significant information about the families from the returned Parent Questionnaires (Appendix Five) (n= 188).

e) 6.7.4 The Piloting Phase of the Parent Questionnaire

The purpose of the piloting phase of the parent/family questionnaire was to test the usability and the structure of the questionnaire focusing on interpretation for parents. As the questionnaire was very long and asked respondents to complete a variety of both open and closed ended questions it was challenging at the outset to estimate the approximate time it might have taken parents to complete the questionnaire. This single challenge resulted in several iterations of the questionnaire being drafted as I had to restructure and refocus both the question types, the question topics and the actual questions a number of times before finally settling on the final version. After several iterations, the pilot study respondents (after three attempts at completion of the questionnaire) completed the questionnaire without challenge within an approximate timeframe of twenty minutes. Nonetheless a proportion of the case study respondents experienced some challenges in the interpretation of ranking question no.9 (i, ii), question 10 (i, ii and iii) and question 19 (extra-curricular ranking question). The pilot phases influenced the actual questions and question types that were finalised in the final version of the questionnaire distributed to respondents in the case study school. The questionnaire was also designed bearing in mind that I had decided to use SPSS as a statistical package to analyse the questionnaire data. I was mindful therefore to included closed questions offering respondents a number of defined response choices. I also included open questions that used likert type scales. I avoided questions types that were; long and complex, double negatives, double-barrelled, jargon, abbreviated,

leading or emotionally loaded (Pallant, 2013) to ensure as much clarity as possible within the questionnaire. I have included findings and revisions to the questionnaires from the pilot phases in a section of both chapters eight and night where the overall thesis findings are presented.

f) 6.7.5 The Administration of the Parent Questionnaire

Prior to the administration of the Parent Questionnaire I met and spoke with both the Principal and the liaison teacher as to how best to administer the questionnaires to optimize response rates given that the parent questionnaire would be the biggest sample taken during the research process. The data from the parent questionnaire would also be as a baseline data set against which the student data would be contextualised. The administration of the questionnaires therefore necessitated prudent planning and organization while applying the highest ethical standards to the operation. The school were very helpful and both assisted and facilitated me at all stages of the administration of the parent questionnaires. The Principal and liaison teacher suggested using the class teacher system to facilitate the distribution of the questionnaires. Class teachers met their individual classes (n=26) for a short registration period each school day and this timeframe was utilized by the school to take a roll call of attendance, to make announcements to disseminate information and to distribute correspondence to parents/guardians. The liaison teacher suggested picking a day that there was a package of correspondence due to be distributed to parents and that the Parent questionnaire and accompanying letter should be part of that package from the school. The Principal had previously advised parents that I had been granted permission by school management to carry out the research at the school and gave the parents a brief outline of what the research would entail for parents and students. There was therefore an expectation at that point from parents with regards to the research. It was also agreed that sending the questionnaire and researcher's letter from the school and with other school documentation communicated the approval of the school and an endorsement of the research process. The distribution of the questionnaire and letter in this way ensured a smooth and seamless distribution of the questionnaires. Class teachers had been advised that because participation in the research was entirely voluntary that they should remind the students to return the completed questionnaires to the school by the date listed but that in it was the parents' prerogative as to whether or not to complete the questionnaire. The students returned questionnaires in sealed envelopes over the period of time between the distribution of the questionnaires and the date listed for return on the questionnaire. The

questionnaires were collected by the class teachers and returned to a secured box in the main office where they were stored in the strong room until I collected them. Some additional questionnaires were returned after the date and the liaison teacher contacted me to say that there were additional questionnaires returned which I subsequently collected.

The administration of the questionnaires involved a significant amount of planning and vigilance which was very much enhanced and enabled by the close cooperation of the Principal and liaison teacher who were keen to facilitate the research in any way possible.

g) 6.7.6 Organisation of the Parent Questionnaire

In the initial written correspondence to the Board of Management and Principal of the case study school (Appendix Two and Appendix Three) I clarified that it was my intention to distribute and administer a questionnaire to all families in the school and to distribute and administer a questionnaire to teaching staff and management in the school. At the time of distribution of the questionnaires I also wrote to the parents (Appendix Four) to clarify my research intentions and to explain the purpose of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was presented to parents in a hard copy booklet format and had been professionally printed. I designed the questionnaire with reference to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2010) SES classifications. The questionnaire was organised into seven sections as follows;

Section One: You and your Family, Question 1- Question 11

Section Two: Your *Participation* as a *parent* in your child's education, Question 11- Question 14

Section Three: Advice on Educating your child, Question 15

Section Four: What you as a parent feel is *important* about *choosing* a post primary school, Question 16

Section Five: What you feel is important to you as a parent that a school ***should*** provide or be like for your child(ren). (Please note that later questions will ask you about your *actual* experience as a parent of the school) Question 17.

Section Six: *Your* **experience** of being involved in this School as a parent/guardian. Question 18.

Section Seven: Family Life and Education. Question 19.

I made my contact details available to respondents in the event that they had any questions or required any clarification about the questionnaire.

Four hundred and sixty-seven questionnaires were distributed to parents and one hundred and eighty-eight were returned. I address the findings from the questionnaires and the analysis of the data in chapter eight of the thesis.

h) 6.7.7 The Teacher Questionnaire

Twenty five of the sixty teaching staff and one of the five SNAs completed and returned teacher/staff questionnaires. The teacher questionnaire (Appendix Nine) had been piloted with eight teachers in another school. Thirteen teachers and one Special Needs Assistant volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews. I randomly selected four teaching staff from the thirteen teachers for the semi-structured interviews.

i) 6.7.8 The Piloting Phase of the Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire was piloted with eight teachers in a different school of a similar ethos and organisational structure. A number of questions from the original teacher questionnaire were amended after receiving feedback from teachers in the pilot study group. The main amendments focused on the organisation of the questionnaire, the number of questions asked and subsequent length of the questionnaire and the wording in some of the questions.

j) 6.7.9 Administration of the Teacher Questionnaire

I made my research intentions known to the staff at the staff meeting which I attended in February 2010. Staff were therefore aware in advance that I planned to distribute a questionnaire for completion as a first phase of sampling of staff and that I intended to conduct semi-structured interviews with staff who completed the questionnaire and self-selected for inclusion in the interview process. With the agreement of the Principal I visited the staff room of the school to familiarise myself with the timetables and the phases of the school day in advance of the distribution of the teacher questionnaire. I distributed the teacher questionnaires during a morning break when the majority of staff were simultaneously gathered at that time together in the staff room. I explained to the staff about the questionnaire and how to complete it. I made my

contact details available to staff in the event that they had any questions or required any clarification about the questionnaire. I had listed a return date on the questionnaire and I asked staff to return the questionnaires by that date. The liaison teacher facilitated the collection and safe storage of the returned questionnaires and I collected them from the school after the return date.

k) 6.7.10 Organisation of the Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire (Appendix Nine) was accompanied by a letter (Appendix Eight) to the staff explaining the purpose of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was presented in hard copy format and had been professionally printed. The questionnaire was distributed in the staff room and I collected the completed questionnaires from a designated space in the staff room on a specified date. The questionnaire included my contact details. The teacher questionnaire was organised as follows;

Section One: Professional details. Question 1 to Question 4 (Gender, Age, Years of experience, current employment status)

Section Two: Professional qualifications. Question 5 to Question 9.

Section Three: Subjects and hours taught. Question 10 to Question 11

Section Three: Post of Responsibility. Question 12 to Question 14

Section Four: Teaching Subject departments. Question 15 to Question 18

Section Five: Characteristics which could be associated with your school. Question 19 to Question 20.

l) 6.7.11 The Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview fits between the questionnaire (where there is no freedom to deviate) and the evolving interview (which has known goals but not necessarily any known or expected end points). (Newby, 2010, p. 340). Creswell (2003, pp 186-7) notes however that the interview is time consuming, takes a lot of organising and has the potential for indirect information processed through the views of the interviewees. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Silverman, 2013). I utilised the semi-structured interviews as the second stage of sampling of the school staff following on from the teacher questionnaire. King and Horrocks (2012) refer to qualitative interviewing

within an interpretive perspective which allows participants to describe aspects of the social world by offering a detailed account of specific social settings, social processes or relationships. They also note that interpretivism is seldom straight forward as people participate in indeterminate lifeworlds, often attaching different interpretations and meanings to seemingly similar "facts" and events (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 12).

The semi-structured interview differs to the structured interview in that it has a loosely designed interview schedule/guide and includes the themes to be introduced during the interview. The interview guide is structured to reflect the research questions and collect data on an indicator that can be used to answer the research questions (Newby, 2010, p. 340). The interview itself is an interactional relationship, both informant and interviewer are engaged in an ongoing process of making meaning (Kvale, 1996 in Green et al., 2006, p. 357). Aligned to the educational disciplinary frame of cultural anthropology interviewing has been seen as one source of information about the "multitudinous aspects of life in society including behaviours, attitudes, belief and material culture (Green et al., 2006, p. 358). Hammersley and Atkinson make the point that in order for the interview is as productive as possible, researchers must possess a repertoire of skills and techniques to ensure that comprehensive and representative data are collected during the interview (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2010). In line with the above mentioned and with due regard for the participants in my case study I opted to conduct semi-structured interviews with the teaching staff and the school management in order to better understand the cultural capital of the school in the case study.

m) 6.7.12 The Teacher semi-structured interview

Thirteen of the teaching staff volunteered to be interviewed. I conducted interviews with eight employees of the school, namely; teaching staff (n=4), Guidance Counsellor (n=1), SNA (n=1), Deputy Principal (n=1) and Principal (n=1). I purposely selected one SNA, one Guidance Counsellor, the Deputy Principal and Principal to participate in the semi-structured interviews. All interviewees were interviewed using the same interview schedule (Appendix Eleven) which was guided by the research questions and by the responses received in the initial teacher questionnaires. As the interviews were semi-structured interviews there was a degree of flexibility open to me as the researcher to probe further on some of the answers from interviewees. This led to rich data beyond the data of the questionnaire being generated. All interviews were electronically recorded and the recordings were transcribed from wav files to

Word documents. The findings from the transcriptions are presented in chapter eight and are analysed in chapter ten. The semi-structured interviews lasted forty-five minutes each.

n) 6.7.13 The Piloting Phase

The Interview schedule was piloted with seven teachers in another school. There were a number of amendments made to the initial interview schedule draft arising from the feedback from the teachers who participated in the pilot phase. Findings from the pilot phase of the teacher interviews are presented in chapter eight of this thesis

o) 6.7.14 The Administration of the Teacher Semi-structured interviews

The teacher semi-structured interviews were conducted in a non-teaching space, which was non-adjacent to the school. The interviews were conducted over the course of three consecutive days. I contacted each of the participants in advance of the interviews to confirm their attendance at interview. Consent forms were completed prior to the interviews and I also asked for consent at the beginning of the interview, this was then transcribed into the interview transcripts. On the day of the interviews I arrived at the interview spaces in advance of the interviewees and I set up the space, checked the recording equipment and the interview schedule guide. I carried out a trial recording and checked that it had recorded appropriately before commencing the interviews. When the interviews were completed I copied the wav files to my laptop and backed them up on the passport drive. All the files were password protected.

p) 6.7.15 Organisation of Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were organised into sections which elaborated further on questions asked in the teacher questionnaires. The sections were as follows;

Section One: Teaching Subjects and teaching experience.

Section Two: School systems and hierarchies within the school and links to families.

Section Three: Parents/Families Participation in the school.

q) 6.7.16 Focus Groups

The focus group offered me the opportunity to explore the viewpoints and attitudes of the student participants within a group discussion. The students were the participant group I was most interested to engage with as I wanted to understand the meanings and norms that underpinned

their group answers (Bloor et al, 2001, pp42-43). Focus groups involve small groups of people with particular characteristics convened for a focused discussion of a particular topic (Krueger and Casey 2000 in Hollander, 2004). Morgan classifies focus groups into three possibilities; firstly as a self-contained method in which they serve as the primary source of data, secondly as a supplementary source of data in studies that rely on some other primary method such as a survey or thirdly as used in multimethod studies that combine two or more methods of gathering data. (Morgan, 1997). This study was a multi-method study and the use of the focus groups added to the data generated through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnography. Kreuger and Casey describe the focus group as being used to gather opinions to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product or service (Krueger and Casey, 2009). They go on to identify five characteristics of focus groups that relate to the composition of the focus group;

- People, who
- Possess certain characteristics
- Provide qualitative data
- In a focused discussion
- To help understand the topic of interest

Morgan refers to the fundamental difference between the focus group and the interview as being on the reliance on interaction within the focus group between the participants themselves, not just between interviewer and interviewee based on the topics supplied by the researcher who takes the role of the moderator (Morgan, 1997).

r) 6.7.17 The Student Focus Groups

The focus group followed a structured schedule (Appendix Fourteen) that had been designed with reference to the responses from the parent questionnaires.

s) 6.7.18 The Piloting Phase

The pilot focus group was conducted three weeks in advance of the main focus groups. A number of issues for clarification emerged after the pilot phase. The main issue to be addressed was the timing and managing the timing of the focus group. As the moderator, it was important

that I maintained strict time management within the focus group in order to address all the planned sections and after the pilot I had to amend the time allotted to each section of the focus group to facilitate better and more precise timing. Another issue that presented was the language I had planned initially was challenging for some of the younger students, necessitating a revision of the language of the prompts and questions. The other issue that required attention was the actual organisation of the focus groups from a participant-age perspective. It was difficult in the pilot to include all the students in the discussion as some of the younger students were shy and did not wish to speak in front of the older students. The age range in the pilot focus group was too broad and noting this I re-organised the participants for the main focus groups into two groups of Junior Cycle and two groups of Senior cycle students. The pilot focus group included seven participants, four girls and three boys. This mix worked reasonably well in terms of interaction between the boys and the girls albeit that the older participants contributed more and spoke more often that the younger participants.

t) 6.7.19 The Administration of the Focus groups

Of the thirty-four families that indicated that they consented to their children participating in focus groups twenty-seven students consented to participating. The students were divided between four focus groups on the basis of age and year-group. Junior cycle students and Senior cycle students did not participate in the same focus groups. The focus groups consisted of four groups of five, six, eight and seven students in each of the four groups. Focus groups lasted for approximately forty-five minutes each and were conducted in spaces away from the main teaching space of the school. These spaces offered privacy, confidentiality and an uninterrupted setting. The liaison teacher assisted me in setting up the focus groups at the school. I contacted the parents of the students in advance of each focus group to confirm their attendance. Students completed and submitted consent forms (Appendix Thirteen) prior to each focus group. I moderated the focus groups and each focus group was electronically recorded. After each focus group the wav sound files were copied to my laptop and were backed up on a passport drive. All files were password protected.

u) 6.7.20 Organisation of the Focus Group Interviews

The case study focus groups were conducted on the school premises in a setting that was away from the main teaching spaces of the school. The focus groups were gender balanced. The focus group facilitator is one of the most critical factors influencing the effectiveness and usefulness of focus groups (Schuman, 2005). I acted as the moderator/facilitator in the focus groups. While this afforded me a first-hand experience of the interactions of the focus groups it was challenging to remain objective in the dual role of facilitator/researcher. I worked with a pre-designed schedule that was sectioned to organise the focus group as follows;

Section One: Introductions

Section Two: confidentiality discussion

Section Three: Rules of engagement of the focus group

Section Four: Icebreaker- students were given sticky notes and pens to identify 3 things they like about the school and 3 things that they dislike.

Section Five: Memories, thoughts and expectations of school

Section Six: How the school community engages each other

Section Seven: What changes students might make to school

Section Eight: Student goals

Section Nine: "in class" and "out of class"

Section Ten: Future things to look forward to for students and concerns for students

Section Eleven: Conclusion

v) 6.7.21 Visual records

Banks (2001) reminds us that the production and use of visual images in empirical, field-based research needs to be understood as one and only one of several methods that a social researcher might employ. That said, the ubiquitous nature of visual technologies affords researchers additional opportunities to generate rich data that may assist in addressing the research questions of a study. Mitchell (2011) alludes to the fact that there is no quick or easy way to work out the interpretive processes in working with visual material but she acknowledges that there is no

quick or easy way of mapping out the interpretive processes for working with any type of research data. I opted to include visual methods in this thesis to augment the text based and verbal data generated and to offer the participants an opportunity to engage reflexively with the data. Mitchell notes that visual images offer the researcher an opportunity to draw in the participants to become central in the interpretive process. "Photovoice" enables participants to be engaged in their own analytic procedures with the photos (Mitchell, 2011).

w) 6.7.22 Researcher generated Visual Records

The research questions determined the researcher generated images I sought to capture. I was interested as a researcher to capture additional data variables that were relevant to the research questions and that augmented the data previously generated by the questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews. My interest lay in the internal and external narratives of the still images of the school buildings and grounds and how the narratives explicated the cultural capital of the school. I applied the concepts of denotation and connotation (Barthes, 1981) in the construction and the analysis of the images (which I describe in more detail in chapter eight). Sweetman (2009) observes that using visual methods can be helpful to operationalise a concept which may be difficult otherwise to uncover or investigate. Visual methods were most appropriate for the investigation of the complex concept of cultural capital that was laden with latent invisibility.

x) 6.7.22 The Pilot phase

I piloted the generation of researcher visual records at a different school of a similar size and with a similar enrolment. I applied the same conditions as I intended to apply at the site of the case study school. There were a number of technical adjustments made to original shooting resolution. As some of the images were captured indoors I had to adjust the flash on the camera to produce a better quality indoor shot than I generated outdoors. I also timed the length of time it took to capture between eighty-five and one hundred shots of the inside and outside of the school bearing in mind that I would be restricted to only take shots when the students and staff in the case study school were in class and with no one on the corridors. I had to factor in additional time for this and also the possibility of having to take a number of photographs of any one image to ensure that I got the best quality shot.

y) 6.7.23 Organisation of the researcher generated visual records

The researcher generated images are presented in Appendix Fifteen of the thesis. The images presented in the appendix represent at least one photograph of each identified still aspect of the case study school. Prior to taking photographs at the case study school I walked the inside and the outside of the school and identified areas of interest relative to the research questions.

z) 6.7.24 The Student Visual Diaries

This segment of the research represents an extension of the student focus groups. My intention was to engage the students in a reflexive "photovoice" exercise whereby they would capture still images of spaces at their homes that represented a connecting space between the home and the school. They would then get an opportunity in the small focus group to describe and discuss the photographs that they had generated and to opine on why they had chosen the spaces, what the spaces meant to them and how they saw the spaces as connecting home and school. Rose (2014) reminds us that conducting interviews with participant generated visual material is helpful in exploring what otherwise might be seen as "taken-for granted" aspects of their lives. The diaries revealed the students' habitus relative to their dispositions towards school and schooling.

aa) 6.7.25 The Piloting Phase of the Student Visual Diaries

I had piloted this phase of the research with two students who attended another post primary school in advance. There were some changes to the language of the instruction given to the students after the pilot phase but overall the students from the pilot phase did not experience any major challenges in carrying out the task of taking the photos or in the small focus group after wards which used a topic guide for the discussion.

bb) 6.7.26 The Administration of the student Visual Diaries

Twenty-seven students participated in the focus groups and arising from their participation four students volunteered to take up to ten still photographs of spaces in their homes that represented a connecting space between family life and school life using an SD card inserted into a Digital camera provided by me as the researcher. Students were asked to return the cameras and SD

cards to me through the school. Parents were advised of this aspect of the research in a letter (Appendix Twelve) prior to the focus groups. Students and parents completed consent forms (Appendix Thirteen) prior to this phase of the research.

cc) 6.7.27 Organisation of the student Visual Diaries Task

The purpose of the visual diaries task was for the students to capture some still images of spaces in their homes that represented a connection between school and their home. As a researcher, I was interested to investigate what constituted a family-school connection in the view of the four students themselves. The students were simply asked to capture up to ten still images of "spaces" in their homes that represented a connection for them between home and school. The students were given a digital camera with charged batteries and an SD card in each camera. Students and their parents signed a consent form prior to being issued with the cameras. The students brought back the cameras with SD cards on an agreed date and I met the four students for a small focus group related to the photographs. The discussion was guided by a loosely designed topic guide (Appendix Seventeen) and focused on giving the students the opportunity to articulate their reasons for choosing the photographs and why the photographs represented a connection between family life and school life for them. The use of pictures/photographs provided a common stimulus for each "interviewee" (Newby, 2010) which focused the discussion relative to the research questions.

6.8 Gatekeepers, Access and Ethical Issues

This study was informed and guided by the Trinity College Dublin Ethical Guidelines for Post-Graduate Research Code. This code of ethics acted to guide and scaffold my research practice and provided me with a set of principles against which I designed and developed the research process in its entirety. I was conscious at all stages of the research of Flick's (2007) advice in which he highlights that ethics in qualitative research is not only important at the stage of data generation but that it is essential at all stages from the beginning to the end of the research process. I was at all times keen to ensure that I worked in a responsible and ethical manner with each participant in the research study and I was especially ethically vigilant when working with students who were under eighteen years of age. The students were the greater focus of my research interest and this necessitated strict and transparent ethical research protocols at all phases of the research. I was of course equally concerned with maintaining appropriate ethical

protocols with all participants but I was extra vigilant when working with students, all of whom were under the age of eighteen years. I was at all times conscious of maintaining my ethical probity throughout the study and I observed four main ethical principles during the research. These principles guided me at all times but were especially useful when I had to deal with a number of ethical dilemmas that presented at different phases of the research. The ethical principles I prioritised included;

1. Confidentiality
2. Informed Consent
3. Non-malfeasance
4. Beneficence

Prior to the initiation of the actual research I had pre-empted a number of potential research predicaments that might have arisen with various participants at different phases of the research process on the basis of previous research work. From a practitioner's perspective, I was acutely aware of potential ethical quandaries that had previously presented for me while working with Parents, Teachers and Students and I utilised the identified ethical principles above to assist me to make sound ethical decisions in relation to the study methodology and design of the research instruments.

I initially visited the proposed research schools in person to meet with the Principal by appointment. The purpose of the meetings was to outline the proposed research, to provide information regarding the research topic and proposed methodology and to enquire about school policies, procedures and protocols for external facilitators/researchers carrying out work in the school. During the course of the preliminary phases of the research I visited three schools in total as I sought permission to carry out the research in each of the schools. In the first school, I visited (August 2009) the Principal indicated at the outset that they were open to such research being carried out in the school, however when the research proposal was brought to the Board of Management it was rejected and I was not granted permission to carry out the research in the first school. I approached the school at the beginning of the school year and I received confirmation that the proposal was rejected in mid- November, 2009. I then proceeded to contact another school but unfortunately my research proposal was also rejected by the Board of Management of that school (December 2009). I had submitted a letter from my supervisor (Appendix One) and a letter to the Board (Appendix Two) at the time of forwarding my research

proposal to the second school, however the Board of Management did not grant permission for the research to be carried out. In January 2010, I approached the third school by writing to the Principal initially (Appendix Three) again outlining the research proposal. A meeting with the Principal followed after which I wrote to the Board of Management submitting my research proposal and outlining the nature of the research (Appendix Two). On this occasion the Board of Management supported my research proposal and granted me permission to carry out the research in the school subject to me upholding the Ethical Guidelines and procedures and protocols for external facilitators working at the school. I was invited to attend a section of a staff meeting at the school to present my research proposal to staff and to encourage staff to participate in the study.

a) 6.8.1 Confidentiality

At the initial stages of trying to secure a school setting in which I could carry out the research I maintained full confidentiality about the schools that I had invited to participate in the research despite being asked if other schools had consented to participate in the research, explaining that I was not at liberty to discuss which schools had been contacted about participation in the research.

Once a research setting was secured invitations to participate in the specific aspects of the study were formally sent in writing (hard copy) to parents, teaching staff and school management (Appendix Four and Appendix Eight) of the research school. The invitations were explicit in describing the research topic, the purpose of the research and the proposed methodology for the research. Participants were fully informed that all data generated would be securely held and kept in the strictest confidence. There was also an assurance given to participants that the school name and any individuals who participated in the study would not be identified in the research document produced at the end of the study. The importance of anonymity was maintained throughout all aspects of the data generation. Hard copy questionnaires were returned in an envelope I provided, having been sealed by the participant and I collected the questionnaires at the school in person.

Students were advised at the beginning of the focus group that everything discussed in the focus group should remain within the focus group and should not be discussed outside of the focus group (Appendix Fourteen). Students were asked not to discuss individual comments outside of the focus group. Students were advised that the focus groups would be electronically recorded

for research purposes and all recordings will be stored securely and protected by a password with only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Aligned to Child Protection guidelines students were also advised that any disclosures by students during the Focus Group interview that may have been considered as Child protection concerns may have to be reported to the relevant authority.

Individual interview participants and focus group participants were coded alphanumerically and no individuals were identified in the thesis. Participants (parents, teachers, school management and students) were informed that all digital recordings and transcriptions would be stored on a password protected laptop, having been backed up to a password protected removable passport drive and would be deleted on final completion of the research. The hard copy parent and teacher questionnaires, which do not identify either parents or teachers who completed them were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet.

b) 6.8.2 Informed Consent

The importance of informed consent was central to the participation of the research participants. I issued separate consent forms to all invited participants. Conscious of the age of the students I sought informed consent from parents initially in the parent questionnaire (Appendix Five) for their children to participate in the focus groups and I again sought their consent and the students' consent prior to the focus group (Appendix Twelve). Only students who had fully completed consent forms were admitted to participate in the focus groups (Appendix Thirteen). Participants were advised that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the research at any time if they so wished. Teachers were also issued with consent forms which they completed prior to being interviewed. Teachers were asked at the beginning of the recorded interview if they consented to being interviewed. It had been my intention to interview a small selection of parents also and I issued letters of information (Appendix Six) and consent forms (Appendix Seven) to parents with this in mind. Unfortunately, there was a very small number of responses by parents (n=10) who indicated that they were willing to participate in semi-structured interviews and only three were actually available to interview when I made further contact.

I had been granted permission by the Board of Management and the Principal of the school to take still photographs of the school building and grounds at the initial stages of the research on

the understanding that no students would be photographed. I observed and complied with this condition. I took the photographs at a time when there were no students present. A cultural inventory of the images taken is listed in Appendix Fifteen while the images are on a separate USB which is password protected accompanies the thesis. Six still photographs have been included in the thesis to support the analysis and discussion. Arising from the focus groups a small number of students (n=4) agreed to take some still photographs of spaces in their homes that represented a connection with school. Students were issued with consent forms which both students and their parents completed (Appendix Sixteen) prior to being given a digital camera with an SD card. Four still photographs which are non-identifiable were included in the thesis document to support the analysis and discussion.

c) 6.8.3 Non-malfeasance

At all stages of the research process I was conscious to ensure that my research work should never harm anyone, intentionally or otherwise and I maintained an open and transparent modus operandi throughout. I sought advice from my supervisor and from school management about the different phases of the research. I complied with all legislation and I followed published guidelines at all times.

d) 6.8.4 Beneficence

As an education professional, I conducted the research on the basis that the welfare of all participants was to the fore of the methodology and that the research would make a epistemological contribution to knowledge that would benefit the education profession, specifically the post-primary sector in Ireland.

6.9 Data Analysis Strategies

e) 6.9.1 Introduction

There were six sources of data generated from the parent and teacher questionnaires, the teacher semi-structured interviews, the student focus group interviews, the student visual diaries and the researcher generated visual records. The questionnaire data was initially analysed at a superficial, deductive thematic level immediately after the questionnaires were collected to inform the design of the next phases of the research and the data was then inputted into the Statistical Package for

the Social Sciences (SPSS). Miles et al., (2014) advise interweaving data collection and analysis from the start in that data analysis is conducted concurrently with data collection as it helps the researcher "cycle back and forth between the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 70).

f) 6.9.2 Data Analysis Strategy

In the case of this research I conducted some preliminary data analysis immediately after I collected the parent and teacher questionnaires in order to assist me in the preparing the organisation and schedules of the next phases of the research process. Similarly, I conducted some preliminary analysis of the raw data generated through the interviews, focus groups and visual records immediately after I had collected the data. I had taken a methodological decision to code the qualitative data from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and visual records through a number of phases and cycles of coding. The initial stages of coding involved me assigning broad labels to the data generated through each of the sections of the research instruments. Descriptive labels were initially aligned to the section and sub-sections of the sections of the research instruments and were further distilled to categorise sections of comparable data generated through the research instrument into "new" data groups. I used the coding process as a heuristic which unfolded as I progressed through each phase of coding. Using stages of coding enabled me to organise the data into manageable chunks which I could further distil to unearth more finely grained and specific findings. I used five primary coding approaches to organise and categorise the qualitative data; Descriptive coding, Holistic coding, In Vivo coding, Attribute coding and Values coding (Miles et al., 2014).

g) 6.9.3 Preparation and Processing of the Data

All of the raw data generated through the various research instruments had to be prepared initially and optimised for analysis. In the case of the questionnaires the quantitative data was prepared for input into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and once the full data sets had been inputted I proceeded to investigate and analyse the data by carrying out various statistical tests within SPSS. I then had to interpret the outputs from the statistical tests in line with the other quantitative data and by weaving it through the qualitative data. I initially analysed the descriptive statistics of the two samples (Parents, Teachers) and further analysed to explore

the differences between interval scaled data with a normal distribution of scores by using parametric independent sample t-tests. The question types I included in the questionnaires had been designed with the statistical analyses in mind. Different sections within the questionnaires were separated and decided on in line with the statistical tests I intended to carry out on the data. Questions thirteen through to question nineteen of the parent questionnaire used scaled likert scales to capture data in relation to various aspects of parental involvement and engagement in the school and in their children's education. The scales used in the questionnaire were purposely designed for the questionnaire and were not previously validated scales. The design of the scales was however constructed with reference to the available literature and previous research and in line with the research questions. The scales were piloted to test for reliability with twenty-five parents and seven teachers in a different post-primary school.

The focus groups and semi-structured interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed to Word documents. The transcriptions were coded thematically and findings were extrapolated from each focus group and each interview. Findings from the focus groups are presented in chapter nine of the thesis while the interview findings are presented in chapter eight. A synthesised discussion and analysis is presented in chapter ten.

The visual images that were generated by the students and the researcher were reviewed and analysed in an inductive-deductive formative manner and aligned to the theoretical framework of the study. The visual images were recorded to augment the data generated in the questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews and are guided by the four research questions. The analytical framework used to analyse the visual imagery is aligned to the overarching analysis. The findings are presented in both chapters eight and nine while the analysis and discussion is synthesised with the other study data in chapter ten. Figure 6.12 Below illustrates the data analysis processes in the research.

Figure 6.8 Data Analysis

6.10 Triangulation

Historically, triangulation is a relatively recent phenomenon in the social sciences, originating in the late 1950s (Campbell and Fiske, 1959) and is normally used as a strategy to eliminate bias and improve on the validity of the research or the evaluation findings. Miles and Huberman (1984) offer the following explanation of triangulation as being "… supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or at least don't contradict it (1984, p 253). Denzin (1970) describes four types of triangulation, namely; data triangulation; investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation and methodological triangulation. I have chosen to use data triangulation in this study to consider the social phenomenon under investigation.

 Blaikie reminds us that Webb et al (1966) advocated the triangulation of "measurement processes" in the search for the validity of theoretical propositions: "When a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing, it contains a degree of validity unattainable by one tested within the more constricted framework of a single method" (Webb et al. 1966:174 in Blaikie, 2000, p. 263). Blaikie also referred to Denzin's work (1970) which advocated that "sociologists must learn to employ multiple methods in the analysis of the same empirical event" (Denzin, 1970, p. 13) which Blaikie interpreted as an assumption by Denzin that each method would reveal different aspects of empirical reality.

Creswell (2015) also emphasizes the point that a core assumption of the mixed methods approach is that when a researcher combines "statistical trends with stories and personal experiences" the collective strength provides a better understanding of the research problem than either single form of data. If we take Denzin's argument in its entirety that "the flaws of one method are the strength of another and by combining methods we can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin, 1970, p. 308) we run the risk of simplifying the concept of methodological triangulation within the mixed methods model. It would be utterly simplistic and practically naive as a researcher to consider that the "collective strength" generated by the combination of various methods referred to by Creswell (2015) will simply assist and enrich my understanding of my research questions through the emergence of potential convergent research outcomes.

There are no guarantees that using triangulation will result in convergence about the relative truth of the social phenomenon being studied and as a researcher I was conscious and aware from Mathison (1988) that I had to interpret cautiously the data generated by each method used. I constructed my explanations from each data set initially and thereafter from the collective sets.

> "Triangulation as a strategy provides a rich and complex picture of some social phenomenon being studied but rarely does it provide a clear path a singular view of what is the case… The value of triangulation is not a technical solution to a data collection and analysis problem, it is a technique which provides more and better evidence from which researchers can *construct meaningful propositions* about the social world.." (Mathison 1988:15 in Blaikie, 2000, p. 267)

In proposing triangulation as a strategy for a researcher to provide evidence to help make sense of a social phenomenon Mathison (1988) cautions that a triangulation strategy in itself does not construct the answers to the questions about a social phenomenon but rather produces a number of outcomes that can be referred to and considered by researchers while addressing research questions. The outcomes she refers to include; *convergence* whereby data from different sources will provide evidence that will result in a single proposition about a social phenomenon, secondly she refers to *inconsistency* where data from different sources does not confirm a single proposition about a social phenomenon and indeed may indicate an alternative proposition and thirdly she refers to *contradiction* whereby data will provide evidence which will actually be contradictory. I am cognisant of Mathison's view (1988) that *all* of the outcomes of

triangulation; convergent, inconsistent and contradictory need to be filtered through knowledge gleaned from the immediate data and from the research context in order to construct meaningful explanations of the data presented when addressing the research questions.

6.11 Validity and Reliability of the Study

Hammersley (1987) states that a research account may be considered valid if "it represents accurately those features of the phenomenon that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise (1987, p67). Silverman (2005) claims that reliability can be claimed where the researcher tabulates categories and when transcribing interviews that all aspects of data are transcribed, even the most minute. Creswell (1998), Creswell and Miller (2000) propose eight different procedures for achieving what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Corbin et al., 2008). Among the procedures are; "prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field", "triangulation", "using peer review or debriefing", "negative case analysis", "clarifying researcher bias", "in member checks", "rich think description" and "external audits".

Prior to and during my research, I also referred to Yin's checklist (2014) to test the quality of a case study. Yin lists construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability as the four tests to be applied not only at the outset of a case study research piece but beyond the original design plans (Yin, 2014). In the case of my research the most relevant of the Yin tests listed were the construct validity, external validity and reliability. Internal validity is not appropriate for descriptive or exploratory studies (Yin, 2014).

In terms of reliability I aimed to minimise the errors within my study by making the stages and phases of the study as operational as possible by developing data collection protocols that were clear, repeatable with a similar cohort of participants and accurate. There were different levels of reliability within my study, the overall reliability of the case study itself was contingent on the operations (data collection) within the study being repeatable by another researcher with similar results. The finer grained reliability within the methods of data generation required closer attention and I tested and retested the research instruments on a number of occasions before being satisfied that each instrument was relatively free from error.

I tested the construct validity of my case study by reviewing the literature to ascertain the most appropriate operational measures for the concepts identified in my case study and the most

appropriate research approach, upon which I decided to use the case study approach. I opted to construct multiple sources of evidence in a manner convergent to the lines of enquiry and to establish a chain of evidence (Yin, 2014) through the data collection phases of my research. In terms of the validity of the research instruments themselves, I checked for validity by testing and retesting the instruments for error and/or inaccuracy. I developed several iterations of the questionnaires, based on feedback from the pilot phases before the final versions were agreed. The external validity of my research posed challenges for me as a researcher in that while I opted for a case study, I opted for a descriptive case study of a heuristic nature rather than a causal, explanatory nature. My research questions originated as "how" and "what" questions and did not include "why" questions which has implications for the generalisability of the study.

6.12 Generalisability of Case Studies

Miles et al (2014) claim that the generalisability of the case study has been contentious. Their claim cites Spradley (1979, 1980 (in Miles et al., 2014)who refer to the contention arising from a question about the researcher's analytic ability to find levels of universality in the case and they also refer to Clarke, (2005) who places the contention around frank admission that complex and site-specific contexts problematize the ability to construct theory, and thus, generalisation. Sarantakos (2005) refers to how qualitative interpretative researchers are less concerned with the generation of generalizable results but instead are more concerned with understanding the complexities of the group involved in the study, regardless of its size (Sarantakos, 2013). The population in my study was both complex and multi-factorial given the different subsets within the case. The diversity of the sample cohorts provided me with sources that generated rich data-sets. Miles et al (2014) suggest a number of useful guidelines for consideration within case study design. I found the following guidelines useful to me as a researcher as I endeavoured to ensure a level of generalisability of my research;

- The characteristics of the original sample of persons, settings, processes and so on, are adequately described to permit adequate comparisons with other samples.
- The report specified any limits on sample selection and critically examines its ability to generalise to other settings and contexts.
- The sampling is theoretically diverse enough to encourage broader applicability when relevant.

- The findings include enough "thick description" for readers to assess the potential transferability and appropriateness for their own settings.
- The processes and outcomes described in the conclusions are applicable in comparable settings.
- Where possible the findings have been replicated in other studies to assess their robustness.

    Adapted from Miles et al, 2014, p 314.

The fact that I opted for a heuristic case study approach in this research utilising a mixed methods methodology implied some limitations for the study and accordingly for this thesis.

6.13 Limitations of the Study

This thesis has by the nature of its design a number of limitations. The thesis presents a single case study that has been constructed from the data generated in one co-educational post primary school in the south of Ireland. The research was limited geographically to one rural town in a county in the south of Ireland. At the very outset of the research I had considered setting the research across a number of school settings but the challenge in getting access to one school rendered that very initial proposition untenable.

I acted as the moderator/facilitator in the focus groups and in the semi-structured interviews. I held a dual role in that I was also the researcher. This in itself could be seen as limiting in the study as it is possible that I brought some of my inherent biases to bear in the manner I conducted the focus groups or interviews, how I reacted or how I prompted participants despite my best efforts to remain neutral. I found it was very difficult not to react as an educationalist at times in the focus groups and interviews and I struggled occasionally to remain objective. Another possible limitation arises in that the findings presented in the thesis are as a result of my interpretation which may not be seen as fully objective and potentially laden with latent professional bias, conferring an "insider" (Sikes and Pitts, 2008) approach on me as the researcher. Loxley and Seery in their chapter in "Researching Education from the Inside, Investigations from within" (Sikes and Potts, eds., 2008) discuss at length issues related to "insider research" (Sikes and Potts, eds., 2008). They refer to the notion that it is not so much the veracity of the "truth claims" which are actually important but instead "who" is making the claims and the claimant's ability to legitimise this privileged position. Drake and Heath, in the

same compilation highlight how "insider" researchers often have "..assumptions and ideas about what they expect to find out and, on the basis of experience as a practitioner they actually have a theoretical stance before beginning their project" (Drake & Heath, 2008). Aligned to Drake and Heath's thinking I was conscious that my "insider" knowledge and familiarity would challenge my ability to critically engage with information and responses generated through the research instruments and to devise "means of stimulating reflexivity wherever possible" (Drake and Heath, 2008, p 129.) in order to maintain a simultaneous role of practitioner and researcher. I will explicate this further in the next section on reflexivity.

There was a significant amount of data generated and processed during the course of the research. It may be construed that the extensive range of data was a limitation in that it is possible that some pertinent data was missed by me during the processing or analytical stages.

6.14 Researcher Reflexivity

Denzin and Lincoln, (2011) quote from Bateson (1972) when they state that all qualitative researchers are philosophers in that "universal sense in which all human beings…are guided by highly abstract principles". Creswell (2013) argues that good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry.

As both a researcher and an educationalist I acknowledge that I brought my own beliefs, values and understandings to the research and that my inherent beliefs and worldviews affected and informed the management of my qualitative study. My philosophical assumptions are embedded into and threaded through the interpretative framework that I have used to scaffold and guide my research study (Appendix Eighteen).

It is of course also true that latent professional bias was an advantage in this study as my professional familiarity with a school setting and the systems within the research setting afforded me a useful understanding and appreciation of the processes within the setting that an "outsider" researcher would not have had. In order to navigate through and negotiate the "inside" context of the research setting I utilised my internal and latent professional "insider knowledge" (Drake and Heath, 2008) to understand the "language and conventions" utilised by the research participants within the research setting similar to the Drake and Heath (2008) reference to Bourdieu's claim to

have "a feel for the game and hidden rules" (Bourdieu, 1988, p 27). As a researcher, I acknowledge that my research is value-laden (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and that my individual professional values and biases are present as well as the values gathered from the field. As a practitioner turned researcher I was conscious that I had to manage "multiple integrities" (Drake and Heath, 2008) and challenge any underlying philosophical assumptions I had. I openly discussed the values that shape the narrative and include my own interpretation from a practitioner perspective in conjunction with the interpretations of participants. This necessitated me searching outside my practitioner familiarity for new meanings as articulated by research participants. I managed this by regularly interrogating the methodology of the research with specific focus on the validity and reliability of the methods used. The location of my research within a bespoke research paradigm ensured that I developed a critical position placed within the research paradigm and underpinned by the research questions. I was at all times aware that I was privileged to have gained access to the research setting and I regularly referred and reflected on the research questions which supported me to remain focused as a researcher.

This study may be characterised as educational research, which Nixon and Sikes (Sikes et al., 2003), would claim as being useful and relevant to educational settings. Nixon and Sikes argument for this requirement is that educational research is grounded epistemologically in the moral foundations of educational practice and that it is the epistemological and moral purposes underlying the "usefulness" and "relevance" of educational research that matter (Sikes et al., 2003, p. 2). My interest in and purpose of conceptualising this educational research is concentrated around the worthiness and the value of the research process and research outcomes to the educational debate on the concept of family-school connections in Ireland and how those connections influence educational outcomes for students. I consider this research work to be educationally worthwhile and justified in contributing to and extending existing legitimate knowledge and theories within the field of Irish educational studies.

6.15 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodology through which the concepts and frameworks were investigated and processed. The chapter outlined the research questions and described the sampling and selection of participants in the research. The case study approach was discussed and the empirical methods of the methodology were critiqued and the research instruments used

to generate the data were described. Ethical considerations and research challenges and considerations were deliberated on.

Part Two of the thesis is concerned with the presentation of the findings extrapolated from the raw data. The findings are synthesised to generate a robust discussion leading to conclusions and recommendations from the thesis.

Part Two

Chapter Seven

Setting the Empirical context: Introduction to the Analysis and Discussion chapters

7.1 Introduction

The following two chapters; chapter eight and chapter nine will address the presentation of findings from the research as extracted from the primary data generated by each of the research participant groups; post-primary students, the students' parents and school staff. These two chapters will be followed by Chapter Ten which will merge and explore the accumulated findings in an analysis and discussion relative to the literature and the theoretical framework.

Chapter eight presents findings arising from the data generated by parent participants relying on the data generated through the questionnaire for parents (Appendix Five). Also included in chapter eight is a presentation of findings and an analysis of data generated by school staff participants through the staff questionnaire (Appendix Nine) and through semi-structured interviews (Appendix Ten) with school staff.

Chapter eight contextualises the research backdrop against which the student focus group findings and analysis in chapter nine are set. I have prioritised the evidence generated by student participants in the four student focus groups in chapter nine including data from student visual photographic diaries in addressing the central research questions.

7.2 Scope and context of the research

A necessary preamble to these chapters includes a definition of the scope and context of the research. This piece of research was carried out with a group of families including students and their parents attending a post primary school in the South of Ireland. School staff also participated in the research.

a) 7.2.1 School characteristics

Adhering to the confidentiality assurances given to management of the case study school I am not at liberty to disclose features that might identify the school directly. However, with due regard to the research questions it is my intention to depict a historical overview of the development of the school which recognises a number of pertinent aspects that relate to the research questions.

The patronage of the school originated in a French order of nuns who originally came to Ireland in 1843. The nuns were also active in England, home to many Irish emigrants, many of whom were educated by the sisters both as day pupils and in evening classes. The ethos of the research school which is a voluntary secondary school originated from the ethos of its foundress and is based on the Ignation ideology which promotes education as a priority and progression as a priority for students. Following the great famine in Ireland in the 1840s and the significant levels of emigration many Irish students were educated by the order in both primary and secondary schools in England. The order was subsequently invited by an Irish Bishop to set up a school in the west of Ireland which they did and following an invitation from an Irish priest in the French seminary they were asked to send sisters to establish a primary school in the rural area where the case study was set. They delivered primary education in the area. Both boys and girls attended the primary school. The primary school grew and gradually the order introduced secondary education in the rural town and they established a boarding school which offered boarding facilities for girls only until 1986. They further developed the primary school and delivered primary education in the area until they amalgamated with the local boy's national school in 1975 to form a new co-educational Catholic primary school. Teachers from the religious congregation were employed in the local Catholic primary school until the year 2000 and remained as representatives on the Board of Management of the primary school until 2008. Until 1980 the school offered academic only subjects but from 1980 onwards practical subjects have also been offered.

At the time of the research there was one member of the religious congregation teaching in a full-time capacity in the research school with two retired teachers teaching there in a part time capacity. The school appointed a lay principal in 2008 for the first time and there is also a lay deputy principal in the school.

The school entered the Le Chéile Trust[22] in September 2009. The school had an enrolment of 771 students in the academic year 2012/2013, consisting of 388 girls and 383 boys. The school is

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[22] **The Le Chéile Schools Trust** comprises the schools of 13 religious congregations in Ireland. The aim of the Trust is to carry on the legal, financial and inspirational role of trusteeship that has, up to now, been done by individual congregations. It carries out the legal and inspirational role of trusteeship. This is a significant development in Irish

located in a predominantly rural area bordering two adjoining counties. At the time of the research there was a teaching staff of sixty teachers in the school with up to ten ancillary staff.

At the time of the research there were four hundred and sixty-seven families registered at the school. Students from families attending the school resided in the local rural town and surrounding areas and a small number of families travelled from another large town and from outside the county boundary to attend the school. At the time of the research there were ten officially designated feeder primary schools[23] to the school and seven additional feeder primary schools outside of the catchment area of the school. Students travelled from two neighbouring counties to attend the school.

There were two primary schools; one Catholic, Urban Band 2 DEIS school[24] (enrolment 310 pupils), one Church of Ireland school (enrolment 76 pupils) and two post- primary schools; one Voluntary Secondary School (Research School) (enrolment 771 students) and one Vocational school, DEIS school (enrolment 220 students) in the rural town. The Vocational school also provided Post-Leaving Certificate further education courses. There was also an Adult Learning Centre (under the auspices of the Education and Training Board (ETB[25]) in the rural town providing return to education courses for adult learners over the age of twenty-one years and in receipt of unemployment benefit. There were two HSE registered childcare facilities in the area at that time. These provided sessional facilities and had the joint capacity for thirty-five children.

Both primary schools in the rural town were significant feeder schools to the research school. Eight other feeder schools also transferred a significant number of sixth class pupils to the research

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education as the Catholic Church and the individual religious congregations renew and reformulate their commitment to Irish education (lechéiletrust.ie, 2012)

[23] Feeder primary schools are designated through the Department of Education and Skills school transport scheme.

[24] DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, was launched in May 2005 and remains the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). DEIS provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and an integrated School Support Programme (SSP). 852 schools are included in the programme. These comprise 658 primary schools (336 urban/town schools and 322 rural primary schools) and 194 second level schools. (DES, 2014)

[25] On July 1 2013 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) were disbanded and incorporated into 16 new Education and Training Boards. The new statutory education authorities were formed from the aggregation of of the 33 VECs and 16 FÁS Training centres delivering coordinated education and training programmes in Ireland. (DES, 2014)

school. The greater majority of the balance of sixth class pupils who did not transfer to the research school normally transferred to the other post-primary school in the rural town. A small minority of sixth class pupils did not transfer to either school but instead transferred to other post-primary schools outside of the catchment area.

b) 7.2.2 County demographics

At the time of the research, the Pobal HP Deprivation Index[26] recorded that the region was the second most disadvantaged region in the Republic with the county being the second most disadvantaged local authority in the region. The absolute deprivation score in the county dropped from -4.0 in 2006 to -12.1 in 2011. This represented a drop of 8.1. A drop of 6.5 in the absolute deprivation score was recorded nationally for the same timeframe placing the county in the position of third most disadvantaged county in Ireland (Pobal HP Deprivation Index). As a county X does not exhibit particular extremes of affluence or deprivation with one hundred and three of the one hundred and twenty-four electoral districts being marginally below average and fifteen of the one hundred and twenty-four being marginally above average (HP Deprivation Index). Significantly, the rural town in which the research school was based was at the time of the research one of the most disadvantaged electoral districts registering at -11.1 on the Relative Index Score (2011). The 2011 census indicated that there was a population increase of 13,571 (10.3%) in the county from 131,749 in 2006 to 145,320 in 2011 (Census, 2011). The total county population (2011) of 145,320 subdivides into 71,909 males and 73,411 females (Census, 2011). Population figures for the rural town in which the research was carried out were recorded at 1544 in 2006 and at 1570 in the 2011 census indicating an increase in population of 26 people (1.7%) in the area. The local authority Local Area Plan (LAP)[27] indicated that according to the 2006 Census that 6.75% of the rural town's workforces was registered as unemployed. This represented a slightly higher level than the national average at that time which was 5% (CSO 2006). 2011 levels of unemployment[28] in the rural town

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[26] Pobal HP Deprivation Index Area Profile for County X (Feline Engling, Trutz Hasse) 2012

[27] Local Area Plans are constructed by local authorities. The LAP for the rural area in question (2009-2015) has been prepared under sections 18,19 and 20 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2007 and the Planning & Development Regulations 2001-2008.The Local Area Plan is consistent with the objectives of the County Development Plan (i.e. X County Development Plan 2007-2013).

[28] Unemployment - Both sexes, aged 15 years + Unemployed looking for first regular job & Unemployed having lost or given up previous job

were registered at the time of the research at 270 (17%) while employment figures[29] were registered at 882 (56%). These figures did not take into account families from outside the rural town who attended the research school but county based figures indicate that a total of 12417 males and 7107 females (total 19524) were unemployed in County X in January 2012. Significant numbers were previously employed in the Manufacturing and Services, Construction and Agriculture areas in the local area but with the onset of the economic recession significant numbers of employees in this area have been made redundant or have changed occupation. Other occupations in the area included fishing, clerical, administration and government, transport, sales, professional and services.

Figure 7.1 Research School Exterior A

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[29] In Employment - Both sexes all persons 15 years + in labour force

Figure 7.2 Research School Exterior B

Figure 7.1 Research School Interior A

Figure 7.2 Research School Interior B

Figure 7.3 Research School Interior C

7.3 Organisation of the analysis and interpretation

My overarching premise at the outset of this piece of research was grounded in my proposition that; families engage and connect with formal schooling in Ireland on the basis of their inherent family dispositions, values and cultures, which may or may not concur or align with the inherent cultures and dispositions of the school. I endeavoured to explore and examine relationships and connections between families and the school to elucidate convergences and divergences of cultures, dispositions and values between both participants.

Aligned to the research questions which I have detailed in the methodology chapter and having worked professionally in the School Support Programme and in my current role as a Teacher Educator I was particularly interested in unearthing and expounding possible factors that influenced families who did not have access to the School Support Programme by virtue of the status of the post-primary school their children attended but who successfully engaged and connected with formal schooling and enabled positive educational outcomes for and with their children despite experiencing socio-economic challenges and other challenges. I submit that paradigms of "successful" engagement of families in formal schooling where the School Support Programme or other formal support structures are not operational are evident but are relatively unexplored and undocumented in the literature. I further submit that "successful" engagement is supported and scaffolded by the cultures and dispositions of families coupled with the cultures and ethos of the school along a continuum of intersections.

I acknowledge that my research questions are potentially complex and that all are inter-related. The research questions in my research dictated the methodological approach used to conduct the research. Six primary data sets were constructed and I ensured data triangulation by the inclusion of a number of methodological layers during the construction and subsequent analysis of the data. Within my triangulated approach, I elected to include an approach apposite to each of the participant groups and this has yielded a rich source of quantitative, qualitative and visual data that presents me with individual lenses through which I interpret the data in the following chapters. Figure 7.6 below illustrates the main sources of data to be presented and analysed in the following chapters.

Parent Data

Questionnaire
for Parents

n=188

Student Data

Student Focus
groups (n=4)

Student Visual
Diaries

Staff Data
Questionnaire
for Staff n= 25 &

Semi-structured
interviews n=6

**Researcher
Generated
Visual Records**
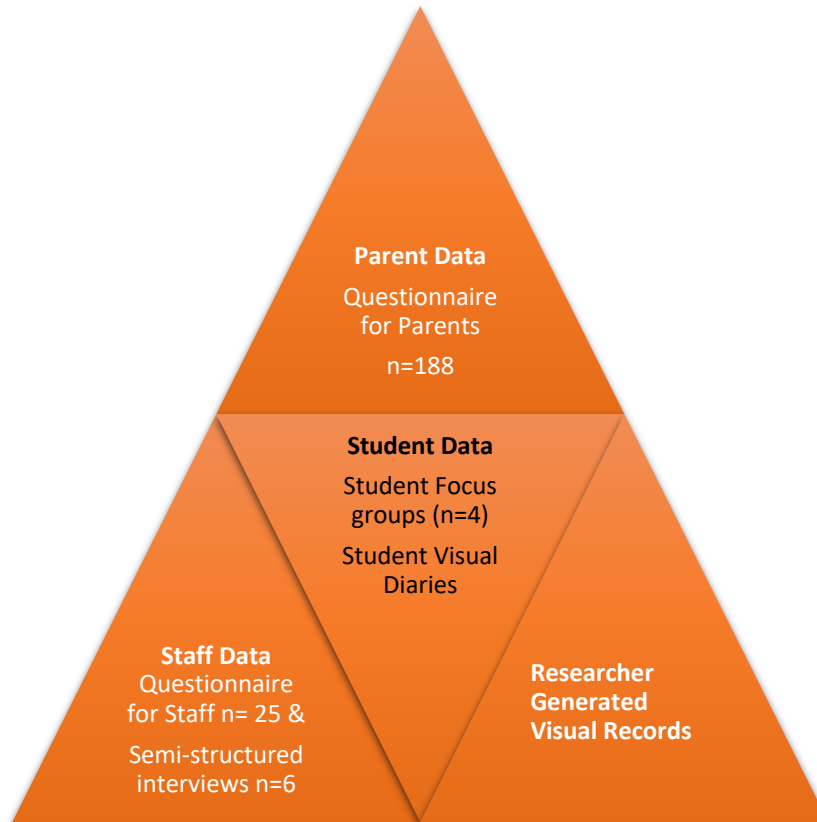
Figure 7.6 Research data

7.4 Summary

Throughout my analysis, I adopted a reflexive approach that afforded me an opportunity to move seamlessly and laterally between the different research instruments and the specific data generated by each instrument. In order to contextualise the qualitative data generated by the students in the focus group interviews I initially interrogated the data from the questionnaire for parents using the software SPSS. Chapter eight illustrates the findings from the application of a number of statistical confirmatory tests to initially establish statistical parameters. In addition, I performed a number of appropriate tests on the data including cross-tabulations, correlation and regression tests, analysis of frequencies and multiple response tests. I also applied these tests to the data generated through the questionnaire for teachers. The data sets that have been produced through the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups have relied on the operationalisation of a number of primary theoretical concepts.

The use of mixed methods to interrogate and edify the research questions has necessitated a structured, yet not rigid framework of analysis in chapter ten that has allowed for a fluid and

evolving approach unlocking access to the worlds of the research participants. The analysis of data presented provides a medley of discussion material which is articulated and deliberated on.

Chapter Eight

Presentation and Analysis of Findings One: Parents, School staff and the School

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the primary data generated through the distribution of two questionnaires; an initial questionnaire to parents of students in the research school (Appendix Five) and a second questionnaire to teaching staff and management in the research school (Appendix Nine). The questionnaire to parents represents a substantive research instrument that was primarily utilised to profile the participating families in the research school. The questionnaire for parents also acted as a filter mechanism for the identification of students in the research school who with their parents' informed consent participated in the student focus group interviews which are discussed in chapter nine. The staff questionnaire was a shorter questionnaire that was utilised to profile the staff of the research school and also to identify a number of staff who consented to participating in follow up semi-structured interviews. This chapter also presents the findings from the teacher semi-structured interviews and from the visual records generated at the case study setting.

The broad range of data generated in my study offered multiple opportunities to examine and expound the multi-layered relationships between the concepts identified in the conceptual framework and aligned to the research questions.

The framework I have adopted in this chapter presents four sub-sections; sub-section one addresses the findings from the parent questionnaires, sub-section two addresses the findings from the teacher questionnaires, sub-section three addresses the findings from the teacher semi-structured interviews and sub-section four addresses the findings form the researcher generated visual records.

Borrowing from Bourdieu's contested concept of cultural capital, the parent questionnaires, teacher questionnaires, teacher semi-structured interviews and the researcher generated visual records aimed to unearth and unpack the underlying and latent concept of both familial and institutional "habitus" of the study participants and of the research school. I was also interested in probing the duality of individual and collective "habitus" as articulated by parents, school staff and students and accumulated into the layers of data collected during the study. A detailed outline of each sub-section is presented in table 8.1 below:

Sub-section 8.2	The Parent Questionnaire	Sub-Section 8.3	The Teacher Questionnaire	Sub-section 8.4	The Teacher Semi-structured interview	Sub-section 8.5	Researcher Generated visual records
8.2.1	**Parent Questionnaires** **Section One**: You and your Family. **Section Two**: Your *Participation* as a *parent* in your child's education. **Section Three:** Advice on Educating your child. **Section Four**: What you as a parent feel is *important* about *choosing* a post primary school. **Section Five**: What you feel is important to you as a parent that a school ***should*** provide or be like for your child(ren).	8.3.1	**Teacher Questionnaires** **Section One**: Professional details. (Gender, Age, Years of experience, current employment status) **Section Two**: Professional qualifications. **Section Three**: Subjects and hours taught. **Section Three**: Post of Responsibility. **Section Four**: Teaching Subject departments. **Section Five**: Characteristics which could be associated with your school.	8.4.1	**Teacher Semi-structured interviews** **Section One:** Teaching Subjects and teaching experience. **Section Two**: School systems and hierarchies within the school and links to families. **Section Three:** Parents/Families Participation in the school.	8.5.1	**Researcher generated visual records** **Section One:** Internal non-teaching spaces Internal teaching spaces **Section Two** External spaces **Section Three** Semiotics and cultural capital

	Section Six: *Your* **experience** of being involved in this School as a parent/guardian. Question 18. **Section Seven**: Family Life and Education.						
8.2.2	Concluding commentary on Parent Questionnaire findings	8.3.2	Concluding commentary on Teacher Questionnaire findings	8.4.2	Concluding commentary on teacher semi-structured interviews findings	8.5.2	Concluding commentary on researcher generated visual records findings
8.6	Chapter Conclusion						

Table 8.1 Overview of chapter

8.2 The Parent Questionnaire

8.2.1 Findings from the parent questionnaire

For the purpose of organising and presenting the findings from the parent questionnaire data, the leading findings have been mapped linearly onto the parent questionnaire schedule (Appendix Five) and are presented within the structure of the questionnaire itself. The questionnaire was divided into seven section, each with a distinctive focus. Each section contained a range of questions and respondents were asked to answer a variety of question types designed to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data.

(i)   ***Section One*** *You and your family*

The parent questionnaire was completed by one hundred and eighty-eight parents on behalf of their families. One hundred and fifty-eight females (84.5%) and twenty-nine males (15.5%) completed the questionnaires. The mean age of the respondents was 45.2 years while the standard deviation was 5.76. Chart 8.1 below shows the profile of the parent questionnaire respondents. In this presentation of findings, the primary questionnaire respondent is referred to as the participant on the basis of them agreeing to participate in the research.
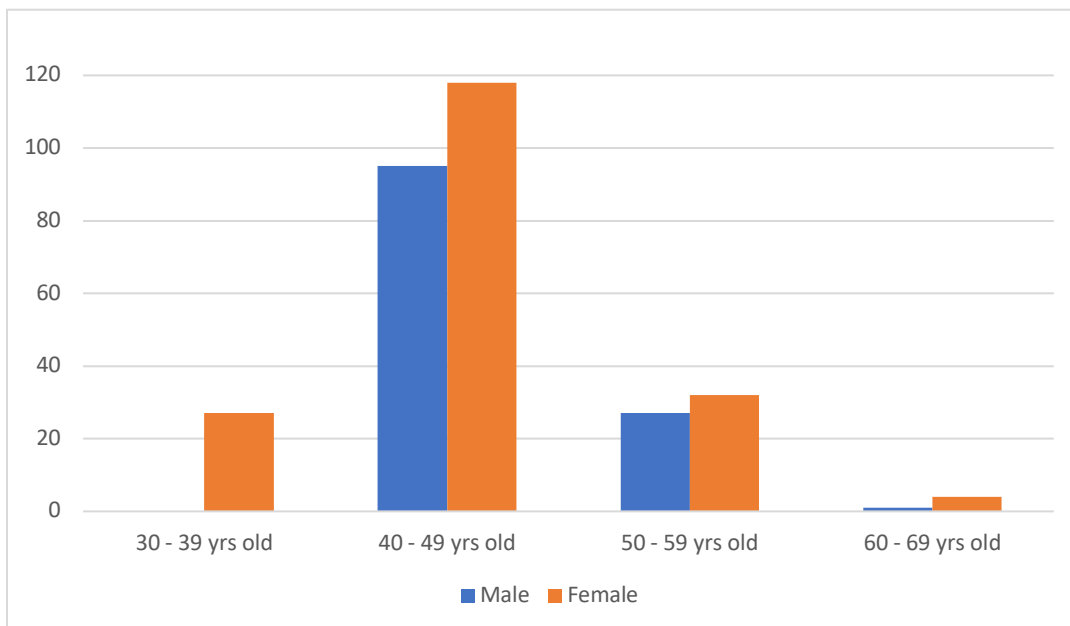
 Chart 8.1 Age range and gender of participants

96.7% of the parents (n=178) who completed the questionnaire reported that their family was Irish, 2.2 % of the parents reported (n=4) that their family was EU but not Irish while 1.1% of parents reported (n=2) that their family was non-EU. Chart 8.2 below illustrates the breakdown of the family type in the research.
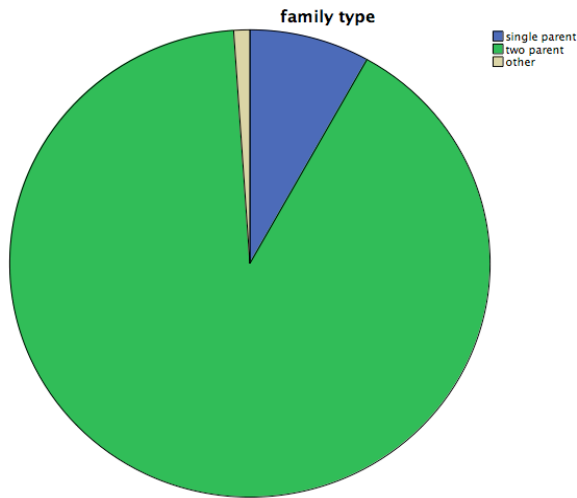
Chart 8.2 Family type

Not all respondents completed the section (question five) asking parents about their income. 78.7% of participants (n=148) completed the question while 21% of participants (n=40) opted not to complete question five. The mean income of the respondents was €57, 2300, the standard deviation was 2.908 and the median was €50,000. Comparatively the 2011 CSO survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) reported that the median household income was almost €38,703 while the mean income was almost €53,000 (CSO, 2012). In 2011 income distribution was highly skewed nationally as more than 60% of households had an income below the mean average. The 2011 statistics indicate that 62% of households had a gross income of less than €50,000. The top 30% of households had a gross income of more than €62,000 per annum. The top 30% of households had a gross income of more than €62,000 per annum while the top 20% of households have a gross income of more than €80,000 per annum. 12% of household have a gross income above €100,000 per annum (CSO, 2012). The levels of income reported by participants were greater than the national average when compared at median levels, with the national median at €38, 703 compared to the participant cohort median at €50,000.

The primary participant (i.e. the parent who completed the questionnaire) was asked about their highest level of educational study (full time or part time) completed up to the point of completion of the questionnaire. One hundred and eighty-eight participants responded to the question. The questionnaire did not seek the highest level of educational study of the spouse or partner. Chart 8.3 below illustrates the highest level of educational study of the participant who completed the questionnaire. 26.1% completed upper post-primary education and this represented the highest level of educational study of the participants.
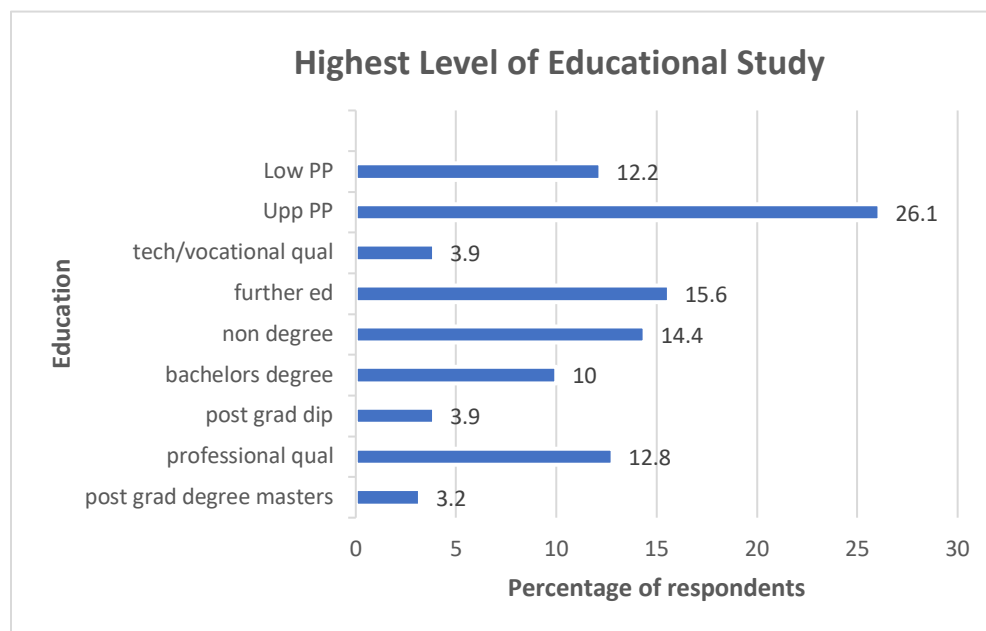
Chart 8.3 Highest level of educational study of the primary parent respondent

10% of participants reported having completed an undergraduate bachelor's degree, while 12.8% reported having completed a professional qualification. 15.6 % of participants had completed a further education (FE) qualification while 14.4% had completed a non-degree qualification. Interestingly 12.2% of participants reported having completed a lower post-primary qualification, thereby leaving post-primary school having completed the Intermediate or Junior certificate.

The Quarterly National Household Survey Educational Attainment Thematic Report (CSO, 2011) Q2 reports that 38% of those aged twenty-five to sixty-four had a third level qualification while the 2011 census recorded that 46% of women aged twenty-five to forty nine had a third level qualification and 35% of men aged twenty five to forty nine had a third level qualification.

Table 8.2 below depicts the distribution of third level institutions attended by the primary participants while table 8.3 depicts the distribution of third level institutions attended by the primary participants' spouses. Forty-seven participants reported having a third level qualification, this represents 33% of the overall participant cohort. This statistic is lower than the CSO statistic (38%) although the age range in the CSO statistic is broader than the participant cohort where the mean age of the cohort was 45.2 years and the median was 45 years. The CSO Quarterly National Household Survey Educational Attainment Thematic Report (Ireland and Central Statistics Office, 2012a) claims that labour force participants among those aged 25-64 increased as the level of education attained increased.

Valid	Institution/ Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage	
	TCD	3	1.6	6.4	6.4
	UCD	5	2.7	10.6	17.0
	DCU	2	1.1	4.3	21.3
	DIT	1	0.5	2.1	23.4
	UL	1	0.5	2.1	25.5
	Colleges of Education	7	3.6	15.0	40.5
	UCC	2	1.1	4.3	44.8
	NUIM	4	2.1	8.5	53.3
	WIT	9	4.8	19.1	72.4
	CIT	11	5.9	23.4	95.8
	Letterkenny IT	1	0.5	2.1	97.9
	Dundalk IT	1	0.5	2.1	100
	Total	47	25	100	
System	Missing	141	75		
Total	188	100.0			

Table 8.2 Distribution of third level institutions attended by participants

Valid	Institution/ Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage	
	TCD	3	1.6	8.1	8.1
	UCD	8	4.3	21.6	29.7
	DCU	1	0.5	2.7	32.4
	DIT	6	3.2	16.2	48.6

	UL	2	1.1	5.4	54.1
	College of Education	1	0.5	2.7	56.8
	NUIM	1	0.5	2.7	59.5
	WIT	9	4.8	24.3	83.8
	CIT	4	2.1	10.8	94.6
	Letterkenny IT	1	0.5	2.7	97.3
	QUB	1	0.5	2.7	100
	Total	47	25	100	
System	Missing	141	75		
Total		188	100.0		

Table 8.3 Distribution of third level institutions attended by participants' spouses

Waterford Institute of Technology (n=18), University College Dublin (n=13) and Cork Institute of Technology (n=15) represent the top three institutions that were attended by the participants and their spouses. Interestingly, St. Pat's, Drumcondra, Froebel, Marino, Mary Immaculate and Church of Ireland teacher education Colleges of Education are all represented in the findings indicating that the questionnaires were completed by participants (n=8) who had primary teacher education qualifications. The data also reports eight secondary teachers, (n=7) and one secondary principal (n=1) who participated in the research. The 2011 census reported that the teaching and education professionals occupation group contained the highest proportion of third level degree holders of all occupational group with 88% holding at least an ordinary bachelor's degree or national diploma (Ireland and Central Statistics Office, 2012b).

Respondents were also asked if their siblings had attended third level education and if their spouses' siblings had attended third level education. Chart 8.4 below illustrates the distribution of respondents' siblings (52.2%) and spouse's siblings (56.4%) that attended third level education indicating that more than 50% of both the respondent and the spouse's siblings attended third level education.
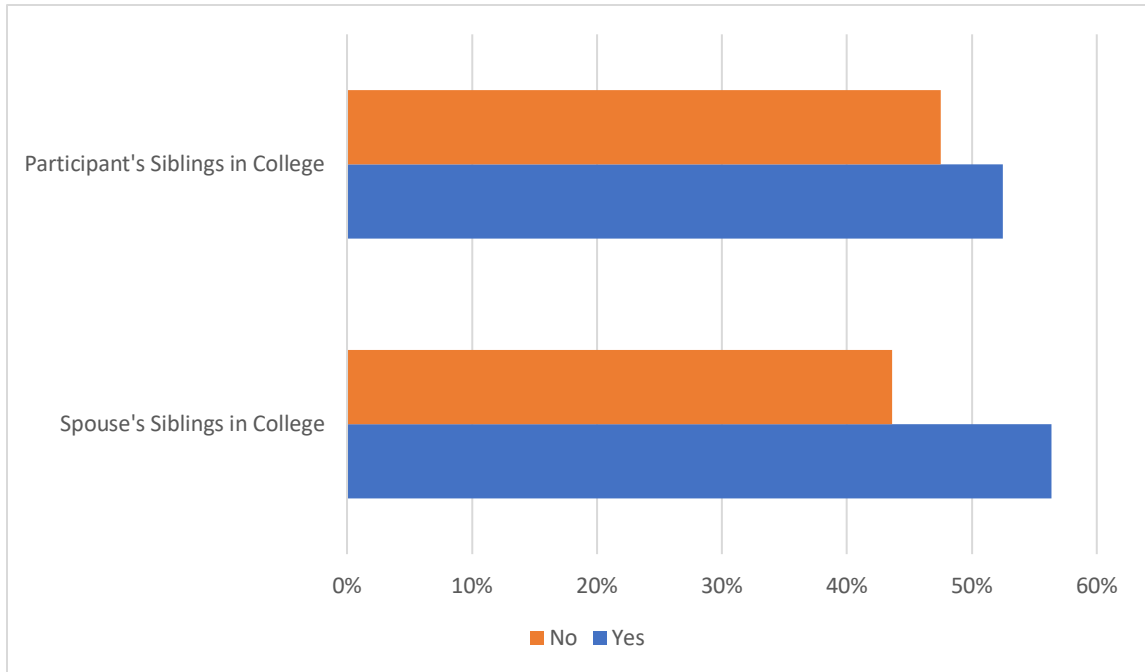
Chart 8.4 Distribution of participant and spouse's siblings who attended third level education

The most frequently reported occupation for respondents was of "housewife" (n=16) while the most frequently reported occupation for respondents' spouses was of "farmer" (n=28).

Participants were asked (question eight) how many years they had worked in their current occupation and if they had ever changed occupation and how many years their spouses had worked in their current occupation and if they had ever changed occupation. Charts 8.5 and 8.6 below illustrate the findings in relation to these questions.
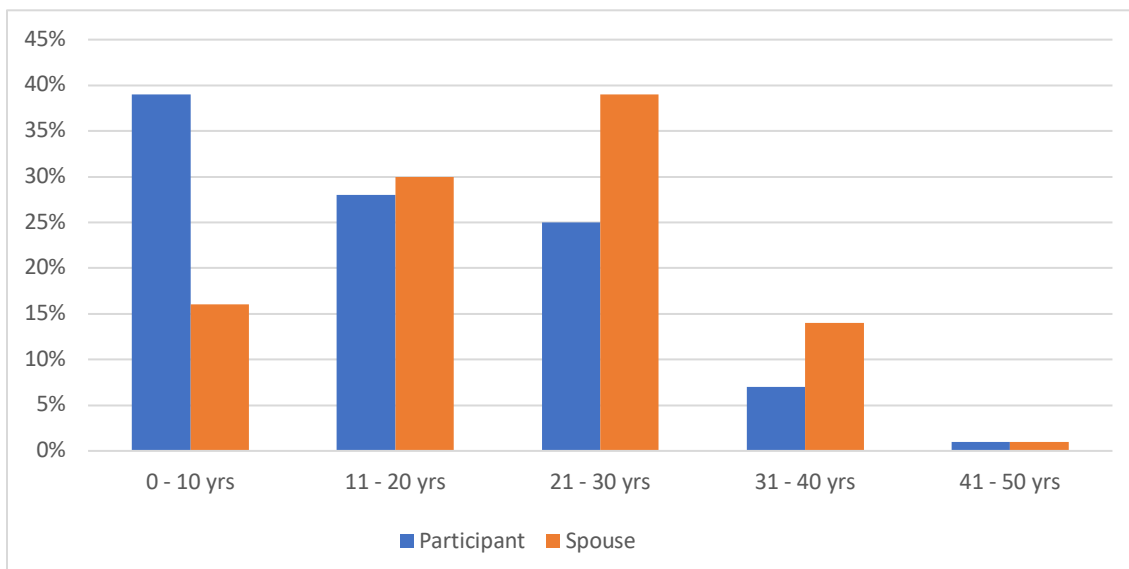
Chart 8.5 Participant/Spouse's number of years in current occupation
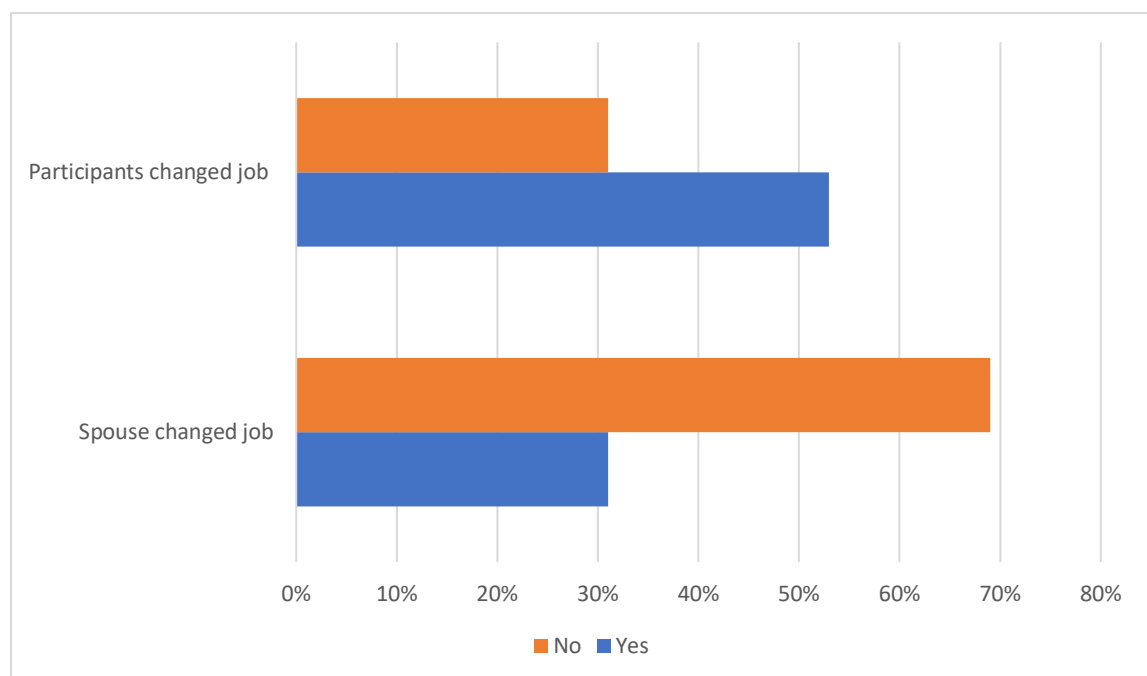
Chart 8.6 Percentage of participants and spouses who changed occupation

The findings reveal that 53% of the participants changed occupation at some point while 31% of the spouses had changed occupation.

When asked to describe their own experience of education 46.8% (n=186) of participants reported that they would rate their experience of primary education as positive, 53.2% (n=182) reported that they would rate their experience of post-primary education as positive while 21.8% (n=76) reported that they would rate their experience of third level education as positive. One hundred and fifty-two (n=152) participants (n=177) reported that they were encouraged to remain in school to Leaving Certificate/end of post-primary school.

51.1% of participants (n=96) said that <u>their</u> own parents *always* attended parent teacher meetings, 70.7% of participants (n=133) that <u>their</u> own parents *always* (usually) read communication from school, while 26.1% of participants (n=49) said that <u>their</u> own parents *always* assisted their children with homework or project work. Table 8.4 below identifies the mean, standard deviation and valid responses for the findings above.

	Participants' parents attend PT meetings	Participants' parents usually read communication	Participants' parents usually assist children with homework
Valid	174	182	183
Missing	14	6	5

Mean	3.7184	4.4176	3.0273
SD	1.74	1.20	1.66

Table 8.4 Participant responses regarding their parents attending PT meetings, communication and assisting with homework

The data generated in section one of the parent questionnaire presents a demographic profile of the parent participants. This profile is useful in understanding the characteristics of the parents and the families. The next section examined the participants' participation as a parent in your child's education.

(ii) **Section Two** *Your participation as a parent in your child's education*

Question eleven concerned itself with parents' participation on the parents' council or board of management of their children's primary and post primary school. An interesting finding from the data generated in this section was that parents had been members of the parents' council and the board of management in their child's primary school but not in the post-primary school. 18.8% or participants (n=32) reported that they were currently a member of the parents' council in the primary school while 43.4% (n=74) reported that they had been a member of the parents' council in the primary school. This is stark contrast to the 6.5% who reported (n=12) that they are members of the parents' council in the case study school and the 9.9% who reported (n=18) that they had been a member of the parents' council. Related to this question, 98.9% of parents reported that they were not members of the board of management of the school with 5.2% or participants (n=9) who were members of the board of management of the primary school at the time and 15.1% (n=26) had been members of the board of management of the primary school previously.

84.8% of participants (n=156) had met the school principal, see chart 8.7.
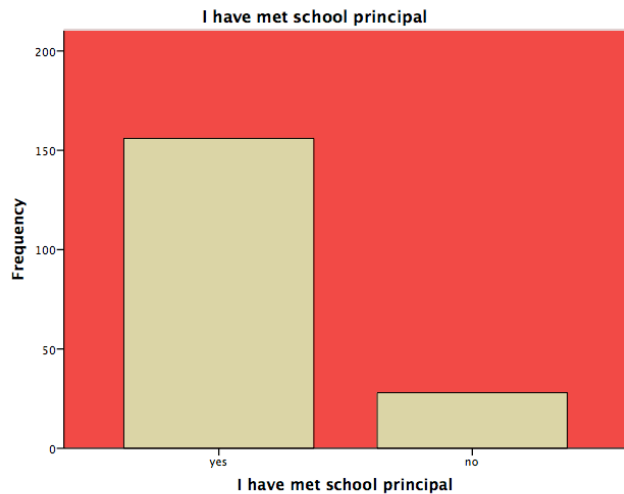
Chart 8.7 Parent meeting school principal

82.1% of participants (n=151) had met their child's current form tutor, see figure 8.8.
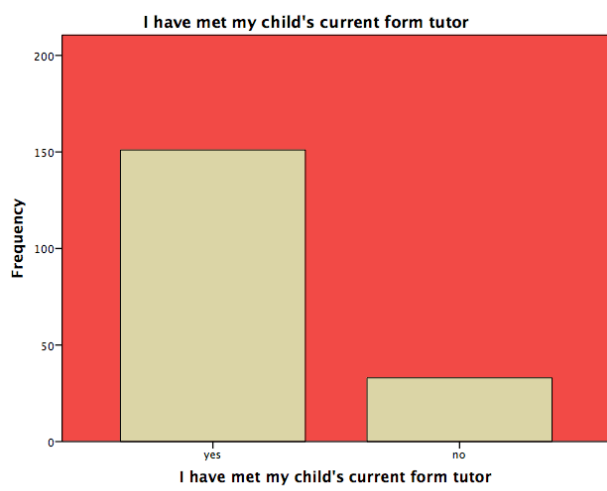
Chart 8.8 Parent meeting child's form tutor

From question thirteen in relation to participants attending events and meetings at the school, 85.5% of participants (n=159) reported that they always attended parent-teacher meetings. This reflects a very high level of attendance by parents at parent-teacher meetings in the case study school while 54.1% of participants (n=100) attended talks and classes organised for the parents by the school.

The ubiquitous topic of homework presents some interesting findings from question fourteen also. 52% of participants (n=92) reported that they helped their children with homework every day, while 39.8% (n= 72) reported checking their children's homework diaries every day. 45.4%

(n=83) reported looking at their children's copies and other written work every week. Table 8.5 below shows the findings for both.

	Help your child with homework Frequency (n=92) out of 177	**Check your child(ren)'s homework diary** Frequency (n=72) out of 181
Valid	177	181
Missing	11	7

Table 8.5 Participants' engagement with their child(ren)'s homework

The National Quarterly Household Survey (Ireland and Central Statistics Office, 2012a) reported that 13% of secondary school children are assisted daily by their parents with homework in a report from the module on parental involvement in children's education. Participants' responses in the questionnaire were considerably higher than 13% at 52%.

Also in question fourteen it is noteworthy that 46.7% of participants (n=85) talk to their children every week about their ambitions and wishes for the future with 44% (n=80) report that they guide their children about school related decisions (e.g. Subject choices, subject level choice, CAO choices, career choices). These percentages reflect a high level of interaction and engagement between parents and their children in relation to their future goals and future educational plans. Findings from section two of the parent questionnaire reveal high levels of participation by parents in their children's education. The following section depicts the findings from the questionnaire section that enquired whether or not parents had ever sought advice on educating their child.

> (iii)   **Section Three** *Advice on educating your child*

As with the previous sections the responses from this section were noteworthy as 58.3% reported (n=105) that they had sought advice on educating their children. Chart 8.9 below illustrates the mean and standard deviation from this finding.

Parents seeking advice of education of their children

Mean = 83.92
Std. Dev. = 98.382
N = 180

No of participants (y-axis)

sought advice on educating your child? (x-axis)
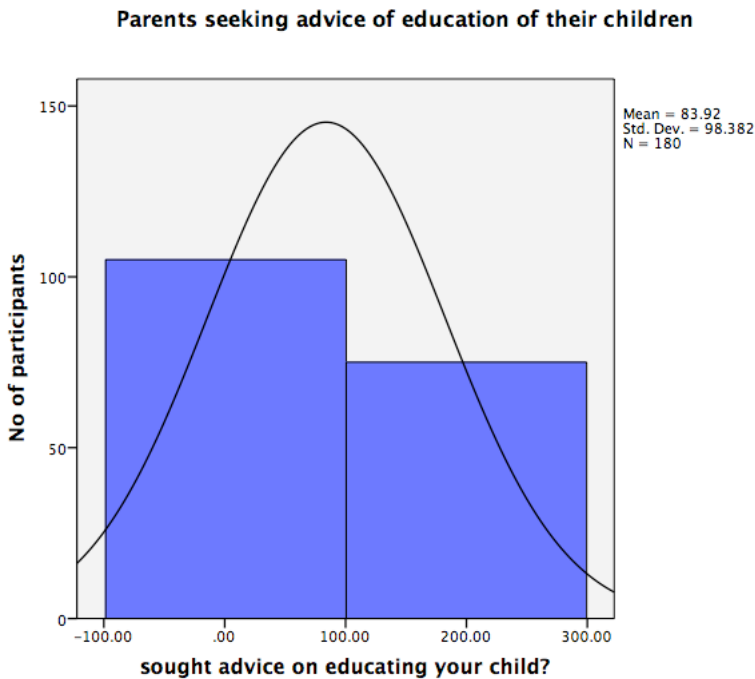
Chart 8.9 Parents seeking advice on educating their child(ren)

Participants (n= 48) ranked their spouse or partner as first in a rank of who they might ask for advice on educating their child(ren), their child(ren)'s teacher second in the rank order (n= 40) and their own family third in the rank order (n=30). It is interesting that participants ranked their spouse or partner first with the child(ren)'s teacher ranked second.

The following section examined what was important for parents in choosing a post-primary school for their children.

> (iv)   **Section Four** *What is important in choosing a post-primary school*

96.8% of the research participants (n=182) responded to the question asking parents to rate how important it was for them that the school was co-educational. 48.9% of participants (n=89) rated this variable as being *very important* while 19.2% (n=35) rated it as being *important*. Chart 8.10 illustrates the strong belief of participants that it was very important for participants (n=182) that the school is co-educational (mean= 3.92, SD= 1.394, median= 4). The histogram illustrates that the data is negatively skewed. The negative values for skewness (-1.37) create a negative skew (peaks to the right) while the positive values for kurtosis (1.249) create a peaked distribution.
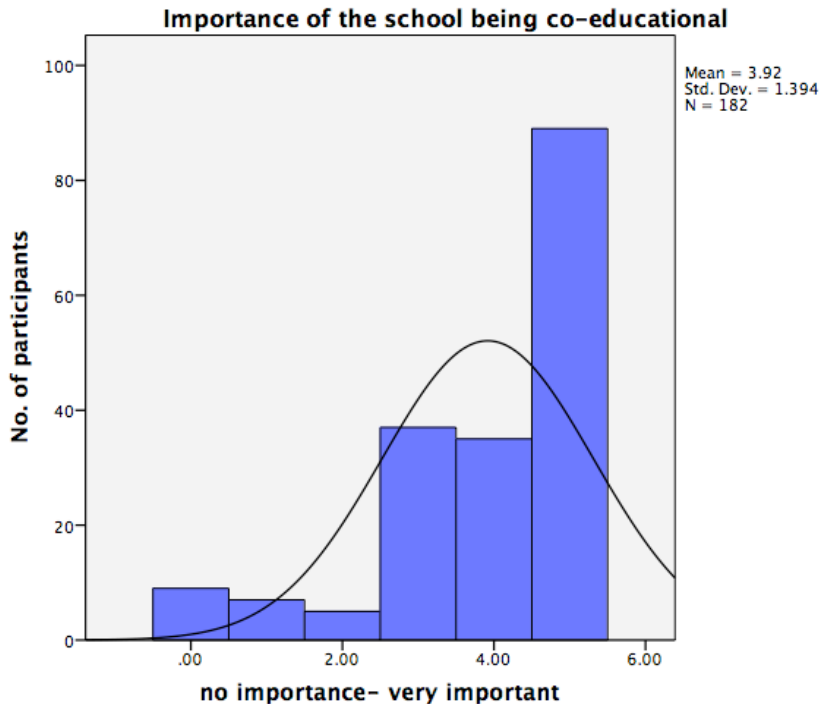
Chart 8.10 The importance of the school being co-educational

An independent – samples t-test was also conducted to compare the levels of income (1st percentile=3 the 3rd percentile=7) against the variable "The school is coeducational". There was no significant difference in scores for the 1st percentile of income (M= 4.13, SD =1.35) and the 3rd percentile of income (M=3.705 SD=1.23). Parents from the 1st percentile held similar views on the school being co-educational to parents from the 3rd percentile.

The findings also indicated that when choosing a post-primary school for their child(ren), participants considered it to be *very important* that the school was successful in "sending" students to third level institutions 72.6% of participants (n=135) stated that it was *very important* for them that the school was successful in "sending" students to third level institutions. Chart 8.11 illustrates the findings from this enquiry below. The negative value for skewness (-1.834) has created a negative peak while the positive values for kurtosis (2.740) have created a peaked distribution. This finding illustrates that there was no significant difference in how parents from the 1st percentile of income viewed the importance of the school being successful in "sending" students to third level when compared to how parents from the 3rd percentile viewed the importance.

The school is successful in sending students to third level institutions

Mean = 3.92
Std. Dev. = 1.394
N = 182

No.of participants

no importance-very important
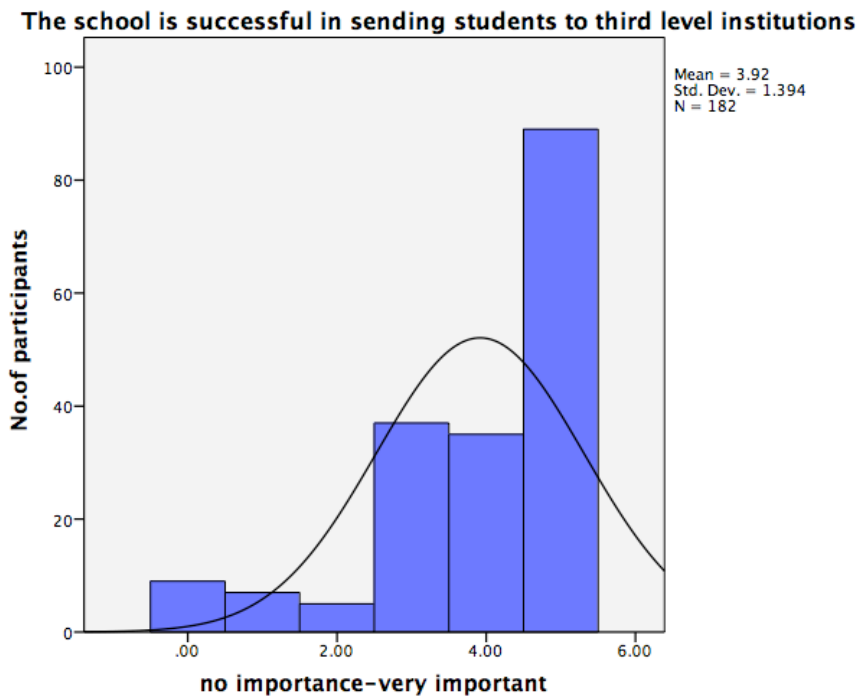
Chart 8.11 Importance for parents of school "sending" students to third level education when making school choice.

Another statement rating that strongly represents participants' views is that it is a very important consideration and possible influence for them in choosing a post-primary school if the school offers a good range of academic subjects. 74.2% (n=138) rated it as being very important that the school offered a good range of academic subjects while 1.6% rated it as being of no importance. This reflects that parents were strongly influenced by the range of academic subjects provided in choosing a post-primary school for their child(ren).

An independent – samples t-test was also conducted to compare the levels of income (1st percentile=3 the 3rd percentile=7) against the variable "The school offers a good range of academic subjects". There was no significant difference in scores for the 1st percentile of income (M= 4.59, SD =0.79 and the 3rd percentile of income (M=4.70 SD=0.46). Parents from the 1st percentile held similar views on the school being co-educational to parents from the 3rd percentile.

62.4% of participants (n=116) believed that it was *very important* that there were clearly established home-school links and 51.1% (n=95) believed that it was *very important* that the

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school facilities and school spaces were well maintained, when choosing a post-primary school for their child(ren).

The following section presents the findings from the section asking parents to rate what they feel the school should provide for their children.

(v)   **Section Five** *What you feel is important that the school should provide*

The three highest scoring statements in terms of the statement being *very important* in this section were:

1. The teaching staff are experienced and well qualified.
2. The pupils know what is expected of them in relation to their behaviour.
3. The school deals with incidences of bullying in an appropriate manner.

Table 8.6 below depicts the frequency measures from these three statements from the questionnaire.

	The teaching staff are experienced and well qualified 83.2% of participants (n=153) believe that this statement is *very important.*	**The pupils know what is expected of them in relation to their behaviour** 82.3% of participants (n=153) believe that this statement is *very important.*	**The school deals with incidences of bullying in an appropriate manner** 81.2% of participants (n=151) believe that this statement is *very important.*
Valid	184	186	186
Missing	4	2	2
Mean	4.76	4.77	4.69
Standard Deviation	0.59	0.51	0.79

Table 8.6 Frequency measures of distribution, three top statements

There is a minimal difference between what the participants believe are the most important statements, with the first statement referring to the teaching staff being experienced and well qualified and the next two referring to behaviour and bullying. Less participants completed the statement in relation to teacher experience. This is an interesting finding which reveals that the

participants believe that the behaviour and anti-bullying protocols in the school should be almost equally as important as the experience and qualifications of the teachers.

(vi)   **Section Six** *Your experience of being involved in the school as a parent/guardian*

This section used question eighteen to focus on the experience of the participants of being involved in the case study school as a parent/guardian. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements.

On a scale that extended from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* there was only one statement that participants indicated that they strongly agreed with. If asked to recommend the school to other parents 48.4% (n=90) of participants *strongly agreed* that they would recommend the school. This is a very strong recommendation from the parents about the school. With regards to other statements in this section the three highest scoring statements in terms of parents *agreeing* with the statement in this section were:

1. I/We are satisfied with the amount of homework my child(ren) receive.
2. In general I/We are satisfied with the quality of education our child(ren) receive(s).
3. In general I/We are satisfied with the physical environment of the school.

Table 8.7 below depicts the frequency measures (agree) from these three statements.

	I/We are satisfied with the amount of homework my child(ren) receive 62.7% of participants (n=116) believe *agree* with this statement.	**In general I/We are satisfied with the quality of education our child(ren) receive(s).** 59.7% of participants (n=111) *agree* with this statement.	**In general I/We are satisfied with the physical environment of the school.** 59.1% of participants (n=110) *agree* with this statement.
Valid	184	186	186
Missing	4	2	2
Mean	4.76	4.77	4.69
Standard Deviation	0.59	0.51	0.79

Table 8.7 Frequency measures of distribution, three top statements

(vii)   **Section Seven** *Family Life and Education*

The final section of the questionnaire was concerned with family life and education.

One of the most interesting findings from this section related to the extent to which participants (parents) restricted the amount of time that their children spent socialising. In the boxplot below the distribution of scores is represented by the blue box and the protruding lines. While the representative box for males represents a smaller cohort (n=27) there is a marked difference in how male participants felt the question represented them and how female participants felt it represented them. If we look at the overall response from the participants 35.9% (n=66) believed that they *always* restricted the amount of time their children spent socialising, however when the overall profile is distilled down further and differentiated by gender, females are stronger in their belief that they *always* restrict the amount of time that their children spend socialising while males are more concentrated between neither never or always and almost always. Chart 8.12 illustrates the distribution of scores for males and females in relation to restriction of time for socialising.
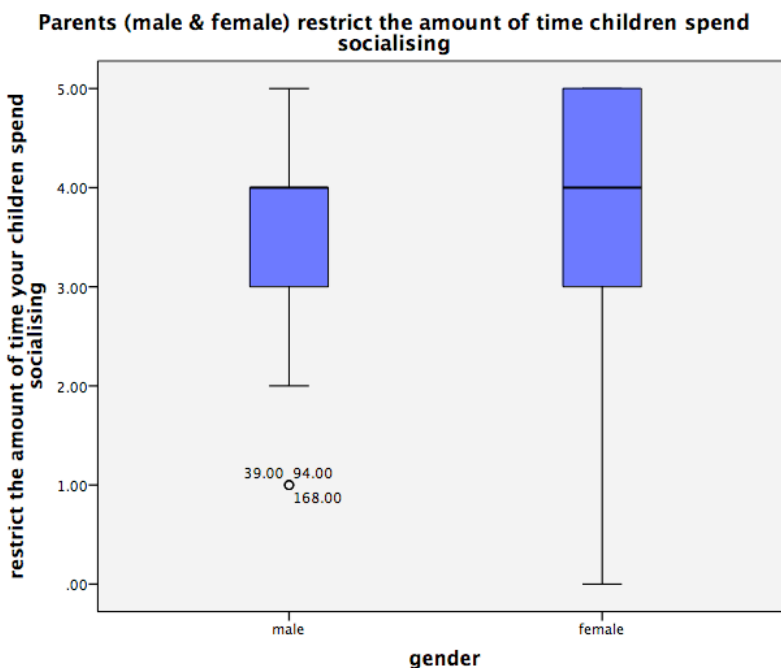
Chart 8.12 Distribution of scores- restriction of time by participants of their children socialising

I also conducted an independent sample t-test to compare the levels of income (1st percentile=3 the 3rd percentile=7) against the variable "restricting the amount of time your children spent socialising". There was no significant difference in scores for the 1st percentile (M=3.77, SD=1.34) and the 3rd percentile (M=3.88, SD= 1.36). Parents who were in the first percentile of income did not differ therefore in their views on restricting their children's socialising time to parents in the

3rd percentile of income. The magnitude of the difference in the means (=-.1096, -.1096) was very small.

33.5% of participants (n=61) reported that in response to the question "Do family members (your partner's parents, your/partner's siblings) talk to your children about education?" represented their case *almost always*. When the results for this question are differentiated by gender there is a difference between the male and female participants' views in relation to the question. There are some outliers evident in the male responses that originate within the never to sometimes segment of the scale and none of the male respondents believed that the question *always* represented them, instead the responses sit within the *almost always* segment of the scale. It is important to note that the number of male participants is relatively small (n=27).

Chart 8.13 below illustrates the distribution of scores in relation to family members talking to the participant's children about education.
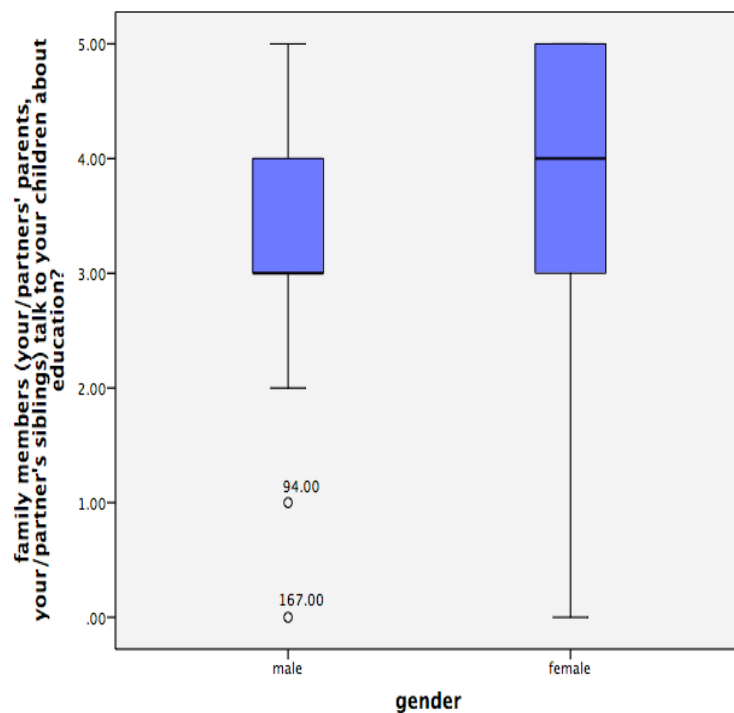
Chart 8.13 Distribution of scores- Family members talking to participants' children about education

The findings also provide evidence of the educational resources of the participants' children. 82% (n=151) of participants listed the following resources:

- Desk, chair, lamp, books, internet connection, laptop

40% (n=74) listed the following resources:

- Pens, educational TV channels, visits to the library, art materials

The findings reveal that the most common educational resources included a desk, a chair and a lamp.

Participants volunteered information in relation to extra-curricular activities and family activities. A number of themes emerged in the analysis of the extra-curricular activities. I have grouped the activities as follows:

- Sports activities; camogie, football, hurling, soccer, rugby, swimming, pitch and putt, walking

- Non-sport related educational activities; piano, music, drama, public speaking

- Recreational activities; cinema, out for a meal, shopping, going to mass, Sunday dinner.

The significance of the three themes in relation to the extracurricular is that the themes represent a myriad of activities that are indicative of varying types of cultural capital including economic capital, academic capital and social capital. Schools grant recognition and legitimacy to cultural capital which in turn advantages some parents and marginalises others (Lyons et al, 2003). The augmentation by parents of their children's schooling by providing various extra-curricular activities serves to enhance their children's schooling and enable their children to access forms of cultural capital via their habitus (Lyons et al, 2003).

The parent questionnaire produced an extensive range of findings which have been prioritised on the basis of being relevant to the research questions and the literature and these have been presented in the preceding sections. The questionnaire data that was generated was in the case of ranking questions Q9 and Q10 difficult to transpose to SPSS for analysis. In the pilot phase of the parent questionnaire the ranking questions (Q9 - list of motivating factors and Q10 - Your children's education) were piloted and this generated manageable data however this process did not work as well across the whole sample. This was not due to poor response rates but in the interpretation of the questions by participants. I analysed the question nine rankings by hand as it was not possible to transpose the data into SPSS. It was not possible to cross-tabulate the levels of family gross income against the highest level of educational qualification as the questionnaire only asked for the highest level of qualification of the participant completing the questionnaire

and did not include the participants' spouse or partner. It would have been useful to have been able to establish if there was any correlation or impact between the level of income and the highest level of qualification of both parties.

The next section focuses on the teacher questionnaire that was used to create a profile of the teacher respondents and to select teachers for the semi-structured interview phase of the research.

8.3 The teacher questionnaire
a)
b) 8.3.1 Findings from the teacher questionnaire

In the same manner as the findings from the parent questionnaire were presented in the previous section, the findings from the teacher questionnaire data have been mapped linearly onto the teacher questionnaire schedule (Appendix Nine) and are presented within the structure of the questionnaire itself. The questionnaire was divided into six sections, each with a distinctive focus. Each section contained a range of questions and respondents were asked to answer a variety of question types designed to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data.

> *(i)* ***Section One****: Professional details. (Gender, Age, Years of experience, current employment status)*

Twenty-five teachers completed the teacher questionnaire. Ten males and fifteen females returned completed questionnaires. Thirteen staff indicated on the questionnaire that they were agreeable to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Chart 8.14 below depicts the age range and years of service of participating teachers.
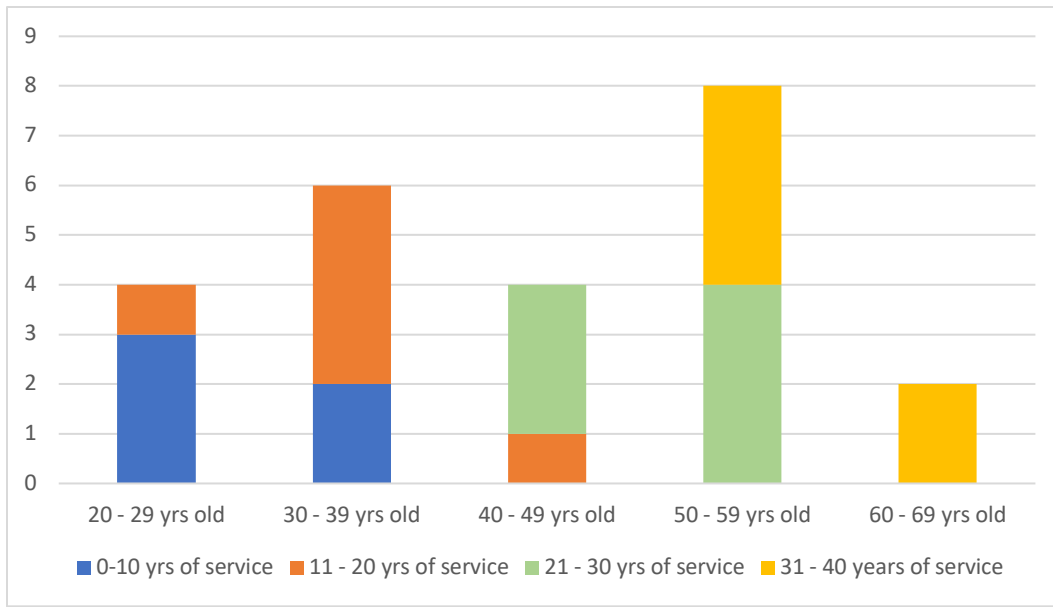
Chart 8.14 Age range and years of service of participating teachers

 (ii)   **Section Two**: *Professional qualifications.*

Chart 8.15 below shows the third level Institutions attended by the participating teachers for undergraduate study. The majority of the participating teachers (n=9) attended UCD to study for their undergraduate degree. Some of the teachers (n=5) completed a concurrent teacher education course, i.e. Physical Education teachers and Woodwork teachers in University of Limerick while the remainder (n=20) completed a consecutive teacher education qualification of a Higher Diploma in Education.
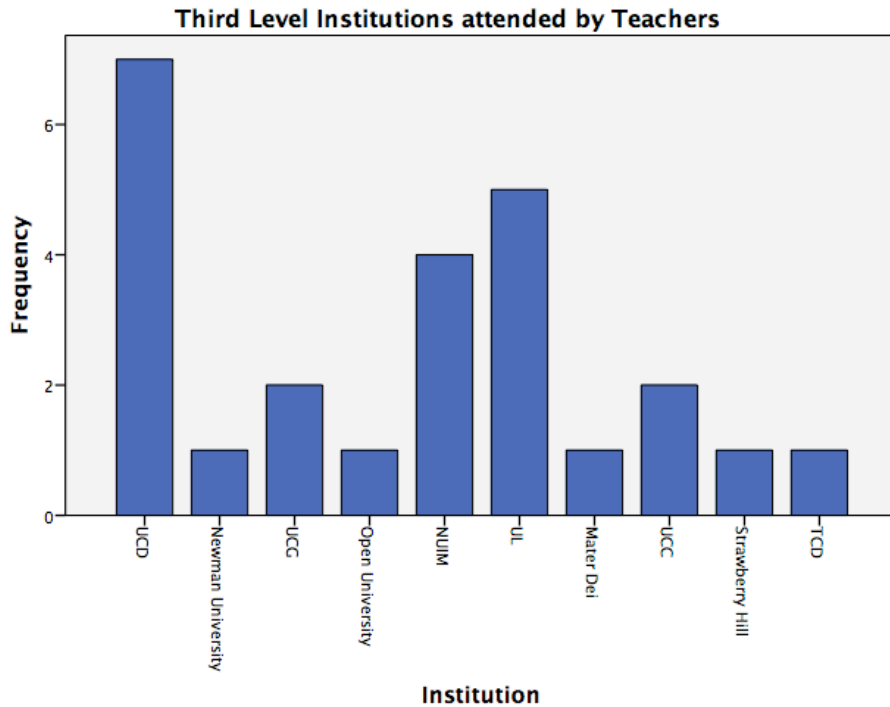
Chart 8.15 Third level Institutions attended by the participating teachers (undergraduate)

64% of participating teachers (n=16) strongly agreed that professional in-service is important for practising teachers.

 (iii)   ***Section Three***: *Subjects and hours taught.*

All teacher participants taught a number of subjects at various levels. The top three subjects taught reported were; Mathematics (n=7), Gaeilge (n=5) and English (n=5).

Chart 8.16 displays the hours taught per week and the gender of participating teachers. It is interesting to note that all of the male teacher respondents were teaching more than twenty hours per week.
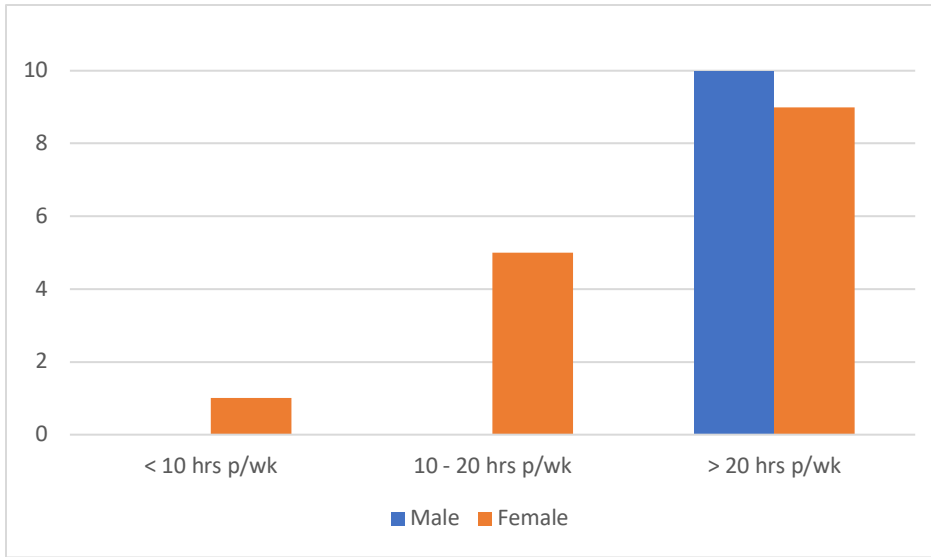
Chart 8.16 Hours per week and Gender of Participating Teachers

(iv) **Section Four***: Post of Responsibility.*

32% of participating teachers (n=8) held assistant principal posts of responsibility and a further 32% of participants (n=8) held special duties posts of responsibility.

(v) **Section Five***: Teaching Subject departments.*

Teachers worked within subject teams in the school. Twenty two of the twenty-five teacher participants reported that they attended subject meetings once a term while one teacher attended subject meetings once every month. One teacher reported attending subject meetings once a year. Fourteen participating teachers rated the status of their first subject (i.e. subject they teach the most hours in) as *very important* while eight teachers rated the status of their second subject as *very important*.

(vi) **Section Six***: Characteristics which could be associated with your school.*

Teachers were asked to rank a list of characteristics which could be associated with their school on a scale of one to ten where one was most important and two was next important up to ten which was least important.

The top three ranked characteristics were; that the school had high academic standards, school management provides clear leadership and that there were clear, recognisable policies and procedures which were implemented in a positive and consistent manner.

The final section of the questionnaire produced a number of recurring themes in the findings. Staff were asked to identify the purpose of their school in meeting the students' needs, their responses form the most interesting findings from the teacher questionnaire. I have collated and tabulated the themes in table 8.8 below;

Purpose of the school	Commentary
To meet all the pupils' needs	"academic results are important they are not the single goal, we must have the holistic approach to education. The school must be a safe and enjoyable place to be for all and provide all with a good foundation in education qualifications and also in self-esteem and self-confidence. School should provide training in skills that are necessary for life" "that school in general only meets a 30-40% target of pupils' educational needs. Too driven by exams and single perspective intelligence and 3 Rs" "Too much focus on the academic (which it meets well). Middle student loss. High and low catered for. Could be far more focus on the enjoyment of school". "Educational needs are of high importance in this school but it is always done to get high grades. I feel a lot of the time students with SEN are left behind. Social needs are met through sport but trips away with students to help them develop socially do not really occur in the school".
To provide educational experiences	"to students which engage their minds, stimulate curiosity and promote reflection in a positive respectful environment" "Educational needs are more of a priority than social needs".
To be inclusive	"Our school has an excellent "SEN" department that keeps the staff regularly up-to-date about the educational and social needs of all students. Many of our weaker students obtain extra classes in subject areas which they find most difficult, ie Maths, English, Science etc. We have a care team who looks after the student body and this has been implemented very effectively in our school"
To provide holistic and enjoyable education	"so that students can achieve their potential in all areas, academic, social, personal, sporting, musical etc" "School provides students with a happy and safe environment in which to develop". "Our school provides a comfortable learning environment where students can reach their full potential on many levels, academically, socially, emotionally."
To stimulate a good work ethic	"Pleasant surroundings leads to good inter-personal relationships between staff and students. A sense of learning together. Students have in most cases respect for their teachers. Resources of the school enhance its delivery of the curriculum".

Table 8.8 Purpose of the school in teachers' views

c) 8.3.2 Concluding commentary on Teacher Questionnaire findings

The teacher questionnaire generated a profile of the teachers teaching at the case study school. The purpose of the questionnaire was to capture baseline data about the teachers and to further select participant teachers for semi-structured interviews. The responses in the questionnaire

informed the structuring of the semi-structured interviews. The next section presents the findings from the teacher semi-structured interviews.

8.4 The teacher semi-structured interviews
a)
b) 8.4.1 Findings from the teacher semi-structured interviews

In keeping with the previous two sections the findings from the teacher semi-structured interviews have been mapped linearly onto the Teacher semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix Eleven) and are presented within the structure used for the interviews. Where relevant, a number of subsection findings have been grouped thematically in the presentation of findings. The interview was divided into three sections, with a number of sub-sections within the main sections.

(i)   **Section One:** *Teaching Subjects and teaching experience.*

The staff that were interviewed (n=8) included the School Principal, the Deputy Principal, a Guidance Counsellor, a Special Needs Assistant, and four general classroom teachers. The range of experience of teaching and managing in the post primary system ranged from fourteen years' experience to forty years' experience inclusively. The subjects taught by the interviewees included English, Economics, Geography, Maths, Gaeilge, Religious Education, History, Civic Social, Political Education (CSPE) and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The interviewees defined their roles in the school on the basis of their responsibilities, i.e. The Principal and Deputy Principal were responsible for the overall management of the school and they also had a leadership role, the Guidance Counsellor had originally worked as a teacher of Gaeilge and History and had subsequently taken a qualification in Religious Education but her role at the time of the research was as a guidance counsellor, the Special Needs Assistant was specifically allocated to provide support to a number of students with special educational needs and the classroom teachers responsibilities included teaching their full teaching hours (n=22) with some additional responsibilities which included form tutor, post of responsibility or head of their subject department.

The teaching experience within school settings varied between the interviewees. Some of the interviewees (n=4) had taught in the school all their teaching career, the Principal, Deputy

Principal and Guidance Counsellor had all taught in other schools which included co-educational and single sex schools in both the voluntary secondary system and the VEC system. All interviewees names have been coded alphanumerically in this section to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees and the school. Table 8. 9 below highlights the characteristics of the interviewees.

Teacher Code	Gender	Years of Experience	Subjects Taught	Role
TF1	Female	35	Mathematics, Geography	Principal
DB2	Male	19	Economics, History	Deputy Principal
CG7	Female	25	Gaeilge, History, R.E.	Guidance Counsellor
MM6	Female	10		SNA
HM3	Female	39	English, History	Classroom Teacher
RM4	Female	38	Gaeilge, Mathematics	Classroom Teacher
BE8	Female	7	French, Gaeilge	Classroom Teacher
NOS5	Female	18	History, R.E, S.P.H.E, C.S.P.E	Classroom Teacher

Table 8.9 Teacher Interviewee characteristics

The Principal commented on how having previously worked in a school within a Vocational Education Scheme (VEC) that she had noted that there was a very different relationship with the Department of Education and Skills in the voluntary secondary system and how everything else was very different, she recalled how:

> *I was about a week in when I realised the photocopier was the same. And that was the only thing I knew that was similar. Everything else about it, how things…subjects were blocked together, how we go about enrolment…everything about it was completely different. (TF1)*

The Principal also alluded to the relationship between the voluntary secondary schools and the DES being different:

> *I found the layer of bureaucracy from the VEC was missing and in some ways that made it em…more difficult as Deputy Principal because I was a direct with the Department, there was no 'middle-man'. But on, in other ways it was a huge gift because you have more eh…say… (TF1)*

The Deputy Principal had previously worked at a single sex school for a short time but had been a member of staff in the case study school for eighteen years as had the Guidance Counsellor before being employed at the case study school for eighteen years.

(ii) **Section Two**: *School systems and hierarchies within the school and links to families.*
   (a) The co-educational school

Thematically the concept of the co-educational school is particularly dominant in this piece of research. The case study school is very much defined as a co-educational school. The theme was addressed in many ways by the interviewees throughout all of the interviews. The Principal commented early in the interview that:

> *Mine (referring to the school) was mixed all the time…I've always come from a system whereby boys and girls and an amalgamation going back between a convent and a vocational school. (TF1)*

The Principal also added:

> *Interesting yeah yeah and em…I suppose then because it's a mixed school, you're getting – you're probably meeting all families…you know… (TF1)*

The Guidance Counsellor mentioned that:

> *…and probably I would say co-ed does more for boys than it does for girls.*
>
> *Em…academically more for boys than girls, em…because they're slower to develop in their first three or four years, you know…whereas the girls are generally, if they're able, they'll go as far as they can go. So they kind of bring the boys on a bit I suppose…what the boys do for the girls then is totalling in the socialising area, is calmed them down. It makes them see reason and it brings a sense of humour to them and that kind of thing, you know. (CG7)*

Two of the more senior classroom teachers (HM3 and RM4) both acknowledged differences in their approaches to teaching in co-ed and single gender schools. They felt that boys were very energetic and pushed and shoved each other and others at will and that generally that girls were more biddable. They felt that academically girls were more focused and that they were good for boys as they pushed them on but that girls in a single gender set up achieved greater academic results while not being socially adjusted to the norms of everyday interaction with boys. They felt that they "had to be always on the watch" with boys. They also mentioned that they believed

that it was good for boys and girls to be together in their puberty years as they became used to each other and they felt that this was something positive in the research school:

> *The lads tend to be more physical with each other but the girls are good to calm them down. (HM3)*
> *Girls tend to do better academically but they are not great when they leave school and go out in the world, they have a bit of adjusting to do to a co-ed world... (RM4)*

All of the interviewees were exceptionally strong advocates of a co-educational option as they felt it offered the best opportunities to both boys and girls. One of the classroom teachers stated:

> *I feel very strongly about it because on a personal level as a parent I have a boy and a girl... a girl gone through a single sex school and a boy at the top end of a single sex boys' school and I actually think there's nothing more natural than the co-ed. (BE8)*

Another classroom teacher added that:

> *And it can be terribly em...closed-in, if you like and insular and in relation to relationships, girls can get very intense in relationships with each other and they can turn very nasty in an all-girls. The boys dilute that... (MM6)*

When asked if the staff had experienced that the families had different expectations of boys and girls within the same family the Principal responded saying:

> *No, no I haven't noticed that families would have different expectations of school but you would see a difference in expectation from the different socioeconomic backgrounds... the expectation would be different in relation to school. (TF1)*
>
> *(b) Building relationships and Communication with Parents*

The theme of building relationships with parents and having open and positive channels of communication was mentioned by all interviewees. Both the Principal and Deputy Principal had contact with parents on a day-to day level while the Guidance Counsellor and the SNA were in contact with parents in relation to specific educational matters. The Deputy Principal was also a Year Head and this was always a position within the school. As a Year head the DP was in contact with parents:

> *Now that can be from the most minor of matters to serious discipline...well not that serious...in 1ˢᵗ year you'd hope and so on. So you would be meeting with parents and interacting there. And then there'd be other issues....that parents would interact with you over...that you'd be dealing with them in relation to stuff...bullying then at times...queries on that seem to come my way as well. So the calls seem to come...I get some calls in relation to that as well. But you would be interacting with parents quite a bit. You definitely would yeah. (DB2)*

The Guidance Counsellor stated that she had a lot of communication with parents:

I've a huge amount Oh a huge amount…about the subject choice and about the decision making or…for sure…if they weren't sure about Transition year or whatever… No, it's (TY) a selection process – 72 students do it, so 50% roughly. (CG7)

The SNA remarked that she did not have as much communication with parents as she maybe should have had but there were systems set up in the school to filter communication also:

No, not lot actually and I suppose it's one of the things I'm going to do is make sure that I have a little more – I mean I may only, may only speak to them by phone… Like last year now, I did meet one or two… Em…but because they liaise with the Learning Support Teacher and then she's liaising back to me, it's kind of filtering a bit like that. (MM6)

Classroom teachers generally communicate with parents by using the homework journal or at parent-teacher meetings. When asked how parents respond to communication from the school the DP commented that:

First of all they'd nearly always em…are thankful for the 'heads up'…nearly always, if you can pick up the phone. Now of course the key is identifying that…the student that is stirring out of line. They're nearly always thankful for the 'heads up' on it, nearly always. And that leads to a positive relationship. From there it's what we can do about it. (DB2)

(c) Pastoral care and well-being of the students

The school has a Care team that meets every week. The Care team consists of the DP, two guidance counsellors, the Resource teacher and a Learning Support teacher. The Care team also has a role in communicating with parents:

Generally one individual would make the call but the Care Team would for sure be, X would interact with parents an awful lot, very much so, with the Resource Students now and she'd be involved in getting the kids assessed as well. But X would very much be in touch with parents. Parents would come in an see X now. And X and X particularly would call home is an essential part of their job. So parents would be very much involved in that whole process as well. (DB2)

…if a student comes distressed and so on…and you bring it to the Care team, I wouldn't always be the one making that call. It would be made by X and so on but generally they'd (the parents) be supportive. Generally…and generally they're aware that there's an issue themselves. And sometimes I get parents ringing up worried and do we know anything…is there any signs in school and we can help them out. (DB2)

The school does not have a designated Home School Community Liaison officer as they did not have designated disadvantage status:

No, there is no Home School Liaison eh person in the school, it's not a designated …we're a Voluntary Secondary School, we're not entitled to it in any shape or form. (CG7)

Both management and staff articulated that it would be helpful if they had the additional resource as *"it's no harm to go out to the house…if it could lead to… Sometimes it's hard to get parents in as well." (HM3)*

One of the teachers commented:

they're (the parents) quite good to come into us now as well. Now we do insist on it at times if we need to see them and we ask them to come in. But X would follow that up a bit now and so on and she would go out. Now we'd always go to the house if there's a bereavement or something like that… (NOS5)
And like you know we don't say have a Home School Liaison Officer in this school. Now I've only briefly worked in a school where that was, so I've lost touch with how it works, but you know, you'd often wonder. There's definitely a need for it because if a child has a problem in school it's because there's something going on at home or they have the same problem at home. (BE8)

The topic of guidance hours in the school was also discussed. There are two guidance counsellors employed in the school. Students are provided with Career guidance and with a counselling service in the school. The counselling service is a confidential service available to all students attending the school:

it is a very private arrangement at the same time…my work is confidential, I don't discuss you know what the students talk to me about. We just kind of discuss the overall development if the parents have been on to her and…if some obstacles came up. (CG7)
their confidentiality is guaranteed and their em…if I'm liaising with the parents I will talk to the student first because it's very much their taking leadership of what they want and their own. (CG7)

The Career guidance service is timetabled from third year onwards. Due to the numbers attending the school it is not possible to timetable second or first years for career guidance:

Eh…with the Career Guidance and Counselling, it's 50/50 Career Guidance and one to one Counselling. (CG7)

First year students are mentored by senior students in the school who are called "Meitheal" leaders. These students are selected specifically for the role of mentoring incoming first years and they receive specialist training in advance of taking on the role.

The school organises two meetings in January, the first meeting for incoming first year parents and the incoming first year is invited to the second meeting. The incoming students then come into the school for two assessments prior to starting at the school:

they come in for two different assessments then but that's just the children. And then when they come in in September very early we set up – and this would be the Care Team very much and the Guidance very strong and the Dean of 1ˢᵗ Year, the Form Teacher – we bring the parents in batches of 30 in the afternoon. And the come and they meet, eh (the parents) first come. I welcome them. I introduce the panel so it'll be the Dean of 1ˢᵗ year, the Form Teacher for that class, who take care of the children in a particular way in that class and the Guidance Counsellor for 1ˢᵗ years and that rotates between X and the other Guidance Counsellor. So it is X currently, so it'll be the other Guidance Counsellor next year. (TF1)
And they attend all the meetings. So they pick up any concern or anything then and parents sit around in a circle. We also have them meet our "Meitheal" Leaders,
so the 'Meitheal' leaders for that particular class are all 'dickied up' and address them as well and say 'I am…and I help with….'. And then we….after that the parents introduce themselves 'I am the mother of ….' or 'I am the dad...', 'I am here to represent…' – whatever student…. (TF1)
And the child is very excited to see Mammy or Daddy or whoever for them. Now they mightn't necessarily …Yeah it could be anybody, it doesn't matter who it is as long as they have somebody that they can connect

with yeah. And we often have smaller siblings that have to be brought because they're being collected from primary school and so on. (TF1)

(d) Attendance, Student behaviour, Uniform and Homework Policy

The school operates its own attendance tracking system. As the school does not have designated disadvantage status they are not funded to employ an attendance officer but they have prioritised the development of an attendance system. One of the senior teachers commented that:

If a family doesn't understand the importance of consistent attendance in school that can impact negatively because if students miss time they find it very difficult to make it up or to get to grips with the concepts they have missed. They become "deschooled", that is a different culture to the culture of the school. Families that believe in education and that buy into the ethos and culture of the school support the school and promote it in their own families and in the community. (RM4).

Students who have excellent attendance are rewarded at a full school assembly and at the Christmas and at the Summer break:

We have a certificate each year that we would reward students for good attendance. We do it at Christmas and we do it at Summer. And there's a certificate given out and they're delighted to get that and we'll always make…if there's a student that's gone through the school now coming up to 6th year – there'd be one or two that have never missed a day … (DB2)

Some students don't have excellent attendance however and the school also addresses this:

Now we do make a big push on attendance and we always follow up and we would send letters out. Letters went last week, we were just warning parents that were just around 15 -17 days, that they're nearing the 20 days where it automatically has to be forwarded out. (DB2)

The attendance system also tracks students who leave the school during the school day:

there's a little green slip that they fill out if they want to go home and that must go to the Dean of Year before 9 o'clock. (NOS5)

The school journal is used to record absence notes. The school sees the journal as the main source of communication with the family for day to day matters. All students are required to record their homework in the journal:

every student has to have a journal, HAS TO, that's mandatory and they have to have it in every class with them. (RM4)

The homework policy and the uniform policy is presented in the homework journal. The school strictly enforces the homework policy with students but there is an opportunity for teachers to use their discretion with students who have not completed homework. If a student is reported for missing their homework three times a triplicate letter is completed and sent home, to the class teacher and to the form teacher:

So we put it into the journal. It goes home. And it's for parents too…it's in the journal there, we make parents aware of it and em this…what we do now with the journals is that a parent…there's a page in it, we have our code of behaviour, classroom regulations, school rules, uniform, homework policy and they're all in it and the students and the parent have to sign that. There's a page then where 'I agree to abide by

the policies of the school'...or whatever and they sign that. So every parent will have received a copy of the homework policy, let's say and it's there. (DB2)

The deputy principal is of the view however that teachers in general would "take a balanced approach". If a student repeatedly does not do homework the matter is escalated to the Dean and the parents would be contacted again.

Homework does present challenges for staff and students, one of the teachers commented that:

Homework is the one thing that causes those little flash points as well…
It does…it causes yeah. And there are some children (who) just can't do homework.
Like they don't want to take out the school bag…when they go home and as you said there's no facilities at home. I mean I always laugh when the parents come in for the Parent Teacher meeting and they say 'well now I have a study desk and a light down there and he goes up to his room and I don't see him'. (MM6)

One of the teachers commented that:

Well say from a subject/form teacher's point of view em, you know we have a very good system with the journals but if, again, it's always a discipline issue. It's always a negative communication.
So whether it's homework or misbehaviour there's an opportunity to put that in the back of the journal. But I mean I would never send home any – say a positive note. That doesn't happen. You know and I don't know much of what's going on in their lives that's positive, you know, if they've achieved or accomplished something outside of school, that…we don't tend to know about it either. So……apart from the letter home out of necessity, there's not… Obviously the parents get the newsletter which is good, they do see what's going on (NOS5).

The school provides after school study for third years, fifth years and sixth years. The study is supervised by staff and students pay for the service:

It's an atmosphere of calm for those to do study in it who otherwise would have difficulty doing the two hours. You've a variety of people in it and then you have the excellent student who just wants to do two hours, have it out of the way and go do their other two when they go home or whatever. (MM6)

Where students cannot afford the charge the school accommodates them and they can attend:

Now the other thing about the charge if someone can't afford to do evening study, they're never excluded from it for that reason. We'd have a good few in there now, particularly with changing times now, it's not a reason for excluding them. We want everyone who wants to be in there in there. (NOS5)

On Saturdays, supervised study is provided free of charge for the Leaving Certificate students:

They're well looked after and that. That's from 10 -12 and 2- 4 on a Saturday and that would run for most Saturdays during the year. (CG7)

The uniform policy is strictly enforced by all of the staff.

There are layered support systems in place in the school that progress from the level of the class teacher to the form tutor to the Year head (the Dean) to the Deputy Principal and Principal. There are regular meetings held weekly to inform staff in relation to student issues.

As form teachers we meet our Dean once a week for about twenty minutes so, you know, the form teacher might let you know 'well we've got this information, this child is x y & z….
And then the Dean would you know, if things got out of hand, then it's to the Vice Principal/Principal. (NOS5)

(e) Subject Choices and the Curriculum

The theme of subject choices and the curriculum was a prominent theme throughout the interviews. The staff articulated very strongly that the school is an "academic school" supported by extensive subject choices embedded in a broad curriculum:

> *yeah well that is one that we do emphasise that we are an academic school and we do emphasise that we're about exam results. Like now...and that's it now. What we do is say that if everyone achieves their potential, that's what we're about. That every student would achieve their full potential both academically and socially. There's no point codding, you do come to school to fulfil yourself academically, you know and you can place the emphasis on other things which we do like to develop you as the whole human being and all that as well. (DB2)*
> *But the truth is as well, you are here to learn. That's why you come to school, so they would be kind of bombarded with that from the word go. (BE8)*

Entry to Transition Year (TY) is determined by a selection process. There are seventy-two places in TY. The numbers are limited in order to accommodate the fifth and sixth year classes and to ensure that there are sufficient specialist classrooms available for the Leaving Certificate programme. The guidance counsellor explained:

> *More students would do it (TY) had we the space if the department would give us the labs and stuff. It's really, they wouldn't fit into Science for 5th and 6th year. (CG7)*
> *we're very heavily loaded in Science here so, let's say next year we've 5 Biology classes, 2 Chemistry classes, 1 Physics class. Now if everybody in Transition Year needed to get into a Science lab, we couldn't offer all that Science. (CG7)*

Students are advised to: *"keep their options open as much as possible"*
> *Because even those who say they really know what they want very often don't, you know...and they will utterly change their minds in 6th year.*
> *So like for the majority of students, eh...well maybe for the majority of girls, they would need to keep a modern language option, the would need to keep a Science subject, they would need to keep a Business and they would need to keep the subject they really love, you know, for points and... (CG7)*
> *Because...em...the boys tend to...let's say even looking at Engineering...it's very stereo typical still...The girls don't think 'well my Physics, therefore I will be an Engineer'...where the Construction Studies and Engineering, which mightn't have them as prepared in some ways, except they'd have the practical stuff, they'd think 'ah, we're going to do Engineering'. (CG7)*

Teachers work as part of subject teams where they agree texts, share resources, use common in house exam papers and use the same schemes of work for their year/subject.

> *We had a lot of subject meetings in History this year because we got an Inspector after Easter so...we've had more History meetings than we've ever had before but really you're just talking about three times a year, if that. (NOS5)*

Staff believed that some subjects had a "better" status than other subjects:
Religion is exam in Junior Cert...and I know some staff now wouldn't see Religion as being the most 'academic' of Junior Cert exams...
And then obviously CSPE doesn't rate at all. It is a common paper, it's not academic, it was never meant to be academic....
So if you haven't taught it, it's kind of hard to get your head around that. And SPHE, I would find that hard work now. You have to get the timetabling right with both of those subjects. (NOS5)

In a sense those subjects that are non-exam, whether it's Leaving Cert Religion or SPHE at Junior Cert, in a sense they're harder to teach because you don't have the stress of the exam. (RM4)

Incoming first year students are streamed for one "top stream" class of thirty students while the other classes in the year group are mixed ability classes. One of the teachers noted that:

> *if I give out a letter to the top stream – Form Class – and if I say 'that needs to be brought in tomorrow', it will be brought in tomorrow.*
> *if I give that out to the mixed ability, I could be waiting two weeks for everybody to get that in.*
> *So there is a reason why those children are in the top stream.*
> *Because they've probably come from a home where education is a priority…*
> *…where organisation is a priority…*
> *…like skills like that…*
> *So it's not an accident in a sense that they're in the top stream because their family, parents probably… they're set up, they meet the deadlines, they're organised so there's…it's all…there's a whole knock on effect. (MM6)*

The top stream students take higher level in all their subjects. The school encourages as many students as possible to take higher level.

> *we'd be pulling them up to the Higher level at Junior Cert and then at Leaving Cert it would tend to arise in a small minority where you'd be trying to explain something, maybe Ordinary Level…. (TF1)*

Occasionally students are not reaching the standard required for that subject and teachers would watch and be mindful that the student might be better to change levels:

It'd be fresh in my mind now because there'd be about three I'd be watching closely at Higher Level Maths at the moment…
They're not working at the Higher Level Maths, they haven't moved from the 20% or whatever it was at Mock level and still not hearing that maybe…that needs to…maybe – 'cause it's too late if you leave it, when they're within weeks of the exam it's too late and I mean there's a big difference between Honours Maths and Ordinary Maths. And because I taught Maths, I would know. (TF1).

Sometimes when a student might want to change levels and drop from higher to ordinary level the staff would try and retain them at the higher level if there was evidence that they would be successful. Staff had experiences of trying to persuade a student to stick with the higher level at junior cert because they may be limiting their options at Leaving Certificate:

> *there might be changing from honours to pass. Now and it would make life much easier but 'do you realise that when they get to 5th year, they can't change back'.(NOS5)*

One of the teachers felt that the curriculum "suits boys":

> *The curriculum suits boys - despite what everybody says - much better. In our school we have Construction Management, we have Engineering, we have Tech Graphs…you know? So straight away…em…I don't know why Geography is so popular, but all the students love doing Geography… (RM4)*

When asked if gender is an influence in making subject choice the teacher replied:

> *No I think it's a personality thing.*
> *You know, female or male doesn't enter into it really.*
> *Some people make decisions easier than others. (RM4)*

The school promotes high academic standards and supports students to attain their potential at various levels. Students are assessed regularly and results from the assessments are sent home to the parents.

> *3rds and 6ᵗʰ would have mid-term exams and mocks and 1ˢᵗ, 5ᵗʰ and 4ᵗʰ and those would get them twice a year…everyone then twice a term*
> *So they're examined twice a year…*
> *And reported twice a year.   (DB2)*

It is an accepted "norm" in the school that students will complete Junior cycle and Senior cycle and progress onto further education and training or onto third level education. One of the senior teachers mentioned that:

The culture in our school is that everyone does Junior Cert and Leaving Cert. That's the norm and families believe in that, it offers them a stable sound way of life. Some of our students have come from families where the parents didn't attend here but they have bought into it now because most parents value the opportunity of their son/daughter progressing onto college and getting a good qualification that will offer them a good standard of living.

Another teacher said that:

> *When students are in class together with other students their ideas do rub off on each other and they begin to think similarly, for example when they begin to think about getting to college, the discussions that they have spurs them on and then they all want to go somewhere, they don't want to be left out or to be different. (HM3).*

The next section of findings focuses primarily on the parents and families' participation in the school. As was the case in the previous sections a number of themes emerged through the analysis which I have prioritised here within the structure of the semi-structured interview.

(iii)   Section Three: Parents/Families Participation in the school.

The participation of parents in the school is central to the research questions of this thesis.

(a)   Parents Council and the Board of Management

The school had recently re-activated the Parent's Council in the school. The decision to reactivate it arose from a WSE report which recommended to the management of the school that they should have a Parents' Council, although the staff acknowledged that they were aware that it was necessary prior to the WSE. There had been a very active Parents' Council in the school previously. The staff are very mindful that parents were in general supportive of the school and supportive of the teaching staff.

> *because we've always had a support network of parents there…but actually getting them on to the Parents' Council was the…. It is difficult as well and they don't want to be overworked with it and you haven't that much for them to do at times of the year either as well. But they certainly are…we would have an active*

Parents' Council now and they have a role to play within it and they raised em…I'm going ringing them after this, that's what I was putting in my phone now. (DB2)

parents sitting on the board – very much so and that's never a problem. Parents are very active and very very good and very keen to get wholesome information, you know and to make a contribution. But on a day to day basis parents would be in touch all of the time. (TF1)

Some of the staff believed that some parents found it difficult to engage with the school despite being welcomed into the school by staff and management:

I hope they feel welcome, but I wouldn't say all parents do 'cause that's the nature of parents and schooling you know. You know, school is, they drop off at the gate for most parents. (DB2)

The principal referred to the parents' sense of the school:

And their own sense of how school was for them…is forever if they've had a negative experience themselves it can be very difficult to cross that threshold…. (TF1)

Some parents find it difficult to engage with the school because of their own experience of school:

'oh I'm nervous'…you know, 'having to come in to meet you and'…(I) immediately try to dispel that – it's not about that, it's about working together. (TF1)

If parents are negative about meeting staff it is unlikely therefore that they will engage with Parents' Council or the Board of Management. (TF1

(b)   Consultation regarding school policies and parents' involvement in school activities

The school involves parents in some of the decision-making around school policies. The DP remarked that:

for the first time ever we did a review of our code of behaviour involving parents and the students and so on and I took that… So the parents are actually – two, X and Y were on that and they fed back to the Parents' Council on it and I have to have one more meeting with them before the end of the year in relation to that, to show them the final code of behaviour. So it's the first time that we've had the school rules done with an input from parents.

So every stakeholder group in the school was represented. X was on as trustee. Everyone was there and I had teachers and students and parents. So we all sat in there and of course we…now the first meeting was fairly stiff…well it was amazing then. Everyone else was just throwing out their ideas by the end…students, parents, everyone now. I found the parents were really good now that was there and Peter had the legal background as well now so. But they really did and they certainly had a say and they went over and had their feedback and I'd done a feedback session all in the one day. You were, you were involved if you remember. (DB2)

Parents are also involved in other school activities and without them it would be very difficult to run the activities.

Transition Year parents would play a big role in that as well. You see we always had big parental involvement, particularly around the school orchestra and Transition year. They're two major things like we wouldn't get by without the help of parents. Sports would be another area parents would be supportive of and em we'd get sponsorship there. There's a parent of a girl in 6th year

whose giving us sponsorship. Em…they come to the matches, they help out a bit at the matches so they have been really useful to us. (DB2)
And sometimes they'd aid us too on speakers in as well…come in and talk to the students as well and so one. (CG7)
Yeah, speak in LCVP…them coming in and talking about their business background…and so now…some of them would be past students and non- parents. I would like to think that and this is an area that we should…we have to improve on as, I would think of is our relationship with the community and so on. Well parents are a big part of that now. (CG7)

(c) Parent teacher meetings

Parent Teacher meetings are held once every school year for each year group. Parent teacher meetings are usually well attended and usually run smoothly but one teacher did acknowledge that:

now there'd be a degree of frustration at times and that – I got that from the Parents' Council…that came back in that they find it very hard to get to every teacher…there'd be queues and so on, on the day. Generally you know…with the Parent Teacher meetings, some have to be half in and some have to be half out now as well…

Staff prepare themselves for parent teacher meetings by ensuring that they have their student records in order and up to date. Management don't advise staff on how to specifically prepare for parent teacher meetings, however they encourage staff to be honest and open with parents about their children:

…the only thing that I'd like staff to do is that they would deliver the message…that you know, if they share a frustration about a child, that's the time to say it, you know, take your opportunity, because sometimes it does happen that you'd ring a parent and say the child's misbehaving and they'd say 'well I went 'round to every teacher at the Parent Teacher meeting and they said they were doing fine. That'd be all…and parents generally, while they mightn't like it being said to them fully, they will appreciate it. (RM4)

Teachers find parent-teacher meetings challenging sometimes:
You know, I mean…And it's interesting too when you've two parents. You rarely get two parents at a Parent Teacher meeting. You get…you'll get one, right sitting down in front of you or you might get two who will separate….will split up and do half the teachers each but sometimes you will get the two sitting down in front of you. That's a bit difficult now because one is asking the question and the other one is listening, talking it all in… (NOS5)

(d) Families' expectations

The theme of families' expectations was an interesting theme as it was the interpretation of what the staff believed were the families' expectations:

Families expect their children to be happy here and to progress through the system to eventually sit the Leaving, they buy into that from the beginning. (RM4)

One of the staff believed that families "buy into" the reputation of the school and that they want to be part of that:

> *We have some 6th generation families in the school at this stage, generally families buy into the reputation that the school has and they want to be part of that. The school is lucky that it has an impressive success rate at keeping students in school and at progressing students onto third level and further ed courses. The culture in the school is that everyone does Junior Cert and Leaving Cert. That's the norm and families believe in that, it offers them a stable sound way of life. Some of our students have come from families where the parents didn't attend here but they have bought into it now because most parents value the opportunity of their son/daughter progressing onto college and getting a good qualification that will offer them a good standard of living. The only way for that to happen is through the education system. (HM3)*

The Principal spoke about how parents want the best for their children and how they are prepared to support their children:

> *But generally speaking they will do anything. They'd sever their right arm for their child, that's just nature like really and I'd have to say our parents are no exception in that.*
> *No matter what the socio-economic background. (TF1)*

> Another teacher spoke about students from similar backgrounds aspiring to different outcomes:
> *I have seen where there could be two families who have similar circumstances economically and financially but the children from one family will be very driven and very keen to take every educational opportunity to progress where the other won't…(TF1)*

I asked why did the teacher think that might be the case:

> *It's in them…they just have it in the, there is motivation at home and possibly from extended family who want the children to do well and they push them on but they have to want it themselves too. (NOS5)*

When discussing who the main contact person from the family to the school normally is the interviewees agreed that it was the mother. Parents expected that their children would "do well" and progress to further education or third level education on completion of school. The staff believed that the expectation of the families was that their children would achieve their potential academically. The Principal commented that:

> *but if you think about it, traditionally being an academic school should exclude children not include, if you think about it and it doesn't.*
> *No because I spoke to a girl yesterday evening at Leaving Cert who was panicking in evening study. So after coming over to get a form signed she arrived over and eh her she was, couldn't concentrate and she was all upset and her tummy was making noises and whoever was sitting 'round her was looking and she had decided that this… It was taking all her energy to stop her 'rumble tums' kind of ….and eh…But when I got talking to her, her anxiety was very much the…how proud she was to be here and how she, you know, felt a big pressure to do really well.*
> *And you know…and eh…ah…but she hadn't really faced calculating even though the Guidance Counsellor had gone through it briefly. So we sat down and we went…drew up 'Qualifax' on the internet and we'd the points calculator and she said "you mean I could get it?". So then she, I had to print it off and we went through all of that. Now she has remained in school….she's a prime example of someone remaining in school who easily could have gone elsewhere. But she wanted to be here so…. An academic school was something that she wanted to be part of. (TF1)*

(e)   Family Values

The themes of family values and dispositions are central to this thesis and the staff that were interviewed also discussed family values during the interviews. One of the teachers stated:

> *Yeah you do, I mean…because…like if education is valued…if reading is valued…if respect is valued, you see it in the child, you do. It comes across…like after teaching them – and I'd have them on and off, like I could have a child on and off for the 5, 4, 6 years…because I'd have him at Junior level and then I'm going to see them at some stage in 5th and 6th year…Just…it's all down to good manners and respect. (NOS5)*

> *You know, it sounds very old fashioned but that's where it comes from…It's in them you know…and if they just have a good personality and a good way about them and em…you know. Some of them…some children are so em...driven and so academically minded to the detriment of everything else. (MM6)*

Staff referred to seeing the "home cultures" manifesting into school then on a day to day basis with particular reference to unacceptable behaviour where students who "shout and roar and screech at everybody at home" behaving in a similar manner in school.

> *They will do the same, yeah. You would see it particularly in boys. And in particular in losing their temper.*
> *You can guarantee if they have a bad temper by 2nd year, they have lived or seen somebody who's had a pretty bad temper. It mightn't be mother and father, it could be an uncle, it could be the grandfather they work with, or something you know? (CG7)*

Staff referred also to the daily language that some students used. They commented that some students were very articulate and had extensive vocabularies while others did not. They claimed that those that had more restricted language often had difficulties processing information and communication and they remembered then meeting the students' parents and observing similar patterns of restricted language from the parents.

Staff also spoke about the type of food that is available at home and what students eat in school:

> *We have a tuck shop and we do…you'd see even…I would say the poorer they are, the more they spend in the tuck shop.*
> *Very definitely. The lunch wouldn't be ready, they'd find money for that, they'd give them treats, you know…they'd go and eat these doughnut yokes that I'm sure has them wired for the afternoon…you know afterwards or whatever…and then you'd see some of the others maybe and you'd see their little dishes with their fruit salads and their…. You often wonder 'are we in the same school?' or what. (CG7)*

c) 8.4.2 Concluding commentary on Teacher semi-structured interview findings

The teacher semi-structured interviews generated evidence that exemplified an insight into the teaching staffs' perspective on the family and the school interdependent connections. I was

particularly interested in establishing within this case study what connections exist between the family and the school and how those connections contribute to the development of educational patterns in Irish education.

The next section focuses on the researcher generated visual records that were used to augment the data generated by the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in constructing a broad profile of the parents and the school. I opted to include a researcher generated visual record as I considered it to be a suitable method to verbalise and articulate aspects of the "habitus" of school that the other research instruments may not have recognised. The visual records of the school offer an insight into the embodied, objectified and institutional aspects of the "habitus" of the case study school.

8.5 The researcher generated visual records

The final section in this chapter presents the findings from the researcher generated visual records of the school buildings and grounds. I generated the data records in order to triangulate the research data and to capture an additional data set that I could use to further explore and interrogate the research questions. Mindful of Sweetman's advice (Sweetman, 2009) of not just using a method for the sake of using it my intention in creating the visual records was to illuminate or reveal aspects of the "invisible" cultural capital of the research school that could otherwise be difficult to explain. Sweetman (2009) adds that using visual methods can be helpful to operationalise a concept which may be difficult otherwise to uncover or investigate. I captured one hundred images at various locations at the school and selected eighty-four of them to assist me in addressing the research questions of the study. In the following sections I have separated the images by the spaces in which they were taken; inside and outside and I have mapped the findings to the spaces. Rose (2014) quoting from Knowles and Sweetman, (2004) argues that using visual methods can "reveal what is hidden in the inner mechanisms of the ordinary and the taken for granted". The images I have selected depict the ordinary, everyday school but on closer inspection the internal and external narratives of the images expose the cultural capital within the school itself. I have opted to prioritise findings that are particularly significant in terms of the cultural capital of the school including objectified capital, economic capital, institutionalised

capital and academic capital. The concept of habitus has also been used to inform my interpretation of the images.

Section One

    a) Internal non-teaching spaces

Figure 8.1 illustrates an entrance area at the school. At a cursory glance the internal narrative of the image reveals the "story" within the image. The image was taken adjacent to an entrance and includes a statue carved in wood above a photograph of the school building and beneath that is a mounted wooden deposit box where students are required to lodge envelopes with school payments in them. The initial enumeration of what is in the photograph awakens a familiarity in any viewer that has ever been inside a school building as there is a homogeneity in what the viewer sees in the image from the research school and what they may well see in another school. The external narrative of the photograph however reveals more of the social context of the school and its properties and dimensions in particular from a cultural capital perspective. Thinking of Barthes (2000) theory of denotation and connotation the initial denotation enumerates the content of the image and the connotation then moves to a deeper and symbolic understanding of what is represented in the image. The wooden deposit box indicates an element of economic capital which underlies the acquisition of other forms of capital. The religious artefact articulates a "habitus" or a disposition or the way of thinking and acting underpinned by Christian and religious values that are enshrined in the ethos of the voluntary secondary school. Those attending and working at the school are expected to observe the ethos in how they act and behave at the school. The photograph of the school building conveys a sense of institutionalised capital which objectifies cultural capital in the form of academic pursuits and qualifications.

Figure 8.1 Internal non-teaching space A

Figure 8.2 of the internal non-teaching space depicts a trophy cabinet that is full of trophies, plaques and awards that have been won or awarded to the school. This collection of objects signifies objectified capital that represents achievement and the award of status to the school. The cabinet is located in a non-teaching space and is visible to students as they pass through the areas each day. The objects in the cabinet confer a status of success on the students at the school as they represent awards made to the school and it is the students' school. The "habitus" is operationalised through the material objects that have been appropriated and the symbolism of winning and success is transferable from sporting pursuits to academic activities. The pursuit of

success at the school is an important theme that has emerged from the data sets and it is further reinforced through this image.

Figure 8.2 Internal Non-teaching space B

Figure 8.3 Internal non-teaching space C

Figure 8.3 shows a corridor space at the school. On the wall on the right-hand side there are numerous photographs of students from the school from winning teams, including sports teams, debating teams, young scientist teams and music groups. This collection of images represents objectified capital where the capital that has been accumulated over time by the school through the students' participation in various activities and is presented in a collection of images. There are also images of academically successful students who have been presented with national and local certificates. The school promotes academic excellence and uses a number of opportunities during the school year to showcase students who are academic high achievers. This is evidence of institutionalised capital where the objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications which are legally guaranteed qualifications are prominent. As the objects are on display in an open internal space in the school the students and staff that regularly pass the images each day and are "consuming" the objectified capital within the images. They in turn are accumulating their own individual form of capital simultaneously.

(b) Internal teaching spaces

Figure 8.4 illustrates the gymnasium in the school which is used as a teaching space for physical education classes. Not every post primary school has a gymnasium in their school. Having a

gymnasium in the school affords the students opportunities to have an indoor space in which to have their physical education lessons. In schools where there are no indoor facilities students and staff have to take classes outdoors. The availability of a modern indoor facility confers advantages on the students in the school and it represents cultural capital in an objectified state.

Figure 8.4 Internal teaching space A

Figure 8.5 below shows a teaching space. The image doesn't reveal anything surprising in terms of the teaching space but there is evidence of cultural capital in the external narrative of the shot. The bag racks, bin and coat hangers at the right-hand side exemplify an ordered approach to how students are expected to act and behave in class by putting their bags on the rack and hanging up their coats and by using the bin to dispose of rubbish. The order reveals a "habitus" which is expected of the students and is evident in the organisation of the space, enabling learning which also signifies academic capital.

Figure 8.5 Internal teaching space B

Section Two

a) External spaces

Figure 8.6 illustrates one of the sports spaces at the school. The students use this area for hockey and soccer matches but it also doubles as an assembly point in the event of a fire drill. While the area is a big open space it is bounded by a fence that sections it off from the open areas. Just visible below the hockey pitch are a set of basketball courts. The facilities at the school are extensive and students are accommodated to pursue different sports on an impressive open campus. There is evidence of academic capital in this shot in terms of the development and maintenance of the grounds alone has financial implications for the school. The variety of sports and activities that are offered at the school indicates the breadth of resources in terms of human capital (staff), economic capital (funding) and social capital.

Figure 8.6 External space A

Figure 8.7 is an interesting image. It depicts the students' cars parked outside the school. The students do not have permission to park their cars in the staff car park. The most obvious form of capital in this image is economic capital whereby students (aged seventeen years) have the use of a car to drive to school, rather than taking a bus. The school transport system provides transport to students in the catchment area but a number of students attend the school who do not live in the catchment area. The other form of capital that is evidenced in the image is objectified materialised capital in the formation of the cars.

Figure 8.7 External space C

Section Three

b) Semiotics and Cultural capital

Using semiotics to analyse figure 8.8 below is useful. Barthes (1981) used semiotics to critique pieces of cultural material in terms of identifying the latent values within the artefact. Semiotics allows us to read the object in the image in the real sense of what it is (a sign about Saturday study) by denotation and then we can process to the signifiers in the image by connotation. There is evidence of cultural capital, academic capital and institutionalised capital in the image. Providing Saturday study in the school signifies a level of academic capital over and above what would normally be provided by a school. Academic success is a motivating factor and the school facilitates the achievement of academic success by making facilities available to students to pursue their goals. From a cultural capital perspective the school is sending out a message that study and academic achievement are prioritised by the school and they encourage students to accumulate knowledge through routine study patterns which are developed over time.
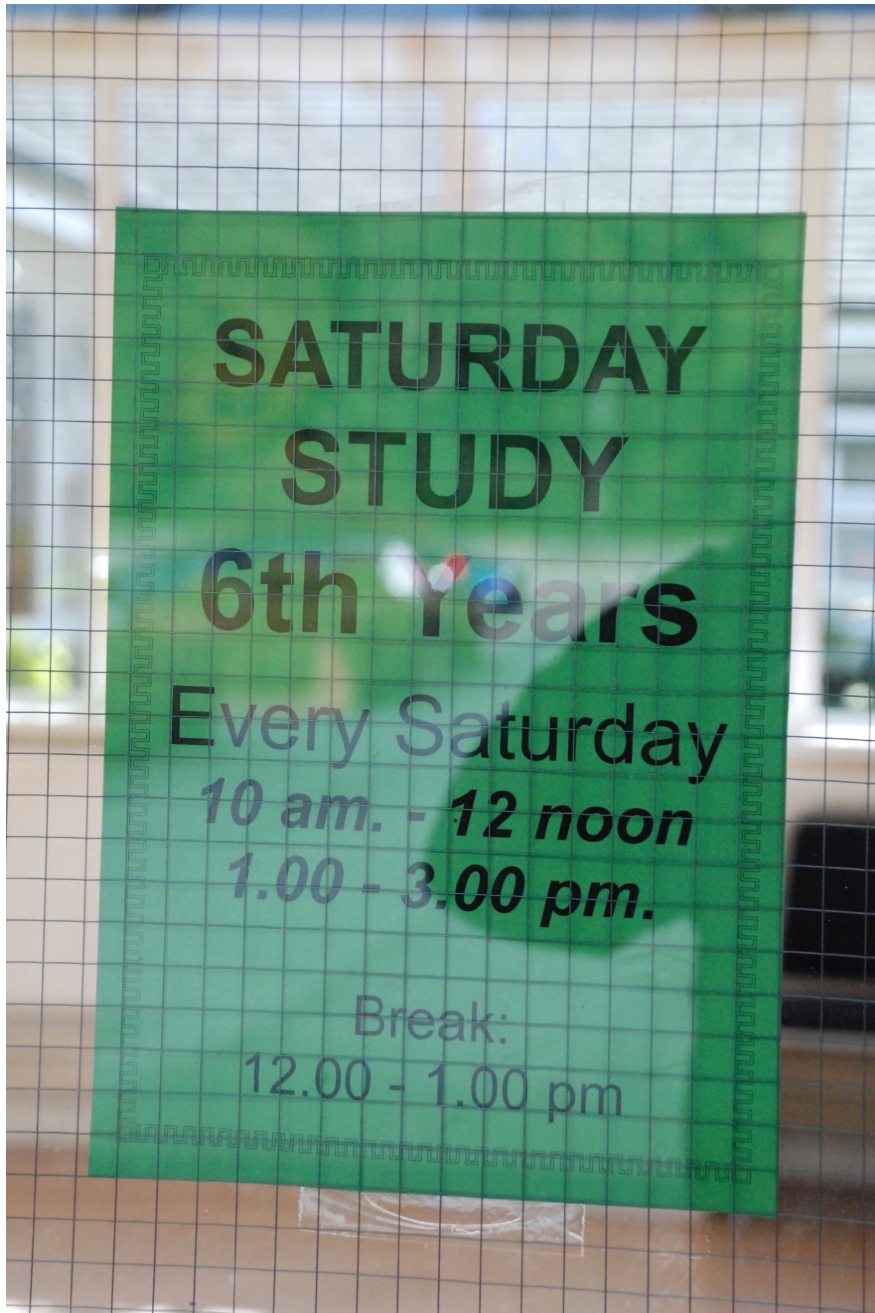
Figure 8.8 Semiotics A

c) 8.5.1 Concluding commentary on researcher generated visual methods

This section has presented the findings from the researcher generated visual methods. Using researcher generated methods affords the researcher more control over the data gathering procedures (and ideally more reflexivity) so that more highly contextualized material can be

produced. Sweetman suggests being able to move beyond Bourdieu's own use of photographs to "uncover, reveal and convey deeper aspects of habitus, or what is sometimes regarded as the mundane and taken for granted" (Sweetman, 2009). The concept of habitus is difficult to explain and has indeed been criticised mainly on the basis of its latent determinism (Reay, 2004). Habitus denotes an individual position towards something or a way of thinking about something. It is difficult and probably not appropriate to describe a habitus of an institution, such as a school. However, by using visual methods to interrogate the narratives of images it is possible to extract meaning and to uncover the deeper aspects within the image.

8.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from the data generated by the parent questionnaire, the teacher questionnaire, the teacher semi structured interviews and the researcher generated visual records. Each data set has presented an array of findings following the analysis of the results generated from each instrument. Some of the findings are convergent findings while there are also some divergent findings. The findings in this chapter have set the context for the student data that is presented in chapter nine. The student data has been embedded in the context of this chapter.

Chapter Nine

Presentation of Findings Two: The students' perspectives

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the student focus groups and from the visual diaries constructed by the students. The methodology chapter depicted in detail how each research instrument was devised and organised in the section describing the research process and instrumentation while the segment on data analysis has offered a comprehensive narrative on the modes of analysis utilised in this research and how once the raw data was assembled it was prepared and organised enabling me to interpret it.

I have mapped the findings onto the organised structures of both research instruments (see section 6.7.20: Organisation of the focus group interviews and section 6.7.28: Organisation of the student visual diaries task in chapter six) to guide the reader in as seamless and smooth a transposition from the raw data to the research output.

This chapter will be presented in two sub-sections; sub-section one addressing the findings from the focus groups while sub-section two addresses the findings from the visual diaries and the discussion as to what they mean relative to the research question and the theoretical frame will be dealt with in the following chapter (Chapter Ten).

The sub-sections are presented in table 9.1 below;

Sub-section 9.2	The Focus Groups	Sub-Section 9.3	The Visual Diaries
9.2.1	**a)** Analytic strategies used to generate findings from the focus group data	9.3.1	Analytic strategies used to generate findings from the visual diary data
9.2.2	Focus group findings (i) Icebreaker. (ii) Memories, thoughts and expectations of school. (iii) How the school community engages with each other? (iv) What changes students might make to school?	9.3.2	Visual Diaries findings (connecting space between family life and school life) (i) What is this space in your photograph? Can you describe the space? (ii) What is in the photograph? Can you describe the objects in the photograph? (iii) Why did you take this photograph of this space?

	(v) What students want to do when they finish school? (vi) Students' current goals. (vii) Students' Future goals. (viii) Talking about future goals at home. (ix) How does the school support students to achieve the goals? (x) "in class" (xi) "out-of-class" (xii) Where do students "hang out"? (xiii) Lunch room or canteen. (xiv) Student spaces. (xv) What students look forward to. (xvi) Concerns for students.		(iv) How does this space represent a connection between family life and school life for you? (v) Do you like/dislike this space in your home? (vi) Why do you like/dislike the space?
9.2.3	Concluding commentary on focus group findings and emergent themes	9.3.3	Concluding commentary on visual diaries findings and emergent themes
9.4	Chapter Conclusion		

Table 9.1 Presentation of Chapter Nine

9.2 The Focus Groups

Newby's (2010) guidelines for focus groups were useful to me as a researcher and I adapted the classifications from the guidelines to this segment of the research (Newby, 2010, pp. 351-352). The guidelines I adapted included; giving thought to the setting, conditions for success, managing the process, stimulating thinking and producing a record.

The four focus groups included twenty-seven participants who were divided as follows; focus group one, (Senior cycle/six students, three boys, three girls); focus group two (Junior Cycle/six students, three boys, three girls); focus group three, (Junior cycle/eight students, five girls, three boys) and focus group four (Senior Cycle, seven students, four boys, three girls).
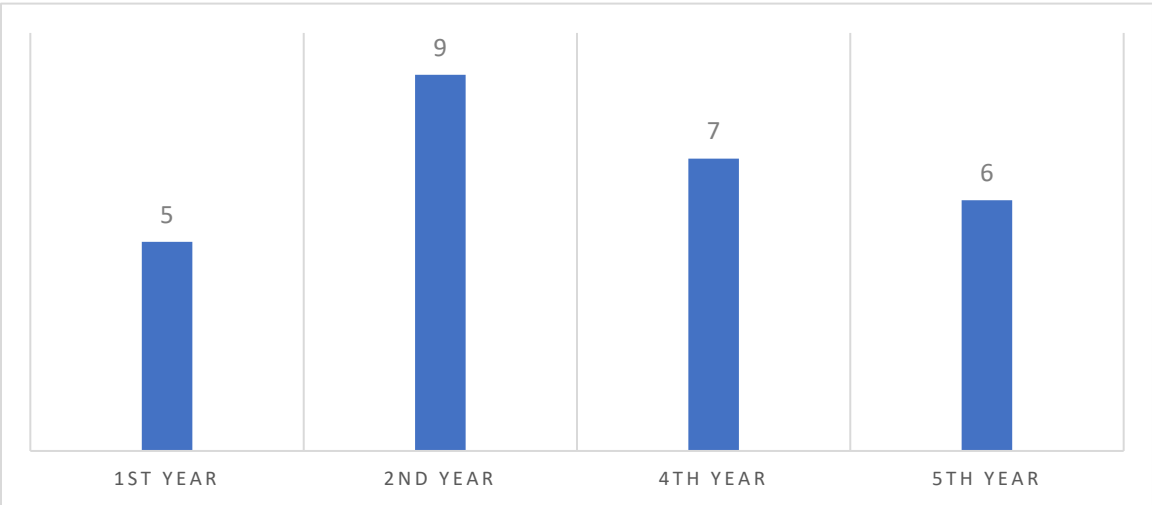
Chart 9.1 Number of Participating Students in each Year group

Chart 9.2 below illustrates the profile of the student focus group participants.
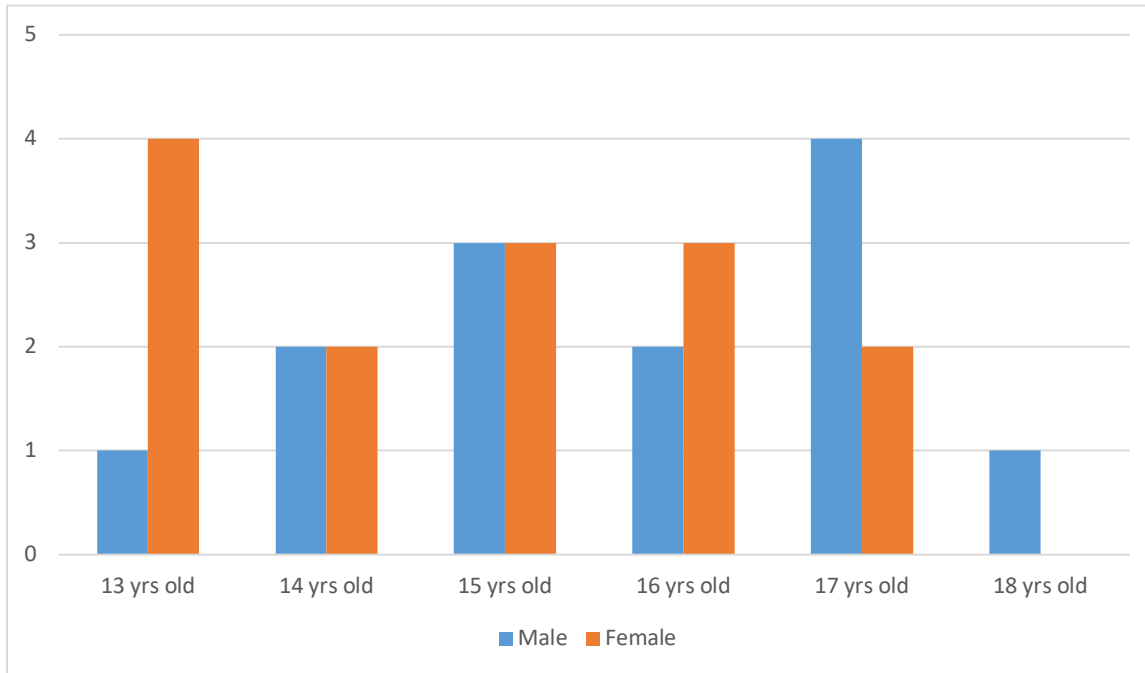
Chart 9.2 Profile of student Focus group participants

a) 9.2.1 Analytic strategies used to generate findings from the focus groups

I analysed the content from all of the topics discussed by the students throughout the focus groups by coding them holistically initially and then applying descriptive, in vivo, attribute and values filters to them. I used the codes to label and categorise similar chunks of the data generated. The codes acted as prompts and triggers for me to focus and reflect on the content through the prism of the assigned codes. Once I filtered the topic content through the coding mesh, I assembled the topics under the umbrella of different clusters. On closer more detailed examination of the content of the clusters a number of themes began to emerge. The emergent themes mapped in different ways onto each of the four research questions. I also collated the findings that emerged thematically against the backdrop of the focus group structure and I have presented the findings in this chapter in a narrative style in an effort to capture the flow and energy of the focus groups which was channelled by the focus group structure.

The coding labels I used to filter the data are listed below;

H=Holistic

D= Descriptive

IV= In vivo

A= Attribute

V= Values (A1 + B) (importance students attributed to themselves, to other people, to other things or to other ideas)

A1= Attitude (the way students think about themselves or other students)

B= Belief (Values and attitudes plus personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals and other interpretive perceptions of the social world)

(Miles et al., 2014)

b) 9.2.2 Findings from the student focus groups

The findings from the focus group have been mapped linearly onto the focus group schedule (Appendix Fourteen) for the purpose of clarity and readability. I have also merged some of the subsections of the focus group schedule to present the findings thematically across a number of subsections where relevant.

(i)   The focus group 'Icebreaker'

Each focus group (n=4) began with a quick round of introductions (including one from me as the moderator/researcher) followed by an "icebreaker" which sought to elicit information from students about their likes and dislikes in relation to their school. Students were given Post-It sticky notes and asked to write down 3 things about school that they liked and 3 things that they disliked. They then stuck the notes onto a portable white board in the room. The themes that emerged from the sticky notes are tabulated below.

Likes	Dislikes
music/orchestra/music facilities/mixed School/ friends/ good teachers/ good school with good reputation/ lots of choices of extra-curricular activities/ good subject choices/good exam results/good subject facilities/good communication systems/sport	homework / length of school day/uniform-especially the round neck jumpers/restricted hairstyles/ lots of rules/too many rules/ very strict in school/too many subjects/not enough experience with some subjects in first year/lack of social areas spaces for students/lack of lunch & canteen facilities/ other students who mess and don't take it seriously/ too academic/teachers/school management/ exam pressure

Table 9.2 Student's Likes and Dislikes about their school

Table 9.2 identifies the "likes and dislikes" identified by the students during the four focus groups. Some "likes and dislikes" were mentioned in all of the focus groups, i.e. music, mixed school, homework, uniform, subjects, good exam results, good teachers and good range of sports while other "likes and dislikes" were mentioned less frequently, i.e. students who mess, exam pressure, social area spaces, school management. Participants in the senior cycle focus groups focused on exam pressure, good classroom facilities, subject choices, and curriculum issues more often than the junior cycle students who focused more on the social spaces, lunch and canteen facilities, rules, sport and extra-curricular activities. I have prioritised the findings from the "icebreaker" that I consider to be most relevant to the concepts of the study and to the research questions. The following section identifies the prioritised findings from the "Icebreaker" section of the focus groups.

(a) Friends

Students were asked why friends were important. Students volunteered a number of reasons as to why friends were important to them. They stated that they were important because "you hang out with them" (Junior female student FG3) and that "you know some of them since primary school, they make it easier and you're not on your own, cos they support you, look out for you, they understand you" (Senior male student FG1). These responses identify a value that the students placed on friendships. A male student stated that "friends are important because they actually understand you not just in school but outside school too so they know the full story" (Junior male student FG2) and a female student added how friends are important because they "really understand when things go wrong or when you have a row with your Mam or Dad and how you feel cos they have the same things going on in their lives at the same time"(Junior female student, FG2).

(b) "Mixed" School

Given that the case study school was coeducational I did expect students to refer to it in the icebreaker, either as a like or a dislike. In all cases it was listed as a like with all students unanimously identifying it as a very strong factor in their elected list of "likes". In every focus group students referred to the fact that they "were in primary school together" (Senior male student, FG1) and that they were "used to each other" (Senior female student, FG1). Among the reasons listed by students for liking the coeducational setting were the fact that "you can be friends with

boys and girls" (Junior male student, FG3) and that "it's kinda normal." (Junior female student, FG2) This raises an interesting perspective as articulated by the student which merits further discussion. The concept of "normality" was raised by both male and female students in relation to the coeducational school. I probed a little further with the students and asked them to elaborate on what they meant as "normal". They responded by saying that they saw it as normal for boys and girls to be in school together as they went to primary school together and they would go to higher education together (as boys and girls), they saw it as a continued process:

> *I love it cos it's normal for boys and girls to be together, when we go to college it will be mixed too so we will be well used to it, I like having friends that are boys and girls, sometimes boys are much easier to talk to about things cos they look at things much more straightforward and they don't see a lot of things that my girl- friends see in situations* (Senior female student, FG4)

One senior cycle female student further elaborated on this by stating:

> *It's normal, we went to a mixed primary school and we are used to it, my cousin goes to an all girls school and from what she says it is totally different in lots of ways but mainly that it can be bitchy cos the girls get really bitchy when there's no boys there* (FG2)

However, this view was somewhat contradicted in another focus group where a girl stated that:

> *...there's lots of girls "clicks" in this school.. the lads are not into clicks so it's easier to talk to them* (Junior female student (FG3)

(c) Homework

Homework was listed as a dislike by junior and senior students. One senior male student very simply stated that "there's too much of it!" (FG1) The students did feel that they were "overloaded" with homework given that "there are other things to be done in the evening after school as well and it makes it hard and at the weekend there's more to be done when you need a break" (Junior male student, FG2). A number of students (n= 6) took issue that "some teachers think their subject is the only subject and they load you up with homework, they forget that you have other things to do aswell" (Junior female student, FG3). One junior male student offered an interesting perspective when he said:

> *I have other jobs to do at home as well, my father has four hundred sheep so we are really busy at lambing time and there's always extra work to be done on the farm feeding the sheep or other things in the house cos we all have jobs to do and the homework is a bit much on top of all that...* (FG2)

The lambing season for this family underpinned their economic survival which was seen to take precedent over school work and associated cultural capital within school work.

(d) School Rules

Students expressed some dissatisfaction with the school rules, with their main grievances based on the extensive series of rules they were expected to observe:

> *There are a lot of rules and it's hard to remember them all, I know there have to be rules but some of them are a bit crazy...like the social areas where you can go, we're not allowed to go to the bigger year's social areas at break time and if you do the teacher will put you back to your own social area* (Junior male student FG2)

Some students mentioned that the school was quite strict and enforced the school rules in an authoritarian manner that didn't appeal to all students. A senior male student mentioned that "it's a bit annoying that they are so strict with everything all of the time when it doesn't really matter that much, sure it's no big deal like." (FG4) while another junior female student mentioned that "it's really stupid that your hair can't be a certain colour and you have to wear black shoes ONLY. what does it matter what you look like as long as you're there" (FG3).

The students felt that the rules were limiting, unnecessary and excessive:

> *I don't know why we have to have so many rules, there's a lot of other things that are important too.*(Junior male student FG4)
>
> *I just don't agree with all the rules, especially for 5th years, some rules might suit junior students more than 5th years, they forget we are older than the junior students!* (Senior Female student FG4)

A senior female student raised the issue of equity in relation to the implementation of rules:

> *The rules aren't always applied to every student in the same way, some people get away with more than other students and that's not fair, they are strict about behaviour and that but if you keep doing the same thing over and over they don't always apply the rules the same, its annoying* (FG4)

(e) Uniform

The issue of dress code and the associated rules was brought up in all of the focus groups. Students took serious issue with what they perceived to be "really extreme" rules around uniform and dress code:

> *Some of the rules about dress code and that are really extreme, who cares about hair colour, it's not going to affect the number of points you get in your Leaving, unless you get suspended for it and then you miss*

class, it shouldn't matter if your hair is a different colour to other people, it's only a colour.. (Senior Female student FG 1).

Students also referred to a recent change in uniform policy which saw the change of a V- Neck jumper to a round-neck jumper. This caused uproar among students and they vented at will about it in all of the focus groups:

> *We used to have a v-neck jumper and a tie and they got rid of it, only the 6th years still have it, I hate the round neck, it looks stupid, It's not comfortable and the shirt doesn't sit right under it* (Junior male student, FG2)

> *The v neck was easier to manage, I don't like the round neck, it looks awful"* (Junior female student, FG2)

(f) School Size

On a more affirmative note students talked in very positive terms about the size of their school and how they felt it was "not too big but it's big enough" (Junior female student FG2). One male student ventured that it was "better having more people than in a small school where there's only a small number and ya (sic)have to get on with the same people all the time" (Senior male student FG1). Again with reference to the recognition of a particular school culture this quote identifies an objectified form of capital which is recognisable in the "big enough" school that is materially represented by the numbers attending the school "there's about one hundred and fifty in each year except transition year, that's only seventy two" One male student stated that it was good to have reasonable numbers attending the school because:

> *The school is not too big but it's fairly big at the same time, it's much bigger than the other school, I think that's better cos you get more choices in the bigger school than in the other school.* (Senior Male student FG1).

Who has told students that it is better to have bigger numbers than the other school? Do students automatically recognise a potential of possibilities with a greater critical mass? It is plausible that students themselves do understand that there are more possibilities for them in terms of choices with greater numbers but it is also worth noting that parents who were interviewed articulated similar views and expressed satisfaction with the fact that the school was moderately sized and offered students greater possibilities as a result:

(g) School buildings and facilities

Another objectified form of capital is presented in the discussion on school buildings and facilities. Students openly expressed their satisfaction and approval of the standard of school buildings and facilities:

> *The buildings here are only a few years old and the equipment is all fairly good too, except in the gym, some of the stuff is a bit old in there. (*Male senior student FG1)

Students continued to refer to a different school in a more negative way and compared their own school to this school in terms of facilities and buildings:

> *The other school is very run down in comparison.* (Junior female student, FG3)

When the student was asked; "How do you know what the other school is like?"

> Her response was; *"We went there on an open day in 6ᵗʰ class, it was alright but some of the buildings were old and dirty and there was outside classrooms that weren't part of the school"* (Junior female student, FG3)

Students were obviously not impressed by the objectified capital of the "other" school and they used this as their basis of comparison between their school and the "other" school.

(h) Subject choices

Students agreed that there was a broad range of academic subjects in the case study school hat such a range enabled them to choose subjects that they liked and that they could progress in. They saw subjects as being linked to getting points in the Leaving Certificate which in turn offered opportunity to progress onto third level education:

> *Subjects are important for points and you need to get good points to get into most courses in college now, college is the main reason for getting good subject choices* (Female student, FG1)

This overt recognition by students of the importance of progression onto college is culturally significant in that the study school promotes participation in and progression to higher and further education as a norm and clearly this is accepted, indulged and invested in by the students. The "habitus" of the school and the "habitus" of the focus group participants is very much in parallel in terms of their acceptance and promotion of progression onto higher and further education. This was a notably strong factor articulated in all focus groups and also from parent interviews, staff and management interviews. Interestingly students again referred to a different school as not offering the choices they were offered and the limitations of this in terms of their educational experience:

when you go to a big school it usually means that there will be more choice available and then you can do the subjects that you like and that suit you best, my friend goes to the other school in the town and she doesn't have a choice at all really cos there's only 20 in the year and the girls all have to do the same subjects whether they like them or not, she did less subjects at junior cert as well, she was thinking of not doing the Leaving but she went back anyhow but she doesn't really like two of the subjects she is doing at all. That doesn't happen here in this school (Senior female student, FG4)

It was not possible for me to verify these assertions as being accurate as the research was carried out in the case study school only, however numerous students compared both schools during the focus groups, constructing a view of the "other" school as being inferior to the case study school:

(i) Teachers and why it is important to have "good teachers"

Students were both positive and complimentary about their teachers and they were happy with their teachers and they recognised the importance of "good teachers" [sic]. Students spoke freely about teachers' interest in their students and how they tried to make sure that students had the best possible preparation for exams in their teaching methodologies and general approach to learning. They also mentioned that teachers liked to see students participate and do well in other things, "not just exams". They referred to the fact that teachers were involved in extra-curricular activities in school and how that afforded students the opportunity to see them in a different way and to get to know them better. Students referred to the fact that their teachers motivated them to do well in their exams and in their progression in school:

Most of my teachers are good at motivating me to do well and to get on with my work and to get the best marks possible, I know they want me to well for me not for them (Junior male student, FG2)

A junior male student did comment however that "there are one or two teachers though and they are always on my case, are very negative but mostly they are alright and you feel safe with them that you will do ok" (FG2).

(j) Other students

Students in both senior focus groups made reference to other students "messing". They articulated an annoyance and a concern about this because they felt that it was annoying for them because "the teacher spends more time giving out to them and then they (teachers) don't get to spend enough time on classwork and then they get annoyed with everyone else" (Senior male student,

FG1). Students at this age group were particularly concerned that other students "messing" were wasting valuable time at Leaving Cert, given that there is so much course work to get through:

> *I don't want to lose out on class time, the courses are really long and there's a lot to get through so it's very annoying if people are wasting time messing.* (Senior female student, FG4).

Students focus on achievement of good results in order to progress onto higher and further education was prioritised. The students acknowledged that the case study school took a very dim view of students interfering in any way or compromising students' progression but it annoyed them intensely:

> *They are usually very strict about people messing in class and it's usually dealt with fairly fast but no matter how fast it is dealt with they still waste our time and that's not fair on us or on teachers when they are trying to get the work done.* (Junior female student, FG3).

The "ice-breaker" served to relax students and to engage them in the focus group. The students reacted well to question prompts and engaged openly with each other during the opening phase. The next section presents what I have interpreted from the data generated from the corpus of the focus groups as the findings that best address the research questions. The findings have been grouped thematically and funnelled through the structure of the focus group. A full discussion regarding the findings follows in chapter ten.

(ii)   Memories, thoughts, expectations of school

Students were asked about their memories of their first days in school. Responses varied from students but quite a few articulated the nervousness of beginning somewhere new and embracing a new start. They believed that it was "very different to primary school and that it was so big... that the sixth years were so big and that we were so small. "I was frightened" (Junior male participant, FG2). Primary education in Ireland espouses a child centred approach and involves children working with the same class teacher all day every day. At post-primary school students are timetabled for between 8 and 9 class periods every day for different subjects with different teachers. This represents a huge challenge for students in transferring from primary education to post primary education. Students in the focus groups recalled "meeting different teachers and they all giving out loads of new work and all wanting separate copies for everything and some of them wanting three or four copies in one subject. I thought that was mad" (Junior male student, FG 3).

Students discussed the Meitheal programme[30] as part of their memories of entering the post primary school. Students praised their Meitheal leaders for the manner in which they assisted and supported the new first year students when they started in the school:

> *I remember my Meitheal leaders and the way they used to come and visit us in our classrooms at break time and talk to us and keep an eye out for us (Senior female student, FG1)/ I kept getting lost but my Meitheal leader was great, they really helped me out and relaxed me* (Junior male student, FG3)

Students' memories included descriptions of how they felt during their first few weeks at the school. They remembered feeling afraid, nervous, excited and terrified:

> *I was really afraid for the first few weeks, I didn't know anyone and I was nervous (Senior male student, FG1)/ I was nervous, didn't really know what to expect (Junior female student, FG2)/ Excited and terrified (Junior male student,FG3)/ I was a bit nervous about everything but I got used to it* (Junior female student, FG3)

One of the senior male students recalled a particular incident that was engrained in his memory;
> *I remember in my first week here getting kicked in my back and not being able to sit down properly for a long time... I think it was a 3rd year that kicked me* (FG1)

Other memories included;
> *Meeting new people and having craic (Junior male student, FG2)/ Meeting new people and my old friends and getting used to it all* (Junior male student, FG3)/ *Good craic* (Junior male student, FG3)
> *Getting used to the school and the size of it, I was in a very small primary school* (Junior female student, FG2)/ *The size of it, it was huge but after a while I got used to it* (Junior female student, FG2)

Students were asked why they had chosen to come to the school in the first place. Students offered a number of answers but the recurring responses featured proximity to home, family history of attending the school, friends enrolling, the reputation of the school and being offered a place:

> *There was a bus going close by my house and it was handy, I had looked at another school but it was more difficult to get to it so this one was easier (Senior female student, FG1)/ This was the nearest school to us and there was a bus stop near our house (Junior male student, FG2)/ The school is close to my house. My Dad is friendly with the teachers, I was always coming here too, I never thought of the other school..*(Senior female student, FG1)

The overall reputation of the school and family influence figured very prominently in the students' memories as a reason as to why they had chosen to attend the school:

> *I was always going to be coming here, my sisters went here and it was natural for me to do the same..I never thought about going to any other school, my sisters got on well here and I was looking forward to it* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *My older brothers had all come here so I knew that it was where I was going to go, I was happy enough about it to be honest* (Junior male student, FG2)/

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[30] The Meitheal programme is a student mentoring programme whereby senior students in post-primary schools mentor first year students during the first two terms of first year in the school. Senior students are selected by interview and are trained to become Meitheal leaders. Each school has one Meitheal "leader" for every twenty five first year students. The programme is funded by the DES.

My family had come to this school before, my sister and brother and two of my cousins so we knew it well. (How did your eldest sibling decide to come here?)....

My Mam and Dad wanted her to come here, they knew a bit about the school and they were happy with it (Junior male student, FG2)*/ My Dad went to the other school in the town but he said that I would be coming here, he thought this was a better school with better choices and facilities for me and he wants me to go to college* (Junior male student, FG3)/

I could have gone to the other school but it doesn't have a great reputation, its smaller and they don't have a great subject choice and they don't get to do all the things we get to do here, and I didn't really have any friends going there... This school has always had a better reputation and that meant a lot for me..(Senior female student, FG1)

My Mam and Dad asked me where I wanted to go to secondary school and I said here because I went to the open day in the other school and I thought it was really small and it had a lot of outside buildings and the subject choices weren't great, they had good practical subjects alright but this school does the practical subjects too and it has all the equipment. I thought it was a bit dirty and the classes seemed small and not much choice at Leaving Cert for subjects and I also heard that not many of the students go to college, they mostly seem to do PLC courses or do apprenticeships but I want to go straight to college so I knew this school was a better option for me. I know people who went to school here and they all went to college, in Waterford, in Dublin and in Cork and they got jobs when they left college (Junior female student, FG3)

For some students being offered a place in the school and the fact that their friends were also going to be attending justified why they had elected to come to the school in the first place:

There was a place offered to me so I was always going to take it if I got offered a place..it was automatic for me.."(Senior male student, FG1)

My friends were all coming here so I was coming too. I didn't really think about the other school (Junior female student, FG2)

Students were asked *who* made the choice for them to attend the school. Students volunteered a number of answers from which the main finding was that their family, i.e. their parents and themselves made the choice to attend the school. A selection of responses originally coded as "In Vivo" and "Values" responses below emphasise a family-based decision to attend the school:

I did I suppose, but my Mam and Dad wanted me to come here too..My sisters went here and they knew the school and they were happy enough with it...(Senior female student, FG1)*/ / I was always coming here, there wasn't a choice to make* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *I did, I never wanted to go anywhere else and my parents knew that* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *I had a choice to go to this school or to go to another school closer to me but I chose this one, I could have gone to the other school if I wanted, my family would have been happy with either* (Junior female student, FG2)*/ We all did I suppose, we did talk about it in sixth class and probably in fifth class but I always kind of knew I would come to this school* (Junior male student, FG2)

My Mam and Dad and me, they did ask me if I wanted to go to the other school but they knew I didn't want to so it was grand, I don't think they would really have wanted me to go to the other school (Senior male student, FG4)/

I decided to go to school here but my parents supported my decision (Junior male student, FG 3)*/ I did but my parents talked to me about what I wanted to do after school as well and they knew I wanted to go onto college and that and they advised me to come to this school because they knew there was a good chance*

that I would get to go onto college from here because a lot of students from this school go to college (Senior male student, FG4).

Students were then asked how they felt when they started at the school. Most of the responses were categorised as "values" responses which varied between (A) values and (B) values where the students' responses reflected the beliefs, attitudes and values that represented their worldview. Students reported that they felt:

> *Frightened, small, nervous* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *Nervous, afraid but after a short while I was ok* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *OK.. I was a bit nervous but I didn't tell anyone, I was fine after a few weeks when I knew what to do and where to go.. It was a big transition from a small primary school to here, the school was so big, you could get lost* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *Nervous but excited* (Junior male student, FG2)
>
> *I was nervous enough at the start but I was fine after a few weeks, it was just hard to get used to all the subjects and teachers* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *A bit nervous but at the same time I was really looking forward to it* (Senior male student FG4)/ *Small, and a bit scared but I was grand after a while* (Junior male student, FG2)

The discussion regarding how they felt when they started at the school then progressed to ask if how they had originally felt when they started at the school had changed. The majority of students answered in the affirmative, stating that it had changed, while some felt that it had not changed. Students also reflected on how it may have changed for them:

> *Oh yeah, its grand now, I love it here..* (Senior female student, FG1)/, *I'm grand now, I feel sorry for the 1st years starting off but they will be ok...* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *I'm fine now, I love it here* (Junior female student, FG2)
>
> *I still like it so it hasn't really changed that much* (Senior male student, FG4)/ *It's grand now, its ok when you get used to it but it was very different to primary school* (Senior female student, FG4)/ *Grand, my family used to ask me a lot how I was getting on and if I liked it but they know now that I'm ok* (Junior female student, FG2)
>
> *I feel more grown up now, I enjoy coming to school and I find school more enjoyable.. I didn't really like it then, I used to think "How would I stick another hour in school?" but now I know that its broken into class slots and I can manage it much easier* (Senior male student, FG1)

The students' responses above illustrate how the students had integrated into school life and how they recognised that there was a transition for them from when they started in the school to the point they are now at.

Students were asked about their expectations (retrospective) of the school when they started at there. Interestingly there were similar responses and reactions across the four focus groups which emphasised a convergence of thinking amongst the students. The theme of family engagement from the outset is recurring across the respondents' views. Responses included a variety of descriptive (D) and in vivo (IV) responses:

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I thought it was cool and I expected it to get cooler... but the novelty wore off with all the homework and the pressure from teachers to do the work..." (Senior female student, FG1)

I didn't really enjoy first year, I didn't really know what to expect and things happened that I wasn't really prepared for, I was grand in third year, that was my best year." (Senior male student, FG1)

I expected it to be tough because we had so many subjects and so much work and it was...my sister used to tell my Mam stories about how we got on in school and I hated that, I didn't expect that to happen!...Mam used to ask me things to find out how she was getting on and I didn't expect that either..(Senior female student FG4)

(iii)   How members of the school community treat each other

Students were asked how students treated other students in school. The responses varied between students who recalled that there were some issues between students while other students were in general agreement that students were respectful and tolerant of each other. Students frequently referred to respect and disrespect throughout the focus groups, which I coded using a "Values" label and which I subsequently progressed to a consider as a theme. The responses below were coded using the In Vivo, Descriptive and Values labels during the analysis. In Vivo is one of the best known qualitative coding methods (Miles et al., 2014). It was interesting to hear the students' use of indigenous colloquialisms to articulate their views throughout the focus groups and it offered an insight into the students own cultural capital as expressed in their own words:

There's kinda like two groups of lads, there's the music heads and the sporty ones, the sporty ones are always slaggin the music heads off and the music heads don't like it but they can't do much about it, they often get caught up in a "scrap" and usually the music heads get hurt...the sporty lads are really immature, up to third year anyhow, they're not too bad in fifth and sixth year but they think they're God cos they're good at sport.. (Senior male student, FG1)/

There's a lot of "clicks" of girls, they hang around together , they're in the same class or they have the same hair and jewellery and they just hang around together, it's hard to get into the click, but they're usually pretty good academically and they keep out of trouble with teachers, they do their work (Senior female student, FG1)

There's always slaggin goign on between certain groups, sometimes its serious, sometimes it's not..."/ Usually students are polite enough but there are some lads who slag other people off but it's not really serious (Junior male student, FG2)/ *There's usually a bit of craic, some of the lads throw each other around the corridor and that but it's only a laugh* (Junior male student, FG2)

Students were also asked how students treated teachers. Again, there was a variety of responses from the students that fed into the theme of "respect" and "disrespect". Some believed that students were respectful of teachers while others conveyed a belief that students were disrespectful and they gave examples to explain how students were disrespectful:

Some students have no respect for teachers, they think that teachers have no feelings and that they can do what they like and say what they like..and that's not on, it's not fair (Senior female student)FG1)*/ For the most part students treat teachers with respect but there's always a few students who never know when to shut their mouth and they get into trouble with teachers* (Junior female student, FG3)

Some students are always messing in class whenever the teacher turns to the board they're making animal noises or moving furniture or throwing things, it depends on the teacher, there's some teachers and it wouldn't happen in their class cos they'd eat ya and you'd be in huge trouble and sent up to the deputy principal, or he'd come and get you out the next class and then there would be trouble. (Senior male student, FG1)

Sometimes in English class the girls would be laughing out loud or talking, they can't keep it to themselves and the teacher gets annoyed then and they keep interrupting, that's not fair on the teacher or on other students (Senior male student, FG1)*/ Mostly students are well behaved with teachers but sometimes if there's a few lads and they know that the teacher is easy to get to they will do it and they keep it up but that's a bit lousy really cos the teacher is only trying to do their job and its not the easiest job either* (Junior male student, FG3)

Teachers talk to each other and if you were giving trouble in one class the next class the next teacher might get on to you cos they'd be after meeting the 1st teacher and telling them and then they'd have a go at ya and give out to you even though it didn't happen in their class and ya didn't do anything in their class. (Senior female student, FG4)

The theme of respect and disrespect also spilled over into the next section where students were asked how teachers treat students:

Workers are treated with respect, teachers will work with the workers.. (Senior female student, FG1)*/ Good enough*(Junior male student, FG2)*/ Most teachers are very good and they prepare the work well and they teach it well, they are ok* (Junior female student, FG2)/ *Yea, grand really, there's one or two that are a bit strange in the things they do or say but generally they're ok* (Senior male student, FG4)*/ Most teachers are ok, once you do your work but if you don't they get very cross* (Junior female student, FG2)/ *Most teachers are grand, they're good at their job and they give students fair play* (Senior male student, FG4)

If you get into trouble it stays with you, you can't get rid of it...sometimes if someone from your family gets into trouble it's linked to you and you get identified as being from that family and that family are troublesome. I was in a class the other day and the teacher got on to me at the start and I hadn't done anything, he said "I hope you are not going to be talking and getting into trouble like your sister did the last day I was supervising her." and I hadn't done anything, I was really mad (Senior male student, FG1)

> *(iv)   Possible changes in the school- what changes would the students make*

Students enjoyed this part of the focus groups and keenly volunteered responses and openly chatted with each other. A number of new themes emerged during this section of the focus groups that focused on internal structures, arrangements and regulations where the School was the decision maker and where the school's cultural capital was reflected.

Uniform had presented across the focus groups in the initial "ice-breaker" phase as a topic that the students had strong views on:

Get rid of the round neck jumper (Senior male student, FG1)*/ Change the uniform* (Junior male student, FG3)

The timetabling of the school day was discussed by students in relation to the length of the school day, the length of classes and the time value of classes.

> *make the day a bit shorter, it's really long, you come in about 8.40 and you stay until 6.30 if you're doing study or 4.0 if you go home but it's a long day with a lot of classes in it* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *Have a half day on a Wednesday* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *Start school at 10 am* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *Shorten the school day or have a half day, other schools have half days every week* (Senior male student, FG4)

(v)   What students wanted to do when they finished school

The discussion proceeded to focus on what students would like to do when they have finished their formal post-primary education. Students volunteered lengthy responses during this phase of the focus group. I was struck by the depth of reflexivity of the students during this phase of the focus groups as they contributed at great length to the discussion and every student had an answer or a reaction to the prompt question. It occurred to me that this was not the first time that the students had discussed the topic of post-Leaving Certificate options as they were well informed and confident in the manner in which they spoke. Despite some of the contributions being lengthy I have included them here to illustrate the profundity and depth of detail they offered. I initially coded the data using all of the coding labels which when clustered developed into the theme of "Post-Leaving Certificate". Students contributed the following insightful inputs:

> *Midwifery- I would have to do an RGN nursing course first and then do the midwifery course. ("Can you explain to us a bit about why you would like to do the midwifery course?) I like the whole idea of nursing, I like Biology in school and I would love to be responsible for bringing babies into the world, I think it would be a great privilege to bring a baby into the world, its positive and there's a lot of negatives out there at the moment about work and cutbacks and all that so I would love to be doing something positive* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *Nursing, I would like to be a midwife* /(Junior female student, FG3)

> *I would like to Science and Maths teaching in UCD. I like Maths and I really liked Science at Junior cert, I'm doing Biology and Physics now and I think I'd be a good teacher. It's not a bad job and the holiday breaks are good, I don't mind helping other people with their maths work, I find it easy to explain stuff to them and sometimes I help my sister out with her Maths too* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *Not sure, maybe teaching, secondary school maybe, don't know* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *I want to be a teacher, secondary teacher* (Junior female student, FG3)

> *I haven't really been too sure up to now what I want to do but I've spent a lotta time with the careers teacher talking about it and that and I think now I would like to do psychology, probably in UCD, maybe somewhere else. I don't have to go to UCD, I could start my course somewhere else and maybe do a postgrad or something in UCD or Trinity depends... I think I understand now what it involves, I didn't until this year but the careers teacher helped me a lot and I've read a good bit of stuff around it now so I think I would like it.. It would be really interesting, I like watching people and working them out* (Senior female student, FG1)

> *I'd love to be a pilot. I know it's not really a female profession but there are some women pilots. I've always had an interest in it and I know I'd have to get high points, especially in Maths but I'm prepared to*

work at it. I have two older sisters in college, one in Dublin and one in Scotland and they love college so I knew I was always going to go to college somewhere, only I know now that I want to be a pilot, I'm keeping my options open too in case it doesn't work out but I'm definitely going to college (Junior female student, FG1)

I love animals and I'd love to be a vet but it's a hard job and it's got unsociable hours, and physically it could be very tough. I wouldn't mind being a doctor either, the points are very high for both but the medicine course now has changed the entry stuff so it might be possible to get in with less points if ya got through the test. It's not easy though so I will have to think of something else as well in case that doesn't work out. I will go to college anyhow (Senior male student, FG4)

Work in the forestry, I would have to go to Waterford to do training for it. I like the forestry and I like rural life and I'd like to be doing that myself (Junior male student, FG2)
Don't really know yet!" (Junior male student, FG2)
Maybe something in computers but I'm not really sure (FG2)

Don't know either, something in forensics, I like Science especially Biology and I like mysteries (Junior male student, FG2)
Don't really know, I 'd like to do a few things but they're all different, too soon to make a choice (Junior female student, FG2)
Medicine, but I don't know if I'll get the points (Senior female student, FG4)
Primary teacher (Senior female student, FG4)
Engineer (Junior female student, FG3)
Not really sure, need more time to think but definitely going to college (Junior male student, FG3)
Social worker (Junior female student, FG3)
Accountant (Junior female student, FG3)

(vi)   The next four subsections from the focus group schedule; i.e. Students' current goals in school, Students' future goals, Students talking about their future goals at home and what they discussed and how the School supports students to achieve these goals have been aggregated under the theme of "Student goals".

Student goals

During this section of the focus groups students reverted back to the discussion on what they wanted to do when they were finished their post-primary education. They presented their future goals as being synonymous with what they wanted to do immediately after their Leaving Certificate. Once again post-Leaving Certificate options were raised in terms of the long-term goal with the shorter-term "now" goals being seen as catalysts to achieve the longer-term goals. Students wanted to do well in exams, in subjects and in school in general:

To get on well in class and to do my best to get good marks, I do my best but sometimes I don't always get really good marks but I do try hard and I work hard cause I have to if I'm going to get good Leaving results (Senior male student, FG4)/ *To do well in tests and get a good enough report* (Junior female student, FG2)/ *To get on well in my new Leaving subjects* (Senior male student, FG4)
I just want to do well, I know ya have to work hard to do well and sometimes I don't do as much as I need ta, or I leave too much until the end and I can't get it all done the night before the test but I'm getting better at organising my stuff so I don't leave it all til the end.. (Senior female student, FG1)/ *To do well in my*

work (Junior female student, FG2)/ *To get good marks and do well and to have a good time* (Junior male student, FG3)
I want to do well in class, and do well with other stuff in school like music and sports stuff (FG1)/ To do well in my subjects and to do well in general (FG3)/ To get on with everything (FG3) To get on well in all my subjects and to do well in music especially (FG3)/ To enjoy myself and to do well (FG3)

Some students talked about travelling abroad and possibly working abroad but the majority focused on transferring to further or higher education. Students expressed some concerns about financial implications of going to college and implications for their families but they were undeterred in their resolve to progress to another phase of education. Many students equated going to college as a pathway to employment and a "good" standard of living:

> *I want to go to college and do a good course and get a good degree. I might do a masters or not.depends on lots of things, I want to get a good job and have a bit of money.."* (Senior male student, FG1)

> *I want to go to college, that's what Ive always wanted to do, I have an older brother in college and I can't wait ta get there and have a laugh but I know I need to do a bit of work aswell, I see them being busy and a bit stressed up about exams and assignments and stuff so I know that's part of it too but I don't mind that.."* (Senior male student, FG4)

> *I want to go to college, I'm a bit concerned about the cost and that cos I know from my older sisters its very expensive and I know my parents find it hard to have money all the time for rent and the bus and the food and all the other things too,*

> *I want to go to college and do a good course and get a job but I'm not sure now with all the people losing their jobs and that if I'll get a job here or if I'll have to go somewhere else.* (Senior female student, FG4)

> *To go to college, all my family have gone to college so I'm going to go too* (Junior female student, FG2)

> *To get a good Leaving Cert and get into college and get a good job* (Junior male student, FG2)

> *I'd like to go to college and get a good degree but I'd like to travel a bit aswell and see a few places* (Junior male student, FG3)

> *To get enough points for my college course, defer for a year, travel and then come back and do the course* (Junior female student, FG3)

Do students talk about their future goals at home and what did they discuss?

Again, the focus reverted to the students' progression onto another phase of education post-Leaving Certificate. Students were eager to offer insights into conversations at home about school-related topics, highlighting an interface between the school and the family where the cultural capital of the family and the cultural capital of the school seeped into each other. This section of the focus group offered numerous insights into an overlap between the values, norms and practices of the school and of the family where the overlap was congruent and continuous. I have selected a

number of wordy but what I consider profound statements from the data that was generated across the four focus groups:

> *Yea, my Mam and Dad are always telling me that to do my work so I'll do well in school and get a place in college and get a good job. They get on to me about homework and study and stuff and ask me if it's done and what did I have to do and that. We do talk 'bout it a good bit, probably more now than when I was younger but they would always have said to me that I need to work hard in school* (Senior female student FG1)

> *My parents and my older sisters would ask me what do I want to do when I leave school and that and they're in college so they'd be telling me stuff about their friends and the courses and that kinda stuff, I've been up at their flat and that and I've been into the College so I know what it's like, they keep saying that the Leaving is the hardest bit and that when ya get into the course it's not as bad cos you're doing what ya want to be doing and its easier to focus on it..* (Senior female student, FG4)

> *Yea, we do talk about it. They'd ask me what I think I'd want to do after school and I'd tell them, sometimes they'd say they think that's not a good idea cos there's no jobs in it or it's not a great choice for me cos they think it mightn't suit me but we do talk about it. sometimes they can be a bit unrealistic about it cos they don't always think about what I want to do, they think about what they think I'd want to do and it's not the same thing but they are good to talk to and they're interested and they try and help me out with everything I do* (Senior male student, FG1)

> *we talk about it at the dinner or sometimes in the sitting room if we're watching something on telly and they might say "would you like to do something like that?" if there was a programme on about a job or something, my older brother would be telling me that I need to do this and that to get the points and that for college and what the best colleges are for the course I want to go to do, he tells me that some degrees are better than others for a job after or to do a masters or that* (Senior male student, FG1)
> *Yea, especially after a parent-teacher meeting, they ask me what do I want to do and how many points I might need but I still have to do my Junior cert so I'll wait till after that to decide* (Junior female student, FG3)

I consider these statements to be profound as they epitomise the prominent and recurring themes of progression from school to higher education and academic achievement underpinning the majority of responses across the focus groups. The students clearly articulate the concept of progression from school and what they have to do to achieve progression as a priority action. Students identified that progression was an enabler for later life and they were motivated to pursue their studies in order to progress. The congruence between the student and family goals and the goals of the school is quite striking.

How the School supports students to achieve these goals

Students were asked to discuss how the school supports them to achieve their goals. The themes of subject choice and curriculum and post-Leaving Certificate dominated this section of the discussion:

> *This school has really good careers support, the teacher is brilliant and she works with every one not just the ones who really want to go to college. The school is academic enough but it does help everyone who wants to do well* (Senior male student, FG1)

The school has started to offer Ag Science as a separate Leaving Cert subject outside of school time because there was a good few people interested in it and it would be helpful for college and that, a good few students are doing it now as an 8th subject for Leaving Cert (Senior male student, FG1)

The teachers are very good in teaching the subjects and they prepare us well, with the exam students they do extra classes sometimes to get them ready (Senior male teacher, FG4)/ *There's a lot of teachers here and they do extra stuff too with students at lunch time and after school and other things and that all helps* (Junior male teacher, FG2)/ *The guidance teacher is brilliant and she's realistic, she knows what she is talking about (*Senior female student, FG4)/ *teachers are good at supporting students to achieve their best, they do try and help you out as much as possible (Senior male student,* FG4*)*

One junior female student made an interesting observation when she stated:

Our school celebrates achievements not just academic achievements and that's good for all students to see, at the school mass awards for good junior cert results are presented and there's always end of year awards for lots of different things too and that's good for students and teachers (Junior female student, FG3)

Her reflection revealed an alternative outlook to the very academic angle propositioned by other students during this phase of the focus groups.

(vii)   *"In class-out of class" This section merges findings in relation to students' activities in class, and students' activities out of class*

Students were asked about what they do in class, in teaching time and how they felt about what they do in class. They also were asked about what they do in-school but out-of-teaching/class time. For the students this was another phase of the focus groups that they particularly enjoyed discussing. This discussion offered a focused insight into the experiences of the students "in-class" and how they felt about what they did. The themes of "school-work" and "homework" were prominent in the discussions:

In class we do our work, the teacher comes in and we just do the subjects and stuff, its either 35 minutes or 40 minutes depending on the day or the time and then the bell goes and we have the next class. Sometimes we stay in the room or sometimes we move to another room if its Biology or Art or PE or Construction, it's all pretty quick though cos you're not allowed to be late or anything or you're in trouble (Senior female student, FG1)/ *Class is usually just class work, correcting homework depending on the subject and taking down more homework. Sometimes we do tape work, sometimes we might have a debate or something or we might have project work but it really depends on the subjects. Some classes go quicker than others* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *we just do class work, can be boring depending on what subject it is, sometimes its ok..* (Senior male student, FG1
Class usually starts with a roll call and then the teacher gets on with the work of the class. We have registration every day too and you meet your form teacher every day there (Junior female student, FG2)/*We stand up when the teacher comes into the classroom, we say a prayer and we do our work. Sometimes the class can go slowly, sometimes it can be quicker depending on the topic, its usually busy* (Junior male student, FG2)
We usually get homework in every class, written or oral and it has to be done for the next class (Junior female student, FG2)

Students were asked to consider how they felt about the school-work they did in class. The responses varied but the majority of students showed an understanding and an acceptance of a norm whereby students attended class with the objective of studying a curriculum subject:

> *I don't mind too much, ya have to do it, sometimes it can be hard though and the homework can be hard* (Senior male student, FG1)*/ I like the work but sometimes I don't get it and it can be difficult but usually its ok* (Junior male student, FG3*) Its grand really, I don't mind, you have to get your work done but sometimes you can get tired if its last class or something but its school work* (Junior female student, FG3)/ *Its just part of the day and you have to do it* (Junior male student, FG3)
>
> *I don't really mind but it annoys me if there's other people messing in the class cos ya don't get your work done and the teacher gets annoyed and everyone gets in trouble then* (Senior male student, FG)
>
> *Sometimes we get too much homework in all the subjects and the teachers don't think about that and they just load you up with homework, that's a bit unfair* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *Its ok I suppose, it's the homework I don't like* (Junior male student, FG2)/

The main theme emanating from the discussions in relation to out of class activities was the theme of "extra-curricular activities". I did observe however that it was not hugely significant for the students and they moved on from the topic relatively quickly:

> *Hang out at break time or go training if there's training on* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *Camogie and hockey- we have training at lunchtime and after school, its great* (Junior female student, FG2)/ *Drama, I like drama, the school does a musical and its great craic, this school has always done a lot of drama* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *GAA, soccer at break-time on the courts, hanging around with friends (*Senior male student, FG4)*/ Hanging around, go to the tuck shop (*Junior male student, FG2)*/ Kicking a ball around on the courts at break-time with the lads (*Junior male student, FG2)*/ meeting my friends, chatting to people (FG3) Hang around FG3)/ Training or practising music (FG3)/ FG3)/ Talking to friends (FG3)*
>
> *There's evening study after school, I stay for that, its good to get homework done but it makes the day long. It's for 3rd, 5th and 6th years, it used to be just exam classes but 5th years do it now aswell, its ok* (Senior female student, FG1)
>
> *Music, there's an orchestra here and there's music after school aswell. Sports –there's hurling, football, camogie, hockey and basketball, there's a lot of sports here* (Senior male student, FG4)
>
> *Sometimes there are a few tours but not that many, in transition year students go to France, but only 72 students get into transition year so not everyone gets to go, its expensive too, about €400 and not all of transition year go* (Junior female student, FG2)

(viii)   *The preceding section focused on in class and out of class activities, including extra-curricular activities and the following section develops the theme further and describes student spaces in the school where they pursue other activities and includes findings focusing on where students hang out at break-times, the lunch-room and canteen*

Students were asked where they "hung out" at break-times. Students described the areas they frequented at break-times during the school day. This segment of the data segues with the following segments on the lunch room and the canteen and student spaces in the school. Even though it was not flagged at the pilot phase of the focus groups, it may have been better to have combined these sections into one section within the focus group as the findings overlap and thematically there is really one emergent theme, that of student spaces. The students value their "spaces" and lamented that they were restricted in where they were permitted to access as they believed that they should have had access to all the spaces while the school insisted on designated areas for designated year groups. This was a source of contention among the students:

In the year group areas, all the year groups have their own areas and we have to stay in those areas, we can't go into the 1st year areas or we're in trouble, sometimes we can go down to the pitches or that and sometimes we just hang around the classrooms (Senior male student, FG1)/ *At break-times we stay in the classrooms talking or go for a walk in the 5th year area* (Senior female student, FG4)/ *Classrooms or 5th year area or if there's training we go the pitch or the gym* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *tuck shop or the classroom or outside* (Junior male student, FG1)/ *5th year area or classroom* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *Social areas, classrooms, outside* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *Our own area or classroom* (Senior male student, FG4)/ *Outside, on the courts, down the hockey pitch, social areas* (Junior female student, FG3)/ *Classroom or social areas (FG3)*

Students were asked about the lunch areas they frequent at lunch time in school:

*There's just a tuck shop and then ya eat in the classroom (*Senior female student, FG1)/ *No canteen, just a tuck shop, every classroom has a cleaning rota, it doesn't always get done though and then there's a row with the teacher after lunch* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *No canteen but I'd love if there was a proper canteen or cafeteria where they did dinners, cos the day is so long and ya can only get snacks and that and you're starving by evening study* (Senior male student, FG4)/)/ *No canteen but I bring my own lunch in* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *No, just a tuck shop and its always packed at lunchtime* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *No but I wish we had a canteen, shop is always packed at break and lunchtime* (Junior female student, FG2)/ *Just a tuck shop and everyone uses it, it's packed (FG2)*

Students were asked about student spaces in the school, they felt quite strongly about the spaces and it was a significant topic for them as evidenced in the extracts below:

yes suppose there are, just wish that there was a proper lunch area though (Junior male student, FG3)/ *Some of the social areas are small but this year we're not too bad, in junior cert the space was very tight* (Senior male student, FG4)/ *It's a big area but we're not allowed into every area* (Junior male student, FG3)/ *I wish the social areas were bigger or that we could cross from one to the other* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *I suppose there are enough spaces but if there's a lot of movement it can get crowded* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *there are enough spaces but I don't like having to be in a specific area* (Senior male student, FG1)/ *there are lots of spaces but maybe they could think about using them better* (Senior male student FG4)

There are lots of buildings and facilities in this school for everyone." (Junior male student, FG3)/ *It's a really big area, much bigger than the other school in the town* (Junior female student, FG3)/ *There are plenty of spaces but some get more used than others* (Male female student, FG2)/ *I think there are enough spaces, it's a pretty big building and grounds* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *the school grounds are fairly big alright but the areas are small* (Senior female student, FG1)

(ix)   What students look forward to

Approaching the end of the focus groups students were asked about what they looked forward to. The main themes arising from the data centre on holiday time and time away from school.

> *Summer this year, it'll be great* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *Oxygen, I'm really looking forward to it, it will be great, next year will be so hard that I'm really going to enjoy this summer* (Senior female student, FG1)/ *Summer- I might be getting a summer job and I'll have money* (Senior male student, FG4)/ *Summer* (Senior male student, FG4)/ *Summer* (Junior male student, FG2)/ *Get a sleep!" (FG2)/ Holidays but next year is junior cert so that's not great (FG2)/ Summer and 3 months off school* (Junior female student, FG2)/ *Summer but then its Leaving Cert year.."* (Junior male student, FG2)

(x)   What students worry about in school

The final piece of the focus groups asked students to reflect on their concerns in school. Their responses again were predicated on the academic aspects of the school, assessments, Leaving Certificate and examinations and their individual performances relative to the assessment. The focus was redrawn to concentrate on the theme of post-Leaving Certificate, examinations, the school report, subjects and curriculum:

> *Exams, this year and next year in the Leaving, I have to do well this year so I won't have so much to do next year* (Senior female student, FG1)/
>
> *Tests and exam results, getting a good school report or my parents will be getting on to me (*Junior male student, FG2)/ *Not doing well in exams and not doing well in the Leaving* (Junior male student, FG3
>
> *When the Leaving is over I will miss my friends, and I won't see them all again, I have a good few friends but I wont have them when I leave* (Senior female student, FG1)
>
> *I worry about some subjects that I find hard and that will be even harder next year, I might need grinds but they're so expensive and they take time* (Senior male student, FG4)
>
> *Not getting the place in college that I want, I do work hard but sometimes in the exam it doesn't come out and then because of a bad day I won't get the marks and I won't get the points, it's not really fair* (Senior female student, FG1)
>
> *Nothing really, I'm only in second year so it's not too bad* (Junior male student, FG2)

c) 9.2.3 Concluding commentary on focus group findings

The focus groups offered the student participants an opportunity to reflect and consider a range of aspects relative to their role as students attending the case study school. The students engaged in lengthy conversations during the course of the focus groups which were enacted at a level of familiarity and understanding that enabled the students to fully participate in the focus group. The focus groups also unearthed and revealed a number of themes that were supported by the data that was generated. Through the filters, I used in my interpretation of the data generated, a number of predominant themes emerged that have channelled through to the findings. In terms of what they articulated as being most significant to them, the themes of homework and schoolwork, student spaces and facilities, uniform, the co-educational school and post-Leaving Certificate feature prominently. Extra-curricular activities did not seem to feature in the same way for them. The most striking finding is their desire to do well while in the school and to progress on after the Leaving Certificate. They are not obsessed however with just getting to Leaving Certificate and doing the examination to move on, they are interested in biding their time until they get to that point and accumulating as much academic capital as possible as thy engage with the school along the way. It is as if they have immersed themselves in a phased, cyclical expedition where the pathway to the next stage is every bit as important for them as progressing onto to the next phase. I will return to this in much greater detail in the discussion chapter.

Four students from the focus groups further volunteered and consented to participate in a visual diary phase of the research. The next section of this chapter presents the findings of the visual diaries phase.

9.3 The Visual Diaries

The visual diaries constructed by the student participants represent the final part of the research data. This data is therefore participant generated data and used a briefing guide given to the participants to construct the images. This visual material constitutes just one part of an extensive data set concerning the students' views and experiences of schooling. The participant generated phase was only taken up by a small number of participants (n=4) and was designed to be a vehicle through which the students could make linkages between what they did at home and what they do in school.

Sweetman (2009) refers to Bourdieu's use of photography and visual methods to uncover and illuminate aspects of "habitus" in investigating areas that are otherwise difficult to verbalise or articulate (Sweetman, 2009). He recalls Bourdieu's assertion (1999, p611) that where research participants are directly involved in the process that it can mean that the process is potentially transformative, allowing for the development of forms of critical self-awareness among the research participants. Interviews with participant generated visual materials are particularly helpful in exploring the taken-for granted aspects of the participants' lives (Rose, 2014) and offer an opportunity for the participants to reflect at a distance from the activities that they are usually immersed in (Rose, 2014). The purpose of using visual methods with the student participants was to explore with them the internal implicit narratives of the photographs of spaces at home that they perceived as being connected to their school.

This phase of the research used "Photo-voice" to augment the text-based data generated through the focus groups and to enable the student participants to construct visuals that they perceived to represent connecting spaces between home and school. Photo-voice is a method whereby participants are given cameras and asked to take photographs of their daily experiences (Holtby et al., 2015). Photo voice enables participants' reflections on their environment and moves beyond the traditional data collection methods. The visual material that was generated by the students did not form the end product of the exercise but instead was an intermediary step (Pauwels, 2010) towards reaching a research output which I have further interpret and present here as findings.

The follow up phase of the small focus group was the interpretation by the students of the images during a conversation to make the images intelligible and understandable. Their interpretations of the narratives from the images and my interpretation of what they articulated form the findings that are presented in this segment of the chapter.

My control over the production process of the students' images was more limited than with the researcher generated images and necessitated producing a short brief for the students to explain my intentions for the data collection phase. Arguably the brief they were given may have been somewhat responsible for them only returning nineteen images overall as they may have interpreted the task as simply capturing "an image" of a connecting space between home and school. I was struck by the fact that while they constructed a number of images collectively

(n=19), all of the images were similar and all included images of desks, chairs and study spaces. Les Back remarks that for Bourdieu, photography was interesting because it portrayed the social world and it betrayed the choices made by the person holding the camera (Back, 2009). This notion of portrayal and betrayal is interesting in light of both the number of images constructed and interpreted by the students and the content and narratives within the images themselves.

The next section maps the findings from the visual diary phase onto the topic guide that was used during the small focus group conducted with the students at the school by drawing out the dominant themes that emerged during the focus group discussion with the students. The data from the discussion with the students was coded using the labels used to code the focus groups and the data was condensed into clusters from which the emerging themes developed.

9.3.1   Visual Diaries findings- connecting spaces between family life and school life

The criticality of the context of the students' photographs cannot be underestimated. Context gives images meaning (Becker, 1995) and moves the photograph beyond simple content but adds a sociological text that can be used by the participant and the researcher to construct an understanding of what is going on in the photograph and what it means. Photographs get meanings, like all cultural objects from their contexts (Becker, 1995) and the interpretations of those who created the photographs serve to further elaborate on the initial contextual inferences.

The findings for this phase of the research were not as extensive as from the focus groups given the number of participants and the nature of the task. Nonetheless there were a number of themes that were significant for the students and about which they held strong viewpoints.

Homework, school work and study spaces represent the most significant themes that manifest in the visual diaries findings. These themes are not in any way at odds with the findings from the focus groups, the main difference is the process by which the themes were articulated by the students. The themes are distilled down and made visible and intelligible through their interpretations. The properties of the photographs and the interpretation of the reader is not fixed (Banks, 2005) and therefore is subject to different meanings. In constructing the brief for the students to take the photographs in the first instance I specified that they should capture some

images of "connecting spaces between home and school". My intention as the researcher was to hopefully generate a number of images of different settings in the home that the students construed as school related spaces, on the basis of their underlying interpretation of what school represented for them and how that might be somehow replicated at home. The students opted to produce several images of similar content (desks, chairs and study spaces, independently of each other. Barthes (198, p40) refers to the internal narrative of an image as the story that the image communicates. The content of the image is not necessarily the narrative that the image maker wants to communicate (Banks, 2005). The external narrative which includes information about the nature of the world surrounding the photograph is always involved in the "reading" (Banks, 2005) of the internal narrative no matter how much we try and separate them out, although if the external narrative is restrictive that can in turn limit our understanding of the external narrative . The external narrative includes the social context that produced the image and the social relations within which the image is embedded at the time of viewing (Banks, 2005).

In the case of the students they interpreted a space that represented for them a connection between school and home to be a study space only, complete with desk, chair and a lamp. The focus group topic guide asked the students about the content of the images and prompted them to reflect and analyse as to why they had chosen to take a photograph of that space.

    (i)   What is this space in your photograph? Can you describe the space?

They were quite judicious as they initially just enumerated the features of the internal narratives of the photographs themselves;

This is my desk in my room at home. I do my homework there and I study there. It's a bit messy but I like it like that. I have my computer on my desk too and I use it for school work and for my own stuff. (Senior male student)

This is my desk. I don't leave anything on my desk, I just take out my homework when I get home and do it and then I take everything off the desk (Junior female student)

This is my study space at home, it's where I do my homework. (Senior male student)

This cursory initial analysis by the students is aligned to Barthes' concepts of denotation where they literally list what was photographed without offering much in terms of exploring the connotations of the photograph.

The study space theme was recurrent in all of their photographs and the meanings they attributed to the spaces were explicitly study, homework and school work related. They did not offer a lot

of contextual information about the spaces that might have better articulated the external narrative. In figure 9.1 the desk is situated under a structure that may be a bed but the participant declined to offer any additional information to confirm that. If the structure is a bed it is most likely that the desk is located in the participant's bedroom which extends a broader contextual meaning to the space. The angle that the shot was taken at has excluded any extensive external narrative but has instead restricted our view to the desk only and the objects that are visible on the desk and immediately beside it.

This is where I do my homework, there is a desk, a chair, my lamp, some pens, some notebooks, my nail varnish, some containers and a picture on the wall. The desk is under my bed. It's not a very big desk, I have to move stuff around to do my homework sometimes. My hockey stick is beside the desk and there are some books there that I like to read aswell but they are not school books, they are just regular books. (Junior Female student)

From a cultural capital perspective, the image evidences material objects related to academic capital and educational and sporting pursuits. There is therefore evidence of objectified cultural capital in the image that the student has chosen to use to reflect as a connecting space between home and school.

Figure 9.1 Participant generated image 1

(ii)   What is in the photograph? Can you describe the objects in the photograph?

Asking the students about what was in the photographs elicited more information from them as they described the objects in each image. The objects they identified while located in their home were in their interpretation very much connected to objects found at the school. This articulated a fluidity or a movement between home and school which is characterised by some messy and busy spaces. The senior male student's Engineering project was the focus of the internal narrative of one of his chosen images (Figure 9.5) and the image communicated an industrious space being used to complete project work. Interestingly the money box on the edge of the desk jars with the age appropriateness of the Engineering equipment and is possibly a childhood remnant from earlier years. Despite what may seem like chaos in the image the student is quite reflexive about it stating that it "just has" his school stuff and his electronics stuff.

In this photograph it just has my desk and my school stuff in it. There are a few other things there that are just my personal stuff There are my books, an alarm clock that I use to get up for school in the morning, a chair, some cushions, a hockey stick and a light. (Junior Female student)

There is a shift in the student's explanation in this section from denotation to connotation (Barthes, 1981)where the mention of books, the alarm clock, cushions and a hockey stick unveils latent socio-cultural associations.

In this photograph, it's just got my school stuff and my electronics stuff for my Engineering project for school. (Senior male student)
*There's just my desk and chair in the photograph. (*Junior female student)

(iii)   Why did you take this photograph of this space?

Asking the students to think about what motivated them to take the particular images prompted them to think beyond the initial internal narratives of the images and to reveal and

convey deeper aspects of their "habitus" or what is sometimes regarded as the mundane or taken for granted (Sweetman, 2009).

I took this photograph because if I was at home and thinking of school I would think about homework and getting it done and the desk (Senior male student)
The space has the same stuff in it as school has. There's a desk and a chair and I use it to do work for school when I'm at home. (Junior female student)

Figure 9.1 Participant generated image 2

(iv)   *How does this space represent a connection between family life and school life for you?*

The spaces identified by the students exemplified their way of thinking (school is about study and homework), their ways of doing things (doing their homework or study) and the way they see things (they have to study and do their homework to get good marks). This is in essence their "habitus" and they base that on the circumstances they are familiar with.

Habitus also includes prejudices and expectations incorporated from past experiences (O'Reilly, 2012). In the students' cases the experiences have been accumulated over time in school where they have become accustomed to and immersed in the academic culture of the school and the associated norms from that:

I feel that the space in my house connects with school because it's usually where I continue on the work I have for school in the evening or at the weekend. We get a lot of homework and study and I will be doing Leaving Cert next year so I have a lot of homework. I have to study to get good marks. (Senior male student)

Desks and chairs are the same as desks and chairs in school so it kind of reminds me of school then, there isn't anywhere else in my house that reminds me of school, except this space (Junior female student).

Figure 9.3 Participant generated image 3

(v) Do you like/dislike this space in your home/Why do you like/dislike the space?

Each phase of the focus group conversation delved a little deeper into exposing latent forms of capital evidenced within the images and the students' dispositions and how both manifested in the conversations. The concept of having a specific place to study that remained specifically for that purpose and remained untouched or unaffected during the student's absence at school during the day highlighted the concepts of objectified capital, economic capital, academic capital and cultural capital. The families had prioritised study spaces and provided the equipment and accessories to enable the students to study and "to do well in school". The reference to undisturbed quiet spaces by the students illuminates the concept of academic capital within the home:

I like it because it's my space where I can leave out my stuff and where I can do my homework (Junior female student)
I like it because it's quiet and I don't get disturbed when I'm studying for exams or doing homework, I can stay here late and do my work. I can more done in less time when its quiet. (Senior male student)
Yeah, I do like it because I can leave some of my stuff there when I'm at school and just come home in the evening and start my homework there. (Senior male student)

Figure 9.4 Participant generated image 4

a) 9.3.2 Concluding commentary on visual diary findings

The visual diaries constructed by the students generated very homogenous images of "connecting spaces" between the students' homes and school. All of the students considered the study space with a desk and chair to be representative of a connecting space between the school they attended each day and the space in which the completed homework and study in the evenings and at the weekend. Students took photographs of study spaces only and did not venture outside of this type of space. The participatory nature of the photo voice methodology created an opportunity for the small group to reflect collectively on the connections related to home and school (Holtby et al., 2015). The students (n=4) who participated in the visual diary phase of the research recognised school and home as being connected in relation to academic matters only which manifested through the themes of homework, schoolwork, post Leaving Certificate, study spaces and student time. Involving research participants in the process of collecting, arranging and analysing visual material may also contribute to their understanding of everyday practice which would not otherwise have been uncovered or understood (Sweetman, 2009) and despite the small number of images constructed by the students and the single focus of the students on the study space the student participants generated additional data that has been useful to me as a researcher in understanding their orientation relative to the research questions.

9.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has described in detail the findings from the student focus groups and the student visual diaries. The descriptions have been supported by extracts from the four main focus groups, presented within the structure of the focus group schedule. The visual diaries findings were supported by extracts from the focus group discussion held with the students and were illustrated by four of the participant generated photographs selected by the students as identifying connecting spaces between home and school.

The findings presented in this chapter represent my interpretation of the raw data having scrutinised the primary data sets and having rigorously applied a number of analysis filters to extract information in order to address the research questions. Notwithstanding the complexities of the qualitative research approach I used and the extensive range of data generated in this

research I adopted a tightly structured and logical approach to extrapolate the findings from the data to enable me to read the research output as aligned to the research questions.

These findings will now be aggregated with the findings that emerged in the previous chapter (the Parents, the Teaching staff and the school) and with due regard to the research questions and the literature will be woven and threaded through the discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter Ten

A conversation on the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships and connections.

10.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion on the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships and connections relative to the research questions of the study. The chapter is presented in three sections; the first section revisits the research questions, the second section analyses the prioritised findings and presents them thematically, locating the discussion of findings within three sub-sections and the final section synthesises the accumulated findings.

10.2 Research Questions

My intention in revisiting the research questions in this section is two-fold. As a preamble to the discussion I intend to refresh the connection between the original research questions and the findings generated. I also wish to evaluate the appropriateness of the research questions for the investigation of the social phenomenon I elected to study. The phenomenon is concerned with the role of cultural capital in family- school relationships and what influences were evidenced in the connections between the family and the school. In order to refresh the link between the research questions and the findings I have listed the research questions below:

What does familial cultural capital "look like" in an Irish context?

How does familial cultural capital influence the educational outcomes of post-primary students in the Irish education system?

What influences children from families experiencing similar social and economic circumstances to aspire to and attain different educational outcomes?

How do the connections and relationships between families and schools contribute to the development of educational patterns and paradigms in Irish education?

The initial two research questions were always to the fore of my thinking about this piece of research. Having consulted with the literature however I was also mindful of Lamont and Lareau's assertion (1988) that Bourdieu's own statements about cultural capital lacked clarity and that his conceptual arguments were weakly linked to specific, concrete referents (Kingston, 2001). Hence making it difficult for researchers to proceed with empirical evaluation. The literature also heightened my consciousness concerning the latent and metaphorical properties of cultural capital and associated habitus (Sweetman, 2009). After considerable deliberation regarding how I might actually investigate the phenomenon given the empirical elusiveness referred to in the literature, I eventually decided that it was possible to explicate and unpack the central concept of my research questions with appropriate methodology. My option of a mixed methods approach enabled the investigation, and the inclusion of the visual element consolidated the approach specifically in terms of affording a mechanism to "illuminate" (Sweetman, 2009) aspects that would otherwise have been difficult to explain or articulate.

Separately, the first research question required some thought and connotational processing as to what I might be "looking" for in terms of cultural capital and the literature (Booth and Dunn, 1996; Eccles and Harold, 1996; Epstein, 2009) offered some useful suggestions and characteristics that assisted in categorising what I should hope to find, by using the most appropriate research instruments possible.

The second research question was even more complex as it concerned itself with three sub texts: *familial, cultural capital* and *how* familial cultural capital influenced *educational outcomes*. It was challenging for me as a researcher to measure or account for each of the three subtexts given the complexity of the phenomenon. The research participants were critical of my exposition of the phenomenon as they all brought their own separate viewpoints and meanings to the research. When I triangulated the data generated across all aspects of the research the richness and depth revealed convergences and divergences between data sets and addresses the complexity of the research questions.

The next two research questions while both interesting were no less complex to investigate and necessitated thorough and meticulous reasoning in the selection of appropriate research instruments to assist in fully elucidating each question. The mixed methods approach offered additional possibilities to explore the questions mediated through methods differentiated by participants. Conducting the pilot study of each research phase was indispensable as it drew

attention to strengths and challenges within the instruments and prompted a number of amendments to be made before the main research commenced.

The research questions represented the facets of inquiry that I most wanted to explore (Miles et al., 2014) and I remained sentient to Maxwell's (2013a) argument that the research questions include what the researcher specifically wants to understand by doing the study and that they are "at the heart of the research design" (Maxwell, 2013b, p. 73). I found myself referring back to the research questions through each of the phases of the research and in particular at times when it was challenging to locate what exactly I was looking for both at the design phase and during the analysis phase. I return to specific aspects of the research questions in parallel to the thematic analysis below.

10.3 Discussion of the findings relative to the data and the literature

Chapters eight and nine presented selected findings arranged thematically and prioritised relative to the research questions and aligned to the literature. Having synthesised the most relevant data from each of the research phases I have structured this section to further blend the findings and advance a number of arguments and contentions supported by the evidence generated by the data and the literature.

10.3.1 "The big-ticket items" (4)

a) Factors that mediate the relationship between the family and the school
(i) The relationship between the family and the school
The notion that there is a relationship between the family and the school is an underpinning assumption in this thesis. This assumption is supported by the literature that cites a number of examples that identify points of connection between the family and the school mediated by an array of factors. The measurement or evaluation of the strength or intensity of the connection between the family and the school is difficult to quantify and qualify, and challenging to identify. The literature provides us with some concrete indicators that have been used in studies (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999; Eccles and Harold, 1996; Epstein, 2009; Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Lareau,

1987; Lareau and Shumar, 1996; Ljunge, 2015; Lyons et al, 2003; Myers and Myers, 2015; Stacer and Perrucci, 2013) to profile the relationship. These factors include family structure, socio-economic status, time availability of parents, levels of parental education, maternal input, parents' employment and parents' values. The literature is in agreement that all of the above factors are supported by a level of capital that is distributed within the family and presents in different forms.

(ii) Parent and family profile

The initial methodological probe in this research investigated levels of family involvement of the parents through the parent questionnaire. Findings from the parent questionnaire revealed a normal distribution of parents when aligned to CSO census data (2011) with the 90.8% of participants recording themselves as two parent families and 8.1% recording themselves as single parent families. From the outset this factor is significant as the literature indicates that biological married parents are in a position of advantage in terms of their children's levels of socialisation in society (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999) and that there are statistically significant and higher levels of family-school based engagement evidenced in biologically married and cohabiting parent families than in non-biological or single parent families (Myers and Myers, 2015). The participant families in this piece of research therefore occupy a position of advantage on the basis of family structure relative to their involvement in their children's education when considered in light of the literature.

(iii) Income and socio-economic status

When gross family income is taken into account the participants' median gross family income is higher (€50,000) than that recorded in the 2011 census (€38,703). 29.8% of parents reported an income of between €21,000 and €40,000 while 27.7% reported an income of €41,00 to €60,000. While the levels of gross incomes among the families in the study is not particularly high they are higher than the national average and when aligned to the literature that reports that low-income parents are less involved in their children's education than high income parents (Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Lareau, 1987; Stacer and Perrucci, 2013) and that low income parents face other related barriers in terms of time constraints, paid leave, work flexibility and parents' views of their own role in their children's education the families occupy a positive position relative to their level of involvement and relationship with the school. It is important however to note that

this assumption could be slightly skewed bearing in mind that only 78.7% of participants responded to the section on income.

In terms of levels of parents' education, the literature reports that higher levels of parents' education correlates positively with high levels of involvement by parents in their children's education. 33% of the parents in the study reported having a third level qualification which is lower than the national (CSO, 2011) statistic (38%) but it may not be accurate to compare the two cohorts given that the overall age range in the CSO figure is more extensive than in the study cohort. It may also be an issue that the questionnaire did not ask for the highest educational level of the spouse or partner which would have made it possible to perform a cross tabulation between the highest levels of educational study and the gross family income. This is a shortcoming in the questionnaire design and in the presentation of the data. It is unfortunate that this shortcoming did not feature during the preliminary pilot phase as if corrected it could have led to an additional finding that may have proposed alternative conclusions in terms of the socio-economic status of the families.

The section on parents' occupation revealed that the most reported occupation for participants (the questionnaire respondents) was housewife (n= 20) while the most reported for participants' spouses was farmer (n= 28) while 84.5% of questionnaire respondents were female and 15.5% were male. These findings illustrate an interesting aspect in terms of which parent completed the questionnaire that concurs with the literature. The literature indicates that mothers are more likely to be involved in school-related activities (Biblarz and Raftery, 1999; Byrne and Smyth., 2010; Fahey et al., 2012) and that fathers were much less likely to get involved in school-related activities than mothers. The rate of response from mothers in this research supports that assertion. The study itself was initiated through the school and bore the hall-mark of a school-related activity which the parents and the mothers in the main responded positively to (n=188/467).

Staying with the theme of family-school relationships and with the notion put forward by the literature that greater levels of parent involvement in children's education are advantageous and beneficial, it is noteworthy that participants reported high levels of engagement by their own parents in their education. 70.7% of participants reported that their own parents always read communication from school, a finding that I have interpreted to mean that there was a high level

of interaction and connection between the participants' parents and the school in a previous generation.

The findings from the research concur in the main with the findings from the literature in relation to the variables highlighted above. Given the status of the variables reported in this piece of research, it is now timely to offer a viewpoint on the linkage between the variables and the operationalisation of the cultural capital of the families. I have used the indicators of income, socio-economic status, structure, levels of education and occupation to profile and to evaluate the resources within the families. These characteristics vary across family structure types and are generally in higher quantities and qualities in biological married households (Lareau and Weinninger, 2003; Powell et al., 2006 in Myers and Myers 2015). I am using the term resources in this discussion as a euphemism for capital. Myers and Myers (2015) borrowing from Hofferth et al. (1998) and Coleman (1988) remind us that social capital resides at the intra-familial level and extra-familial levels as originally conceptualised by Coleman. The data generated from the parent questionnaires and the student focus groups provide extensive evidence of the social and cultural capital of the participant families when measured by the quality and activities of the parent-child relationship and the parents' connections to other parents and institutions that promote educational outcomes (Myers and Myers, 2015). 58.3% of parents (n=105) responded that they had sought advice on educating their children. The literature indicates that capital is interchangeable and exchangeable (Maton in Grenfell, 2008) and related to social class (Byrne and Smyth., 2010; Calarco and Lareau, 2012; McCoy et al., 2014a; Myers and Myers, 2015) and there is evidence in the study findings that the cultural resources of the families, (evidenced by the variables above and other variables) when merged with the cultural resources of the school, convert to formulate advantageous outcomes for students and their families. I remain conscious however of references in the literature (Kingston, 2001) that claim that cultural capital does not account for the relationship between social privilege and academic success and that there may be too many conceptually distinct variables that have been labelled as cultural capital, creating a distorted sense of what accounts for academic success. One of the resources that features prominently in the findings is the participation of parents in school related activities. Children recognise that their parents place high value on their education through their participation in parent-teacher meetings or volunteering at the school (Stacer and Perrucci, 2013) and the evidence from this study is that there is an proactive and positive emphasis on parental

engagement with the school through various channels and opportunities for engagement. Parental support increases students' confidence to explore options, including options that they may previously have thought to be inaccessible, and to engage in career planning (Turner and Lapan, 2002 in McCoy et al., 2014). The following thematic section draws on the evidence from the parent questionnaires, the teacher interviews and the student focus groups and discusses how the parents' participation in school-related activities enables and empowers parents and converges with the literature.

b) Parents' participation in school activities

(i) "Buy-in" from parents

During the staff interviews one of the interviewees commented that parents generally want the best for their children and that they would do anything to support their children. Another staff member commented that the families "buy into" the reputation of the school and that there are some sixth-generation families in the school. Staff referred to the culture of the school being that everyone does Junior Cert and Leaving Cert and because that is the norm and families believe that it offers them a stable way of life. The use of the term "buy-into" resonates strongly with the mercantile connotation of capital whereby the investment by families in the school and in the culture of the school yields (educational) reward. The use of the term culture reflects a recognition by the teacher of a particular way of doing things in the school, characterised by certain behaviours and actions.

(ii) Meetings between parents and the school

Parent-teacher meetings and introductory meetings for first year students epitomised a point of connection where parents and teachers met in person. 85.5% of parents reported that they attended parent-teacher meetings while 54.1% of parents reported attending talks and classes organised for parents at the school. These findings are in line with the findings from Byrne and Smyth.'s 2010 study. In discussing parent-teacher meetings during the interviews it was acknowledged by staff that while they were well attended that meetings could generate a degree of frustration from both parents and teachers. Parents' frustration arose from trying to get to see every teacher and teachers sometimes find it challenging meeting the parents. The literature suggests (Calarco and Lareau, 2012) that cultural capital is centred around inequality based on

the fit between the individual's culture and the culture of the institution within a society. In terms of educational system, levels and types of cultural capital possessed by parents allows them to interact differentially, involve themselves in and comply with the regulations of the institution (Calarco and Lareau, 2012). The ways in which schools initiate parental engagement favours those who have greater cultural capital (Calarco and Lareau, 2012). In the case study school those parents who are frustrated in their efforts to see every teacher are anxious and concerned about the academic progress of their children and they understand by virtue of their level of cultural capital the implications of academic progress for future educational opportunities. This connection to the literature (Lynch and Lodge, 2002) is further evidenced in findings from the staff interviews where teachers acknowledge that some parents find it difficult to engage with the school perhaps because of a negative experience of their own and that parents are anxious about meeting staff or the principal.

(iii)   Stakeholders

From a legislative perspective (Education (1998) Act) greater emphasis has been placed on involving parents in school activities including empowering them in the decision-making aspects of the school. The findings point towards a congruence between parents and the school where the parents are considered stakeholders in the schooling process. An initiative to redraft a code of behaviour in the school was reported by the staff during the interviews as being a success with all stakeholders (trustees, parents, students, staff, ancillary staff) being consulted and involved in the formulation of the code. While the selection criteria for parental representation in the initiative was not elaborated on it would be interesting to know what the criteria were and which parents were selected. Conscious of Hanafin and Lynch's (2012) work on peripheral parents the evidence points towards a tendency to consider parents as a homogenous group with no distinction by class, in which middle-class parents are most visible. There was a clear intention by the school to initiate parent involvement as stakeholders and through the reestablishment of the parents' council. The cultural capital argument in the literature suggests however that it is mainly those parents who have greater cultural capital that will advance in the family-school relationship (Lamont and Lareau, 1988, Lyons et al, 2003) and that schools are responsive to the cultural orientations of the dominant class (Kingston, 2001). It was also interesting that the findings reported that parents who had been members of the parents' council and board of

management of their child's primary school were less likely to be members of the parents' council or the board of management of the post primary school.

(iv)   Building relationships

With regards to building relationships between the family and the school that don't just focus on stakeholder participation in initiatives the findings evidenced an impetus within the school to construct and maintain positive channels of communication between parents/families and the school. This manifested from a very early stage even before the student had actually started at the school through introductory meetings with parents and with students themselves. There was extensive evidence of a caring environment within the school where students' well-being was prioritised. The environment was supported not only in terms of educational provision but also in a clearly articulated pastoral care approach that involved older students as mentors, a tiered class tutor support system, a care team and school management. While the latter provisions are underpinned by statutory requirement the former provisions are not found in every school and may be seen as unique to the culture of the case study school. The literature clearly outlines the obligations of schools in terms of provision and indeed the school is fully compliant and active as required. As the school does not have designated disadvantaged status it does not have a Home School Community Liaison teacher funded by the state and this is contentious for staff. Because the school does not "fit" the socio-economic indicator model, this does not mean that there are not a diversity of needs in the school. This finding parallels earlier mention in the literature (O'Toole and Association of Secondary Teachers, 2013) which highlights that the original eligibility indicators (Smyth et al., 2015) of educational disadvantage is narrow and not appropriate given economic changes in society over the last number of years.

c)   The school is successful in sending students to higher and further education;

Parental choice of school may be influenced by the school's curriculum, academic reputation or ethos (Byrne and Smyth., 2010) and the evidence from the literature (Lyons et al, 2003) illustrates a culture of high expectations and support in promoting successful post-school transitions for post-primary students (McCoy et al., 2014b). The findings from the student focus groups revealed that it was a combined decision (them and their parents) in most cases to attend

the school but the subtext I interpreted was that parents were very influential in making the choice. This aligns to the literature cited earlier (Lyons et al 2003) that recognises where parents have high levels of cultural capital that they are enabled to interact differentially with the institution in order to accrue appropriate resources that enables further accrual of academic capital and progression within the system. The findings from the research conducted concurs with the literature and illustrates a consensus amongst the participants that prioritises transition to further or higher education as one of the most important findings. Evidence within the findings elucidates a comprehensive guidance and counselling provision within the school that all students from first year to Leaving Certificate have access to, although it is timetabled from third year only. While family has a strong influence on post-school planning decisions and choices this influence is matched in the case study school where curriculum provision is optimal and after school study is provided during the week and at the weekends. It was the voice of the students in particular in the findings that really focused my attention as to their motivation to progress to the next phase of education. The students returned at every opportunity to discussing post-school choices, careers, assessments and examinations, study and crucially the reputation of the school for "sending" students to college. The institutional "habitus" of the school is illuminated in the objectified resources and provisions that the school makes available to the students during the school year. Institutional habitus can be regarded as the impact of a social group on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through organisations such as schools (McDonough 1997; Reay et al. 2001, 2005 Smyth and Banks, 2012).

There is much evidence of institutional habitus displayed in photographs, cups, trophies and certificates around the building of the school and students who are a homogenous group within the school are exposed to this on a daily basis instilling in the student body dispositions and aspirations that prioritise progression to college as a normative event. From a theoretical perspective Coffé and Geys (2007) refer to the Putnam (2000) bridging and bonding model and how homogenous tightly knit and closed networks groups are associated with more bonding potential while heterogeneous cross-cutting groups are associated with more bridging potential that in turn builds social capital. The school in the case study doesn't just promote "getting by", it has a distinctive focus on "getting ahead" (Putnam, 2000). It promotes "getting ahead" by creating opportunities through curriculum provision and extra-curricular provision and a

dedicated guidance and student well-being provision that brings a diverse student population together through positive educational experiences. This in turn develops bridging social capital that students use to progress.

There is a similarity between the bridging and bonding theoretical perspective and the contextual effect referred to (Smyth and Banks, 2012a) where they describe contrasting approaches towards the transition to higher education between a fee paying post primary school (Fig Lane) and a working class school (Barrack Street). They pay particular focus to the guidance that students get in the school and they adopt the framework that institutional habitus is manifest through learning organisation and process in the school and in guidance provision. There are similarities between the case study school and "Fig Lane" in the Smyth and Banks research in that formal guidance at Fig Lane is structured and students participate in a weekly guidance class and have a timetabled one-to one meeting with the guidance counsellor and there is strong encouragement that students take higher level subjects. Fig Lane holds expectations about suitable destinations for its students. The case study school communicates solid expectations about the most appropriate destinations for its students to the students themselves and to parents. The students in Barrack Street have very different sets of economic, cultural and social capital on which they draw. The prior experience of family for students in Fig Lane provides those students with knowledge of what to expect and information regarding university. The case study school is not a fee-paying school but the institutional habitus of the school which manifests through curricular provision and guidance builds towards a transition to college which is "taken for granted" by the students and the families. This may go some way to explaining the preoccupation by participants with transitioning to college from the case study school. 72.6% of parents reported that it was *very important* for them that the school was successful in "sending" students to third level and there were no significant differences between how parents from the first percentile viewed the importance of "sending" students to third level and how parents from the third percentile viewed the importance when compared statistically using a t-test.

d) Coeducation and curriculum

Historically the topic of coeducation has been contentious and there has been a strong emphasis on single sex education in Ireland when compared to the United States or England (Smyth, 2015). The trend towards coeducational provision gathered momentum in the early 1970s. This

took the form of the establishment of the comprehensive and community schools but recently the trend towards coeducation may be more attributed to the amalgamation of post primary schools. The case study school began to offer coeducational provision in 1969 in response to local need. Technically the case study school is a voluntary secondary school and is recognised operationally as such. However, if viewed through a school type lens rather than a sectoral lens, it also for example, portrays the dimensions of a comprehensive school as there are nuances of the comprehensive school curriculum in operation. It could be argued that the school holds the status of a voluntary secondary school with the underpinning religious ethos but in reality, has transitioned its curriculum to that of a comprehensive school model.

The dominance of coeducation as a theme in the research findings is interesting. Teachers hold various views on the merits of coeducation but all of those interviewed favoured coeducation as a model. They articulated advantages for boys and for girls in the coeducational setting. Their endorsement of coeducation is somewhat at odds with what must be recognised as somewhat dated literature   that claims that girls do not perform as well academically in a mixed school as they do in a single sex school. The students themselves were also very vocal in their contributions and they saw it as very normal and as it should be. 48.9% of parents rated the variable of the school being coeducational as *very important* while 19.2% rated it as being *important* with no significant difference recorded between first percentile income and third percentile income groups.

Students valued the broad range of subject choices and subject levels in the case study school. The staff articulated that the school is an academic school supported by an extensive choice of subjects embedded in a broad curriculum where students are assessed at regular intervals with outcomes reported to parents. This is in line with NCCA recommendations and all underpinning education legislation. The school does stream one class of students in each year group and this is again somewhat at odds with the literature which recognises now that there has been a diversion from streaming. That said there is only one class in each year group streamed and the other classes are allocated as mixed ability which is similar to comprehensive school provision. The view expressed by a teacher that the curriculum suits boys was an unusual one and I have not found anything in the literature to support this assertion.

10.3.2 Minor themes (2)

(a) Homework/School work and parents advising children regarding education.
Homework and School work featured for each of the three research participant groups. Students complained about homework while 62.7% of parents agreed that they were satisfied with the amount of homework their children received. There was a lot of discussion by staff about the homework policy and how it is used and applied. The literature recognises homework as one of the settings in which the educational influence of the family on children's school achievement is most directly visible (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Burrow, 1995, Warton, 2001 in Dumont et al., 2012). The homework policy was drawn up to reference to NCCA guidelines and evidences recommendations for good practice. While the theme of homework is used here as a minor theme it is of course linked to curriculum provision, assessment for learning and assessment of learning. The literature has presented evidence (Ladson-Billings 2006; Nichols, Glass and Berliner 2005; Au 2008 in Smyth and Banks, 2012b) of how there is a relationship between high stakes testing and educational inequality. Smyth and Bank 2012 also refer to evidence from the literature that indicates how test score distributions consistently varying by dimensions of socio-economic status, including parental education and family income (Grodsky, Warren and Felts 2008 in (Smyth and Banks, 2012b).The introduction of Junior Cert reform has been discussed in the literature as have the proposed new short courses focusing on numeracy and literacy with new modes of assessment and accreditation (NCCA, 2016). Schools will be given more autonomy to design their own programmes to meet the assessed needs of their students. The use by the NCCA of the student voice consultative methodology (Flynn, 2015) may have enhanced the design of the new syllabus and may have made them more student friendly, departing from the traditional terminal summative assessment examination model. The students in the case study school were however very focused on terminal examinations and assessment as the school promoted itself as an academic school. There is evidence of a culture of encouraging students to take as many subjects at higher level as possible at Junior Cycle in the hope that as many students as possible will take higher level at leaving certificate.

(b) Student spaces (social spaces/habitus and facilities)

Findings from the student focus groups centred on the concepts of student-dedicated spaces and spaces that students had ownership of. Loxley et al (2011) refer to Bronfenbrenner's ecological and ecosystemic theories of child and adolescent development as being influential in representing space as a context in which social relationships are formed and impact on the developing self and how the internalised self relates to the larger environments surrounding them, they caution however that psychologists have also proceeded aspatially in the same manner as their sociological colleagues in the construction of sociological research and theorising. This is consistent with the viewpoints expressed by the students in relation to ownership of a space that they could "hang out" at lunchtimes and develop social networks and relationships. The students lamented that they were restricted in the spaces they were permitted to access and they longed to be able to access "other spaces".

10.3.3 Abstract themes

(a) The visual material and using visual methodologies as a reflective instrument: illuminated habitus.

I have described in the opening segments of this chapter how as a researcher I was challenged initially as to how best I could explore the concept of cultural capital and how I might describe what it "looked" like in the context of family-school relationships. Conscious of the Lamont and Lareau, Di Maggio and Coleman literature which cautioned against loosely labelling everything as cultural capital I was anxious to justify the concept in a concrete way and to give credibility to it in the research. While I struggled to reconcile some of Bourdieu's perspective with the Irish context I was confident of using visual methods as espoused by Bourdieu to explain what could not be easily explained through interviews or questionnaires or focus groups. The use of visual methods afforded me as a researcher an opportunity to reflect on the the internal and external narratives of the images (Sweetman, 2009) expose the cultural capital within the school itself. I opted to prioritise findings that are particularly significant in terms of the cultural capital of the school including objectified capital, economic capital, institutionalised capital and academic capital. The concept of habitus has also been used to inform my interpretation of the images. My own individual habitus which is laden with my professional capital and informed by the previous

phases of the research was useful in deciphering the properties and dimensions of the internal and external narratives of the images.

10.4 Summation

The research used a case study model to explore the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships and connections. The research focused on a number of complex concepts and attempted to explicate an understanding of cultural capital evidenced in various forms and framed by "habitus" in specific "fields". Cultural capital is manifest in a variety of forms in the day-to day of the school in the case study and is evidenced in an objectified, embodied and institutionalised ways. The disposition, orientation and way of thinking of the students, families and staff at the school is predicated on the individual cultural capital of all parties but it coexists within the mutual "field" of the school. Students and parents draw on their own cultural resources and merge them with the cultural resources of the school to amalgamate and accrue even greater cultural capital which is instrumental in achieving educational outcomes.

10.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a discussion on the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships and connections relative to the research questions of the case study. The chapter began by revisiting the research questions in order to refresh the linkage between the research questions and the findings. I also wanted to re-evaluate the suitability of the research questions to investigate the role of cultural capital in family school relationships and connections. The chapter has presented the discussion with reference to the literature previously reviewed and presented in chapters two, three and four. The final chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations from the research.

Chapter Eleven

Looking forward- conclusions and recommendations from the research

11.1 Context

The literature presents a body of evidence (Bourdieu and Nice, 2008; Byrne and Smyth., 2010; Lareau and Shumar, 1996; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; McCoy et al., 2014a; Meighan, 1986; O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh, 2005) that reports that social origin impacts on students' educational outcomes. The literature also focuses on the creation and reproduction of educational patterns and paradigms through educational processes mediated through formal curriculum and assessment, the hidden curriculum, the social organisation of the classroom and the authority relationships between students and teachers (Lareau, 1987). The engagement of parents in their children's education has generally focused on family structure, socio-economic status, barriers and opportunities for engagement and parental perceptions and experiences. Historically, literature from an Irish perspective evidences a deficit approach model that focuses on educational failure perpetuated by educational disadvantage and disaffection, while more contemporary considerations in the Irish context reveal a breadth of studies that concentrate on coeducation, gender, subject choice, post-school transition, family-school connections and higher education. Central to all of the above literature is the concept of capital. While Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam are all linked to the concept of capital, Bourdieu has been foremost in theorising and expounding the concept. The concept of cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu has been central to the construction of this thesis. Bourdieu maintained that cultural experiences in the home facilitates children's adjustment to the school environment, transforming cultural resources into cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1988). Cultural resources can be defined as familiarity with the conceptual codes that underlie a specific culture (De Graaf et al., 2000). Lamont and Lareau (1988) claim that cultural capital can be institutionalised and consist of high-status cultural signals that are used for social and cultural exclusion (Lamont and Lareau, 1988). Cultural capital therefore usually refers to the importance of socialisation using cultural resources (social capital) of children into a particular way of thinking and being and children

who are unfamiliar with this type of socialisation lack the skills, habits and styles that are rewarded at higher educational levels (De Graaf et al., 2000). Inherent in Bourdieu's explication of cultural capital is "habitus" which refers to our overall thinking, orientation or way of being in the world (Sweetman, 2009).

This thesis has addressed the role of cultural capital in the relationships and connections between the family and the school.

11.2 Resumé- The professional perspective

Professionally, undertaking this doctoral level research has been revealing and informative for my own praxis. Although I am currently in a different professional role than the role I originally started in, the questions underlining the enquiry from when I started as a teacher were and are as relevant for me as a teacher educator as when I first started in the classroom, although I hold different views on them at this point. My epistemological viewpoint and my positionality has developed and changed over time and my understanding of my own praxis has been enhanced through the development of new skills which have accentuated my professional position as a reflective practitioner. The pursuit of this research has enabled me professionally and empowered me as a researcher to take a broader and deeper look at the educational vista of post-primary education in Ireland. My understanding and interpretation of the sociological constructs and prioritised concepts from the research has been enlightened and has forced me to consider the research focus as a totality of fused and interconnected concepts mediated through the duality of the family and the school.

11.2.1 Accessing the Participants

One of the greatest challenges for me as a researcher at the outset of this piece of work was to gain access to a setting where I could conduct the research. That challenge endured over a period of time before I was granted permission to carry out the research in the school. In terms of the replicability of such a study the challenge of gaining access to conduct the research or any school-based research should not be underestimated. I was extremely fortunate that the case study school not only gave me access but also facilitated me in every way possible, allowing me

to optimise my time at the school for the purpose of data generation. Operationally schools are busy places and are driven by multiple demands and requirements as is well documented in the literature (The *Education* (1998) Act. It is understandable that it may not suit a school to invite a researcher into conduct research in a school and it is ultimately the school's prerogative as to who they permit to access their schools and the school community. Undertaking this research as a doctoral level researcher was both daunting and difficult despite my professional background which afforded me a familiarity with much of the content. The logistics of the fieldwork associated with research were more challenging than other aspects but the learning from the process was very worthwhile. From a researcher perspective the greatest learning for me was in how to actively manage the participants and how to be productive in approach. Without the participants there would not be any data and managing the data collection was critical to the outcome of the research.

The reliability of the responses from the various participants is also worth mentioning. In interpreting and analysing the findings and constructing a discussion I was conscious that the case study was a methodological artefact (Yin, 2014) and the outcomes and findings were generated by those who agreed to participate in the research and do not represent the views of all the parent, students or teachers in the school. Instead the findings are a snapshot as articulated by those who actively selected to be part of the research. The research dilemma is as always to access those who do not wish to participate in the research to try and understand the full picture as opposed to a select part of it. Future work is needed to enhance access to those who were not part of this piece of research as their viewpoints and contributions to the debate are equally valuable and merit inclusion in the overall analysis.

11.2.2 The students

The participants of most interest to me as a researcher were the students. The findings from the parent questionnaires, teacher questionnaires and the teacher interviews served to consolidate the data from the student focus groups and visual diaries. The contributions of all the participants were illuminating and when taken together offered enlightening perspectives on the role of cultural capital in family-school relationships. The visual cultural inventory of the school that I

generated was useful and instrumental in explaining aspects that the other tools could not explicate.

The concept of student voice is becoming even more foregrounded in educational research. Student voice is about giving students democratic and meaningful input into matters that concern them directly in the day to day running of schools. While my role with the students was that of a researcher rather than a policy maker I was conscious during the design and the facilitation of the focus groups of the underlying principles espoused in the student voice literature (Taylor and Robinson, 2009). I utilised these principles in my focus group design and also in planning the pilot and main phases of the visual diaries phase and the focus group sessions. In terms of the productivity and the success of the researcher instruments the focus groups were successful and generated a mass of findings, more than I could possibly include in a single thesis. The visual diary phase could possibly have been more successful and from a research perspective it is worth noting that it requires considerable pre-thought and clarification for the participants in order to succeed. I must acknowledge however that the findings from the diaries and the views expressed by the students in the focus group were very useful specifically when investigating the concept of cultural capital. I am drawn back to Kingston's contention (2001) that where too many conceptually distinct variables are labelled as cultural capital that it distorts what exactly cultural capital actually is and what it might "look like". The student participants' contributions in the focus groups and using the cameras assisted in addressing the research questions and exploring the role of cultural capital in the family-school relationship.

11.2.3 The teachers and school management

The teacher participants also evidenced a form of cultural capital specific to teachers that was of interest to me as a teacher educator and as a researcher. Their views, beliefs and dispositions identified a habitus that was congruent with the values and beliefs of the school and of the post-primary education system in general. The evidence in the findings is of a group of teachers who cared about their students, who had expectations that the students would progress after school and who were professionally aware of their obligations and duties as teachers. This was evidenced through the interviews I conducted with them. I only interacted with those who self-selected to complete the questionnaires and to participate in the interviews and I can only report

on and discuss the habitus I witnessed. That is not to say that there are other teachers at the case study school who have different dispositions and values that may be incongruent with those evidenced in the findings.

11.2.4 The parents

While my contact with the parents was mainly through the questionnaires I did have contact with the parents of the students participating in the focus groups. The evidence generated in the questionnaires assisted me as a researcher to establish a baseline to address the research questions from by locating and identifying the cultural capital of the parents and to interpret how that cultural capital mediated the relationship between the families and the school.

11.3 Conclusions

The research study identified four research questions from the outset;

1. What does familial cultural capital "look like" in an Irish context?
2. How does familial cultural capital influence the educational outcomes of post-primary students in the Irish education system?
3. What influences children from families experiencing similar social and economic circumstances to aspire to and attain different educational outcomes?
4. How do the connections and relationships between families and schools contribute to the development of educational patterns and paradigms in Irish education?

The findings have addressed the research questions in a number of ways, from which the following conclusions have emerged;

- Familial cultural capital manifests in many forms in the Irish context, most of which mirror familial cultural capital in an international context, which is underpinned by similar principles. Indicators including family structure, socio-economic status, time

availability of parents, levels of parental education, maternal input, parents' employment and parents' values epitomise the cultural capital resources that Irish families draw on to socialise their children in the education system and to access educational routes that eventually accrue into educational advantage. The levels and forms of capital that are distributed within the family are interchangeable and utilised as required in the education context.

- Socio-economic status including family income and parental levels of education influence parental engagement in their children's education while family structure (two-person biological or two-person cohabiting) is a determinant of parental engagement and leads to positive educational outcomes for their children.

- Parents' participation in school related activities including attendance at parent-teacher meetings, membership of parents' council or the board of management and involvement as meaningful partners (stakeholders) in decision making matters empowers parents and affords them access to the cultural capital of the school through school organised activities. It is important to note however that the research is inconclusive as to the level of representation of the whole parent body in terms of dispositions, attitudes or beliefs .

- The provision of solid and robust pastoral care and mentoring supports for students through the hidden curriculum and the provision of organised guidance sessions through a whole-school approach is both beneficial and constructive in the formation of aspirations, dispositions and expectations of progression to further or higher education post-school choices. This institutionalised "habitus" attracts "buy-in" from parents, students and staff which enables a unified approach to "getting ahead" rather than "getting by". The school takes extensive responsibility in structuring curricular provision, extra-curricular provision, timetabling and organisation of school structures at junior and senior cycle to maximise and optimise the educational experiences of a diverse student population.

- The promotion by the school of a broad based coeducational curriculum that facilitates all students is commendable and inclusive. The findings are at odds with the literature in terms of the impact of coeducational settings on educational outcomes of boys and girls, although it is acknowledge that my research did not include a narrow focus on

examination results or scores and considered educational outcomes in the broader sense and in terms of cultural capital.

- The ubiquitous concept of homework featured prominently in the findings but from differing perspectives. Students' views at junior level especially considered homework a chore and excessive but teachers and parents valued homework and viewed it as beneficial in preparation for assessment and examination. The literature reveals that homework is one of the main the settings in which the educational influence of the family on children's school achievement is most directly visible.

- Student-dedicated spaces are critical to students' development and socialisation. The use of visual methods to explore spaces illuminates and explains aspects that are otherwise difficult to articulate.

- The evidence from the findings at the case study school is aligned for the most part to findings from the literature both nationally and internationally. Educational patterns and paradigms in Irish education are contingent on the interchange of familial cultural capital and school cultural capital and where parents and students "buy-into" the institutionalised habitus of the school the findings suggest that they stand to benefit and accrue educational advantage and progression. This was the case for the majority of families in the case study school. There was very minimal evidence of situations where families (of similar socio-economic status), did not "buy-into" the disposition or thinking of the school or aspire to proceeding to further or higher education.

- Cultural capital as a concept although complex and laden with diverse connotations and denotations is a useful concept through which to theorise the connection created at the nexus of the family and the school.

11.4 Recommendations

- Further study is required to investigate the concepts prioritised in this study. It would be interesting to work with those who did not participate in the study as they may have different views or standpoints relative to the research questions of this study. The views

expressed in the study are a snapshot of the views of those who self-selected to participate.

- The continuum of teacher education (Teaching Council 2016) provides a framework within which the enhancement of practitioner awareness of the criticality of cultural capital in schooling can be promoted. Punctuated along the many stages of the continuum from initial teacher education to induction and probation to continuous professional development student teachers and practising teachers can be enabled and encouraged to reflect on their own habitus and disposition within the school setting. The "invisibility" of cultural capital is challenging for every teacher as they struggle to identify tangible and concrete examples of cultural capital evidenced in the habitus of the students or in the institutionalised habitus of the school. At a professional level it is imperative that awareness is embraced through the provision of meaningful professional development dissemination for practitioners. It is recommended that forms of CPD be made available to practising teachers that explore the issues uncovered in this research not limited to the sociological frameworks alone but should also include the introduction of practical measures, frameworks and models which facilitate the development or not of home-school links

- Furthermore there is anecdotal evidence that student teachers enrolling on the PME programme are predominantly from a middle-class background with middle-class values and aspirations. The extension of the PME to a two-year programme has had extensive financial implications for the student cohorts. Students who are of limited means with limited access to capital either fail to register on programmes of teacher education or register and fail to complete because of financial hardship brought about by the organisation of the programme over a longer timeframe and with additional and extended school placement requirements. The "habitus" of a middle-class teaching workforce is very different to the "habitus" of a working class teaching workforce. In terms of role models the teaching workforce requires representatives of all classifications to facilitate a diverse student population.

- The use of visual methods in the assessment of latent and invisible sociological and educational concepts is to be recommended. The images constructed in the case study

research revealed not only the immediate content of the images (objectified capital) (denotation) but the external narratives (connotation) revealed other forms of capital (economic and social capital) that could never have been articulated in text or verbally. Solid and thorough protocols for the generation of images to be analysed is required however to protect and indemnify researchers utilising visual method.

- Further study is required to promote awareness of sociological concepts in education. Studies should depart from deficit model promotion to the investigation and exploration of non-deficit models which result in positive educational outcomes.

- It is recommended that national policy should revisit the criteria of eligibility for the appointment of home-school liaison teachers. It is desirable that there be an extension of home-school liaison across all schools in particular developing connections with those families who are "more difficult to reach" families.

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Appendix One

Letter from Thesis Supervisor regarding Research

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN   *TRINITY COLLEGE*

03/12/09
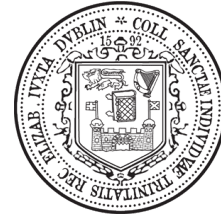
To Whom it May it Concern,

I am writing in my capacity as both Director of the Doctorate in Education programme here in the School of Education, TCD and Ms Melanie Ní Dhuinn's thesis supervisor. In support of Melanie's request, we have spent some time discussing both the ethical and practical aspects of her proposed work and more specially what she intends to do in your school. I have complete confidence in Melanie as both a researcher and educator that if invited into your school she will conduct this part of her work with both discretion and respect for your staff, students and parents. When completed it should prove to be an interesting and enlightening piece of research which will add to our understanding of schooling in Ireland.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information.

Dr Andrew Loxley,
Director D. Ed Programme,
Director of Research,
School of Education,
TCD.

loxleya@tcd.ie

Appendix Two

Letter to Board of Management of Research School seeking permission to carry out the research.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN   *TRINITY COLLEGE*

Chairperson's name,
Board of Management,
X School,
Co. X.

Dear Chairperson,

I am a doctoral student of the School of Education in Trinity College, Dublin. As part of my Doctorate degree I must carry out an original piece of research in the field of education. As part of this research I would like to request permission to carry out a study in your School. In this study, I intend to investigate the relationship between families and schools. My research methods will include questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, visual ethnography and focus group interviews with students.

I would like to respectfully ask for your permission to invite parents /guardians and students and a small sample of teaching staff and management in your school to participate in the study. I am expecting this part of the study to last no longer than three months and will involve visiting the school 2/3 days a week.

In relation to ethics, I will be bound by the School of Education's ethical guidelines (I can provide a copy for your information), which means I have to obtain informed consent from anyone I approach to participate in the study, ensure that all data that is gathered will be securely held and kept in the strictest confidence. In line with this, the school name and any individuals who participate in the study will not be identified in the research document. I will be pleased to furnish you with a copy of the research.

More specifically for my research in the school I plan to:

➢ Distribute and administer a questionnaire to all families in the school.

➢ Distribute and administer a questionnaire to teaching staff and management in the school.

➢ Select a random selection of families and staff who volunteer via the questionnaire to take part in the semi-structured interviews.

➢ Carry out focus groups interviews with students.

➢ Record some visual images of locations within the school. Students will not form part of these images. Ask students to record visual images of study spaces in their homes.

➢ I wish to stress that the study will be carried out in an unobtrusive manner and in keeping with the norms and established timetables of the school. Interviews with staff and management will be at times convenient to individual participants.

I would gratefully appreciate if you could consider my request and inform me of your decision at your earliest convenience. Should you require any further information with regard to this study please feel free to contact me and I will be happy to discuss the study with you and the Board of Management.

Yours sincerely,

Melanie Ní Dhuinn
Phone number

Appendix Three

Letter to Principal of Research School seeking permission to carry out the research.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN   *TRINITY COLLEGE*
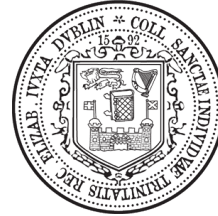
Principal's Name,
Principal,
X School,
Co. X.

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student of the School of Education in Trinity College, Dublin. As part of my Doctorate degree I must carry out an original piece of research in the field of education. As part of this research I would like to request permission to carry out a study in your School. In this study, I intend to investigate the relationship between families and schools. My research methods will include questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, visual ethnography and focus group interviews with students.

I would like to respectfully ask for your permission to invite parents /guardians and students and a small sample of teaching staff and management in your school to participate in the study. I am expecting this part of the study to last no longer than three months and will involve visiting the school 2/3 days a week.

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More specifically for my research in the school I plan to:

➢ Distribute and administer a questionnaire to all families in the school.
➢ Distribute and administer a questionnaire to teaching staff and management in the school.
➢ Select a random selection of families and staff who volunteer via the questionnaire to take part in the semi-structured interviews.
➢ Carry out focus groups interviews with students.
➢ Record some visual images of locations within the school. Students will not form part of these images. Ask students to record visual images of study spaces in their homes.

➢ I wish to stress that the study will be carried out in an unobtrusive manner and in keeping with the norms and established timetables of the school. Interviews with staff and management will be at times convenient to individual participants.

I would gratefully appreciate if you could consider my request and inform me of your decision at your earliest convenience. Should you require any further information with regard to this study please feel free to contact me and I will be happy to discuss the study with you.

Yours sincerely,

Melanie Ní Dhuinn

Phone number

Appendix Four

Letter to Parents in Research School asking parents to complete the Parents' questionnaire.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN   *TRINITY COLLEGE*
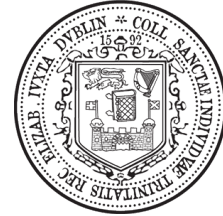
Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am a doctoral student of the School of Education in Trinity College, Dublin. As part of my degree I wish to investigate the relationship between families and schools. After speaking to the principal and Board of Management, they have granted me permission to carry out this study in your child's school.

As part of this research I would like to respectfully ask you to complete the enclosed questionnaire, so that your experience as a parent/guardian will be included in the study findings. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

I would also like to carry out face-to-face interviews with a small randomly selected group of parents and focus group interviews with students. If you wish to participate further in the study in the individual interviews, please indicate this in the section at the end of the questionnaire. I am bound by the School of Education's ethical guidelines (I can provide a copy for your information), which means I have to, ensure that all data that is gathered, will be securely held and kept in the strictest confidence. In line with this, the school name and any individuals who participate in the study will not be identified in any research document produced at the end of the study.

I would appreciate if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire by the ***30th April 2010***. Please place it in the enclosed envelope and return it to the school.
If you require any further information regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will be happy to discuss it with you.
Yours sincerely,

Melanie Ní Dhuinn
Phone Number

Appendix Five

Questionnaire for Parents**.**

Thank You for completing this questionnaire. Your views are an important part of this piece of research. All replies will be held in the strictest confidence. Individual views will not be identified in the research document.
If you wish to discuss the questionnaire with me, I may be contacted at:

Phone Number
Melanie Ní Dhuinn

Question 1 to 11 concern you and your family

1. **Your gender**   Male ☐   Female ☐

2. **Your age**   _____ years

3. **Are you:**

   A one parent family ☐   A two parent family ☐   Other ☐

4. **Residence**

   Are you: An Irish citizen☐   EU citizen but not Irish☐   Non-EU citizen☐

   Is your spouse/partner: An Irish citizen   ☐   EU citizen but not Irish   ☐
   Non-EU citizen☐

   What is your place of birth? (Name of *county* or name of *country* if outside Ireland)

   _____

   What is your spouse/partner's place of birth? (Name of *county* or name of *country* if outside Ireland)

   _____

5. **Your *approximate* annual family (self & spouse/partner) gross income (thousand Euro)**

   0-10 ☐   11-20☐   21-30☐   31-40☐   41-50☐   51-60☐ 61-70☐   71-80☐
   81-90☐   91-100☐   101-110 ☐   111- 120☐   121+☐

6. Your level of highest educational study (Full time or part time) completed to date: Please tick *one* box

Lower post-primary ☐ Upper post-primary ☐ Technical/Vocational qualification ☐
(Junior/Inter /Group Cert) (Leaving Cert) (Apprenticeship)

Further Ed Course ☐ Non degree course ☐ Bachelors degree☐
(PLC) (Nat Cert/ Nat diploma) (Primary degree)

Postgraduate diploma☐ Professional qualification ☐

Postgraduate degree (i) Masters' degree ☐ (ii) Doctorate degree ☐

7. Details of 3rd level education:

Where did you attend third level college (please name institution, eg UCD, WIT, UL TCD?)

What year did you graduate from third level education?

Did you attend third level education as a full-time or part-time student?

Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐

Do you hold any THIRD level qualification(s) which you attained after completing *two or more years* of study?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If "Yes" what subjects did you study for your primary degree (eg. French, Economics, Engineering, Mathematics, Politics)?

Please name your primary degree (eg BSc, BA, BEd, BTech)

Were you the first person in your family (your generation) to attend third level education?
Yes☐ No☐

Did your siblings attend third level education?

Yes☐ No☐

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Where did your spouse/partner attend third level college (please name institution, eg UCD, WIT, UL TCD,?)

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What year did your spouse/partner graduate from third level education?

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Did your spouse/partner attend third level education as a full-time or part-time student?

Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐

Does your spouse/partner hold any THIRD level qualification(s) which he/she attained after completing *two or more years* of study?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If "Yes" what subjects did your spouse/partner study for his/her primary degree (eg. French, Economics, Engineering, Mathematics, Politics)?

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Please name your spouse/partner's primary degree (eg BSc, BA, BEd, BTech)

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Was your spouse/partner the first person in his/her family (his/her generation) to attend third level education?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Did your spouse/partner's siblings attend third level education?

Yes ☐ No ☐

8. Occupation

What is your current occupation?

Answer:

Please be precise in your answer. Eg. primary teacher, secondary teacher *not* teacher, retail store manager *not* manager, electrical engineer *not* engineer, registered general nurse *not* nurse

How many years have you worked in your current occupation?

Answer:

Have you ever changed occupation?

Yes ☐   No ☐

What was your previous occupation?

Answer:
(Please be precise in your answer, eg Primary teacher, secondary teacher *not* teacher, retail store manager *not* manager, electrical engineer *not* engineer, registered general nurse *not* nurse)

What is *your* spouse/partner's current occupation?

Answer:
(Please be precise in your answer, eg Primary teacher, secondary teacher *not* teacher, retail store manager *not* manager, electrical engineer *not* engineer, registered general nurse *not* nurse)

How many years has your spouse/partner worked in his/her current occupation?

Answer:

Has your spouse/partner ever changed occupation?

Yes ☐ No ☐

What was your spouse/partner's previous occupation?

Answer: (Please be precise in your answer, eg Primary teacher, secondary teacher *not* teacher, retail store manager *not* manager, electrical engineer *not* engineer, registered general nurse *not* nurse)

9. Your Views on your own Education

(i)   Please answer the following questions by ticking *one* of the boxes.

How would you rate your own experience of primary education?
Very positive ☐ Positive ☐ Neither positive or negative ☐ Negative ☐ Very Negative☐
How would you rate your own experience of post-primary education?
Very positive ☐ Positive ☐ Neither positive or negative ☐Negative ☐Very Negative ☐
If you attended 3rd level how would you rate your own experience of third level education?
Very positive ☐ Positive ☐ Neither positive or negative ☐ Negative ☐ Very Negative ☐

Were you encouraged by your parents to remain in school to Leaving Cert/ end of post-primary school?

Yes ☐ No

(iii)   (Please circle a number that best represents you: 0= *never* to 5=*always*)

Did your parents usually attend parent-teacher meetings in school?

Never   **Always**

  0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Did your parents usually read communication (eg school reports, newsletters) from school?

Never   **Always**

  0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Did your parents usually assist you in completion of homework/project work?

Never   **Always**

  0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

The next two sections focus on your reasons/motivation for completing or not completing Leaving Cert/Post-Primary education.

Below are a list of motivating factors which could be associated with your motivation *to complete* Leaving Cert/Post –primary education. Please rank in order of importance on a scale of 1-5 (eg. 1 = most important, 2 = next most important and so on to 5 which is the least important) which of the following reasons motivated you to complete Leaving Cert/Post-Primary school.

Reason	Rank
Saw it as a step towards 3rd level/further education.	
Saw it as contributing to a good quality of life.	
Saw it as helping secure well paid employment.	
Wanted to experience success of completion.	
Saw it as the next step in my education.	

Below are a list of factors which could be associated with your reason for *not completing* Leaving Cert/Post–primary education. Please rank in order of importance on a scale of 1-6 (eg. 1 = most important, 2 = next most important and so on to 6 which is the least important) which of the following reasons you did not complete Leaving Cert/Post-Primary school.

Reason	**Rank**
Friends were not staying on in school.	
Wanted to get a job and earn money.	
Curriculum didn't suit me.	
Had behavioural difficulties.	
Family circumstances.	
Never experienced success in school.	

10. Your Children's Education

Please complete the following table in relation to your children and schooling:

School Type	Pre-school (3-5yrs)	Primary School (5-12/13 yrs) (Please name school)	Post-Primary school (Please name school)	Further Ed Institute	3rd Level Institute	Other
No. of children						
Boys (age in years)						
Girls (age in years)						

What year groups are your post-primary children currently in? Please complete the following table:

Year	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year
No. of children						

What subject levels does your child(ren) currently study:

Please indicate what cycle (Junior Cert/Leaving Cert) your child(ren) is undertaking and the *number* of subjects studied at each level listed.

	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4
Foundation Level JC/LC				
Ordinary Level JC/LC				
Higher Level JC/LC				
Common Level (eg CSPE, SPHE, LCVP)				

Is English the spoken language in your home?

              Yes ☐   No ☐

If English is *not* the spoken language in your home do you think that this is a barrier to your child's school performance?

              Yes ☐   No ☐

Questions 11- 14 concern your *participation* as a *parent* in your child's education

11. Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:

I am a member of the Parents' Council in this school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I was a member of the Parents' Council in this school

Yes ☐ No ☐

I have never been a member of the Parents' Council in this school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am a member of the Board of Management in this school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I was a member of the Board of Management in this school .

Yes ☐ No ☐

I have never been a member of the Board of Management in this school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am a member of the Parents' Council in my child(ren)'s *primary* school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I was a member of the Parents' Council in my child(ren)'s *primary* school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I was never been a member of the Parents' Council in my child(ren)'s *primary* school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am a member of the Board of Management in my child(ren)'s *primary* school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I was a member of the Board of Management in my child(ren)'s primary school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I have never been a member of the Board of Management in my child(ren)'s primary school.

Yes ☐ No ☐

12. Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:

I have met the school principal at organised school events

Yes ☐ No ☐

I have met my child's current form teacher (2009/2010)

Yes ☐ No ☐

13. Which of the following applies to you:

(Please circle a number that best represents you: 0= *never* to 5=*always)*

I usually attend school events (musicals, plays, sports events, concerts etc).

Never   **Always**

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

I talk about school to other parents.

Never   **Always**

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

I am aware of my child's attendance record in school.

Never   **Always**

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

I attend talks and classes organised for parents by the school.

Never   **Always**

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

I attend parent-teacher and other school meetings.

Never   **Always**

0	1	2	3	4	5

I attend events (AGM etc) organised by the Parents' Council.

Never   **Always**

0	1	2	3	4	5

14. How often do you usually?

(Please tick *one* box in each question)

Help your child(ren) with homework?

every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

Check your child(ren)'s homework diary?

every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

Read correspondence sent home from school?

every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

Look at your child(ren)'s copies and other written work?
every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

Talk to your child(ren) about how they are getting on in general in school?

every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

Talk to your child(ren) about their ambitions and wishes for their future?

every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

Guide your child(ren) about school related decisions (eg subject choices, subject level choices, CAO choices, career choices)

every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

Talk to your child(ren) about extra-curricular activities in school?

every day ☐ every week ☐ every month ☐ once a year ☐ never ☐

15. Have you ever sought advice on educating your child?

Yes   □   No   □

Whose advice on educating your child would you value?
Below are a list of people from whom you might seek advice on educating your child(ren).
Please rank in order of importance on a scale of 1-8 (eg. 1 = most important, 2 = next most important and so on to 8 which is the least important) whose advice you would value.

Spouse/ Partner	Own Family	Friends	Neighbours	Child's teachers	Parenting Courses	Own Parents	Media

16. Please rate the following statements in relation to what you as a parent feel is *important* about *choosing* a post-primary school.

(Place circle around a number that best represents your view: 0 = *of no importance* to 5 = *very important*)

The school is co-educational.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school has a uniform.	0	1	2	3	4	5
Parents & guardians are welcome in the school.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school is successful in 'sending' students to third level institutions.	0	1	2	3	4	5
There is a well-devised code of discipline in the school.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school offers a good range of academic subjects	0	1	2	3	4	5

The school offers a good range of practical subjects	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school caters for pupils of all abilities.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school has well defined educational goals.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school has a religious ethos.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school's facilities (eg classrooms, toilets etc) are well maintained.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The range and scope of IT resources is good.	0	1	2	3	4	5
There are clearly established home-school links	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school is visually welcoming.	0	1	2	3	4	5
The school has open days for prospective parents and children.	0	1	2	3	4	5

17. Please rate the following statements in relation to what you feel is important to you as a parent that a school *should* provide or be like for your child(ren). Please note that later questions will ask you about your *actual* experience as a parent of the school. (Place circle around a number that best represents your view: 0 = *of no importance* to 5 = *very important*)

The teaching staff work in an open and collaborative way with each other.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Students are well supported by teachers in their academic work.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school has a distinctive, recognisable philosophy, which informs teaching and learning.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Parents and carers are actively welcome in the school.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The pupils know what is expected of them in relation to their behaviour.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school explains its approaches to teaching and learning so parents are informed about what pupils experience.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school listens to parents' and guardians' concerns.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school has a positive attitude towards staff development.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school deals with incidences of bullying in an appropriate manner.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

The teaching staff are experienced and well qualified.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school operates a clear and consistent policy on assessment of pupils' work.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school operates a consistent homework policy.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The school appears to be a happy environment.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The teachers exhibit a positive and supportive relationship with pupils.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
It is relatively easy to meet with teachers to discuss issues relating to my child.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The transition between primary and post-primary school is managed sensitively to ensure minimal disruption for pupils.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Pupils are encouraged to be responsible for aspects of their own learning.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The board of management is receptive to new and innovative ideas.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
There is an active parents' association in the school.	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

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18. The next set of statements will ask you about *your* **experience** of being involved in this School as a parent/guardian. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by ticking the appropriate box.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Nether Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
In general I/we are satisfied with the quality of education our child(ren) receive(s).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In general I/we are satisfied with the physical environment of the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The parents' association is an effective way to communicate and deal with issues between parents and the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The school makes too many demands on parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I/we are kept informed of curriculum developments in the College.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In general I/we are not satisfied with the quality of teaching in the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The school makes too many demands on parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I/we are satisifed with the amount of homework my child(ren) receive.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The school deals with incidences of bullying in an appropriate manner.

If asked, I would recommend the school to other parents.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The Year Head system functions well.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The school provides good support around career choices.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The pupils genereally treat each other with respect.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The school is effective in communicating to me any problems my child(ren) are having.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

My child is happy and content in this school.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The Parents' Association can provide an alternative perspective on school related issues.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I/we generally find the teaching staff approachable when needing to discuss the academic progress of my/our child(ren).
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

There is evidence of good leadership in the school.
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

19. The next set of questions asks about **Family Life and Education**. Please circle a number that best represents you: 0= *never* to 5=*always*

Do you consistently encourage the value of doing well in school within your family?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you emphasise the role of effort and hard work to your children?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you encourage your children to be curious and inquisitive about everyday matters (eg nature, cookery in the home, food hygiene, day to day routines, home projects etc) in your home?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you encourage " learning" (other than academic learning eg. Cookery, IT activity, jigsaws & puzzles, quiz games etc) in your home?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you observe your child(ren) "learning" in your home?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you encourage your children to socialise (eg. Develop friendships, develop peer relationships, meet friends regularly) outside of school?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you restrict the amount of time your children spend socialising (eg meeting friends, going to cinema, going to matches, going to nightclub etc)?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you restrict the amount of access your children have to internet related activities (Bebo, facebook, online activities)?

0   **1**   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

Do you encourage communication between siblings about education matters (eg. School, subject choices, careers, subject levels, extra-curricular school activities)?

0   1   2   3   4   5

Do you talk to other family members (your/partner's parents, your/partner's siblings) about your child(ren's) education?

0   1   2   3   4   5

Do family members (your/partner's parents, your/partner's siblings) talk to your children about education?

0   1   2   3   4   5

Have you ever become *over involved* in helping your children with school work?

0   1   2   3   4   5

What educational resources (eg, desk, computer, internet, books etc) are in your home? (Please list)

_____

Have you established a homework routine for your child(ren)?
                    Yes☐ No☐

Do you monitor the length of time your children spend at homework?
                    Yes☐ No☐
Are your child(ren) involved in extra-curricular activities?
                    Yes☐ No☐
Please complete the following table relating to your child(rens) extra-curricular activities?

	Name of activity-soccer, camogie, piano, drama etc	**Frequency per week-how many times per week does your child participate?**	**Hours per activity session (eg 1 hr, 1.5 hrs)**
Child 1			
Child 2			
Child 3			
Child 4			

What other activities (eg cinema, theatre, go out for dinner, go to football match) would you participate in as a family? Please list in the space provided.

MANY THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.
Please return it in the envelope provided to the school by **Friday 30 April 2010.**

If you wish to participate further in this piece of research, please complete the section below.
I would like to participate in a short interview☐
I consent to my son/daughter participating in a focus group☐

Signed_____

Name :
Address:

Telephone:
Email address:

Appendix Six

Letter to Parents in Research School regarding Parent Interviews.

Dear Parent,

Thank you for completing my questionnaire on the relationship between families and schools.. There was an excellent response to the questionnaire and a number of parents indicated in the questionnaire that they were willing to participate further in the research. A small selection of those who volunteered to participate further in the research has now been selected from the returned questionnaires. You have been included in this final selection.

As you indicated in the questionnaire that you would be willing to participate in a short interview I would like to invite you to participate in a short interview at a time and venue convenient to you. It is my intention to conduct the interviews as semi-structured interviews from the 31 January to the 14 February 2011 inclusive. It is possible for me to conduct the interviews in person at the school and it is also possible for me to conduct the interviews by telephone if that is more suitable. I expect the interviews to last approximately 35 minutes. I would like to record the interviews for research purpose. I assure you that all recordings will be stored securely in electronic format by me and will be password protected. All recordings will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be accessed by myself as the researcher. All recordings will be destroyed on completion of the research.

It is of course your prerogative as to whether or not you wish to participate at this stage in the research and there is no obligation on you to participate. Participation is entirely voluntary and at your convenience. If you choose to participate you may withdraw at any time.

I would be very grateful if you could consider your availability for interview and indicate a suitable time and place that I may be able to interview you at, within the timeframe of the week commencing 31 January to the week 14 February. I am available to conduct interviews in the evening time if that is more convenient for you. I have attached a Parent Participation/Consent return form for your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Melanie Ní Dhuinn
Phone Number

Appendix Seven

Parent Semi-Structured Interview Participation and Consent Form.

Parent Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Telephone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Please complete as appropriate:

I do not wish to participate in a semi-structured interview

I am available for interview on _____(date) at (approximate time)_____

I would like to participate in a semi-structured interview in school   OR at another venue
Please name the venue.

My son(s) /daughter(s) are currently attending X school and are in _____Year groups
(please name year groups).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information about this stage of the
research process.
email address

Phone Number

Melanie Ní Dhuinn

Appendix Eight

Letter to Teaching Staff in Research School asking staff to complete the questionnaire.

Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral student of the School of Education in Trinity College, Dublin. As part of my degree I wish to investigate the relationship between families and schools. After speaking to the principal and Board of Management, they have granted me permission to carry out this study in your school.

As part of this research I would like to respectfully ask you to complete the enclosed questionnaire, so that your experience as a teacher will be included in the study findings. The questionnaire should take approximately10 minutes to complete.

I would also like to carry out face-to-face interviews with a small randomly selected group of teachers. If you wish to participate further in the study in the individual interviews, please indicate this in the section at the end of the questionnaire.

I am bound by the School of Education's ethical guidelines (I can provide a copy for your information), which means I have to, ensure that all data that is gathered, will be securely held and kept in the strictest confidence. In line with this, the school name and any individuals who participate in the study will not be identified in any research document produced at the end of the study.

I would appreciate if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire by the *22 March 2010*. Please place it in the enclosed envelope, and return it to the staffroom where I will collect it.
If you require any further information regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will be happy to discuss it with you.
Yours sincerely,

Melanie Ní Dhuinn
Phone Number

Questionnaire for Teachers.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN   *TRINITY COLLEGE*

Questionnaire for Teachers.

Thank You for completing this questionnaire. Your views are an important part of this piece of research. All replies will be held in the strictest confidence. Individual views will not be identified in the research document.
If you wish to discuss the questionnaire with me, I may be contacted at

Phone Number

Melanie Ní Dhuinn

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE THIS SHEET

1. Your gender   Male ☐   Female☐

2. Your age   _____ Years

3. No. of years teaching experience (including current academic year) _____

4. Are you:

Part-time Teacher ☐ Temporary Wholetime Teacher ☐ Permanent Teacher☐

✓ Please tick

5. What are your degree subjects?

6. Where and when did you complete your Degree and/or Higher Diploma?

	Degree	**Higher Diploma in Ed.**
Name of University/ Teacher Training College		
Year of Graduation		

7. Have you undertaken postgraduate study, where, when and to what level?

	Postgrad Diploma	**Postgrad Degree (Masters/ Doctorate)**
Name of University/ 3rd Level Institution		
Years of study (eg. 2005-2007)		

8. Have you attended Professional In service training as a practising teacher?
               Yes☐ No☐
9. Do you agree that Professional In-service training is important for practising teachers?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Nether Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. Please identify the subjects and subject levels you teach in the table below

J. Cert/ L. Cert	Subject	Level	No. of class Periods each week

11. How many hours per week do you teach?

---------------------------------------hours

12. Do you currently hold a Post of Responsibility?

Yes ☐ No ☐

13. If Yes, please indicate if it is:
   ➢ Special Duties Post   ☐
   ➢ Assistant Principal Post ☐

14. Please identify the duties of your Post of Responsibility in the box below

15. Do you teach as part of a subject team/subject department in your school?

Yes☐ No☐

16. How often do you meet your subject colleagues for subject related meetings?

Once Weekly	Once Fortnightly	Once Monthly	Once Every term	Once every academic year
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. How do you rate the status of *your* subject(s) in your school?
    (Please use a separate line for each subject you teach)

    Subject 1

No importance				Very Important
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
No importance				Very Important
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
No importance				Very Important
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

18. How do parents rate the status of your subject(s) in your school?

No importance				Very Important
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
No importance				Very Important
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
No importance				Very Important
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

19. Below are a list of characteristics which could be associated with your school. Please rank in order of importance on a scale of 1-10 (eg. 1 = most important, 2 = next most important and so on) which of the following school characteristics you as a practising teacher value.

Characteristic	Rank
1. The school has high academic standards.	
2. There are clearly established home-school links.	
3. The school is a safe and well maintained environment for teachers and pupils to be in.	
4. The school has a reputation for looking after the pupils' social and emotional development.	
5. Teachers offer positive feedback about academic progress to parents and guardians on a regular basis.	
6. The school has a positive attitude towards staff development.	
7. The school operates a clear and consistent policy on homework and assessment of pupils' work.	
8. The school explains its approaches to teaching and learning so parents are informed about what pupils experience.	

9. School management provides clear leadership.	
10. There are clear, recognisable policies and procedures which are implemented in a positive and consistent manner.	

20. How would you as a teacher best describe the purpose or function of your school in serving attending pupils?

MANY THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. Please return it in the envelope provided to the staffroom by morning break on Monday 22 March 2010.

If you wish to participate further in this piece of research, please complete the section below
I would like to participate in a short interview ☐
If you are agreeable to be contacted by text message or email to arrange an interview, please provide details below. (Please do not write your name on the questionnaire)

Mobile Telephone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Appendix Ten

Teacher Semi-structured Interview Participation and Consent Form.

Teacher Name:
_____

Telephone Number:
_____
Email address:
_____

Please complete as appropriate:

I do not wish to participate in a semi-structured interview

I am available for interview on _____(date) at (approximate time)_____

I would like to participate in a semi-structured interview in school   OR at another venue
Please name the venue.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information about this stage of the research process.
email address

Phone Number

Melanie Ní Dhuinn

Appendix Eleven

Semi-structured teacher Interview Schedule/Questions.

Date of interview:

Interviewee Name/No:

Venue:

M/F:

Time of interview:

Interviewee Permission granted: Y N (Circle)

Teaching Subjects and teaching experience

1. What subjects do you teach?
2. How many years teaching experience do you have?
3. Are you a permanent teacher/part-time teacher?
4. How would you define your role within this school?
5. How do you think your subject is perceived by students (importance, participation, attitude etc)?
6. How do you think your subject is perceived by parents (importance, participation, attitude etc)?
7. How do you think your subject is perceived by other staff members in the school (importance, participation, attitudes etc)?
8. Do you teach as part of a subject team?
9. How often does the team meet?
10. What do you discuss at team meetings?
11. Is there ever discussion around student's subject performance/ progression?
12. What else would be discussed?

School systems and hierarchies within the school and links to families

1. Is there a care team in the school?
2. Who are the members of the care team?
3. What is your understanding of the role of the care team?
4. Is there a Home School Liaison Teacher in the school? Y N
5. Is there a clear, identified home school link between staff and families in this school? Can you describe this link?
6. How is information about students and families provided to staff in general? Please describe the mechanisms.
7. Are staff made aware of family backgrounds of all students or a selection of students?
8. If staff are made aware of only a selection of students how are those students selected?

9. How do teaching staff in this school communicate with parents/families? (PTM/diary notes)
10. What other teams/hierarchies are there in this school? (form tutors/ year heads)?
11. What links would these teams have to parents/families?
12. Does the school explain its approaches to learning and teaching to parents/families? How does it explain these approaches? When does it explain these approaches?
13. Does the school have a clear and consistent policy on homework and assessment of pupils work? How does it communicate this policy to parents? Is it implemented consistently?
14. Why might a student not have homework completed?
15. Is there any leniency towards students who may not have homework completed?

Parents/Families Participation in this school

1. How do parents/families participate in this school community? (extra curricular activities, PTM, Parent's Council, fundraising, other…)
2. Have you met the parents/guardians of students you teach?
3. Approximately what percentage of parents/guardians have you actually met in person?
4. How did you meet them? (PTM, informally, school show, sports events, exhibitions, award presentation)
5. What is your school's policy on Parent Teacher Meetings?
6. What is your agenda for PTM?
7. How do prepare for Parent-Teacher meetings?
8. What information do you give parents/guardians at these meetings (academic, social/personal progress/other info?)
9. Do parents get an opportunity to ask questions at PTM?
10. What questions do they ask?
11. Do parents share information with you about their children? What kind of information? How does this information impact on your work in your subject area with that student?
12. Would you be aware of parent's attitudes to their children's education?
13. How would parents have articulated their attitudes to you? (What do they describe, what are their hopes, aspirations, concerns?)
14. If you became aware of a particular attitude that a parent might have in relation to how their child was progressing or not progressing in your subject area how would your new awareness impact on your modus operandi with that student in that subject area?
15. Have you ever had a conflict situation with a parent? What happened? How did it affect you as a teacher?
16. If a parent has two or more children whom you teach have you ever noticed a different response or different approach from a parent to different children from within their family? Can you describe their response/approach?
17. Why do you think parents might take a different approach to different children within their family?
18. Do you think that family values influence student's levels of participation in school? How do these values influence levels of participation?

19. How would you describe the relationship of families and this school? (Productive, good communication lines, clear understanding, poor understanding, ambivalent, suspicious, respectful)
20. Are there noticeable differences in the way that different families in this school engage with the school and the education process? What are the differences? Can you describe these differences?

Appendix Twelve

Student Focus Group Invitation and Information letters to students' Parents.

Dear Parent,

Thank you for completing my questionnaire on the relationship between families and schools. There was an excellent response to the questionnaire and a number of parents indicated in the questionnaire that they consented to their son/daughter participating further in the research. A small selection from those who consented to their son/daughter participating further in the research has now been selected from the returned questionnaires. Your son/daughter have been included in this final selection.

As you indicated in the questionnaire that you consented to your son/daughter participating in a focus group interview I would like to invite your son/daughter to participate in a short focus group interview in school in the week beginning the 7 February 2011. Focus group interviews will involve 6-7 students participating in a supervised thematic discussion about school, their memories of school, their expectations, their goals, the school community, their hopes and concerns and school life in general. The focus group will last for approximately 45 minutes and each focus group interview will be recorded electronically. Students will be asked to commit to a confidentiality contract within the group and to respect the opinions and views of everyone while not breaching the group rules by disclosing information about the content of the focus group outside of the focus group.

Exam students (3rd and 6th Year students) will NOT be participating in the focus groups.

 I assure you that all recordings will be stored securely in electronic format by me and will be password protected. All recordings will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be accessed by myself as the researcher. All recordings will be destroyed on completion of the research.

It is my intention to ask the students participating in the focus groups if they wish to volunteer following the focus groups to take up to 10 still photographs of spaces in their family home that represent a **connecting space between family life and school life** as a visual diary using an SD card inserted into a Digital camera provided by me as the researcher. Students will be asked to return the cameras and SD cards to me through the school.

It is of course yours and your son/daughter's prerogative as to whether or not they wish to participate at this stage in the research in the focus group interviews or to participate in the visual diary aspect and there is no obligation on them to participate. Participation is entirely voluntary. If your son/daughter choose to participate they may withdraw at any time if they wish to do so.

I would be very grateful if your son/daughter could consider their availability for the Student focus group interview and if you could indicate their availability by email using the attached Student Focus Group Interview Participation/Consent form.

Each student will participate in ONE focus group.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information about the student focus groups.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Melanie Ní Dhuinn
Phone Number

Appendix Thirteen

Student Focus Group Informed Consent Form for Students and Parents.

Students' Focus Group Participation and Consent Form.

Student Name:
_____

Year Group:
_____

Class Group:
_____

Parent Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):
_____

I consent to my son/daughter _____ (student's name) participating in a focus group interview to be held at their school for the purpose of Melanie Ní Dhuinn's research on the Influence of Families on Education and Schooling in Ireland.
I understand that my son/daughter may choose to withdraw from the focus groups at any stage if they wish to.

Parent Signature:
_____

Contact details: (telephone number)
_____

Student signature:
_____

Please feel free to contact me at any stage about this stage of the research process.

email address

Phone Number

Melanie Ní Dhuinn

Appendix Fourteen

Student Focus Group Schedule/Questions.

Student Focus Group Schedule

Duration: 45 minutes

1. Introduction to Researcher.
2. Introduction to Research:
   - Aim of the research- to research and evaluate/ consider/assess the influence/effect of families on schooling and education in Ireland with particular emphasis on how students influence schooling and education.
   - This school has been chosen to participate in the research as it is a mixed school, offering a wide subject choice and offering a wide range of extra-curricular activities, relatively big school servicing a wide catchment area and geographically located on the border of three counties, history of involvement in a wide range of activities and programmes both curricular and extra-curricular.
   - Research involves a lot of different people both inside and outside the school, parents, teachers, students, School Management, Board of Management.
   - Questionnaires were circulated to parents and to staff last year and were completed and returned. A selection of parents and staff indicated an interest in further participation in the research.
   - From the returned questionnaires random groups of parents, students and staff have been selected to participate in either semi-structured or focus groups interviews.
   - Students will participate in informed consent focus group interviews- explanation of focus groups- 4 focus groups in the school.
   - Consent: Students attend the focus groups in a voluntary capacity having signed a consent form. Students may leave the focus group at any point. Parental consent has also been given for students to participate in the focus groups.
   - Any student who wishes to leave the focus group may do so now before the focus group starts or at any point during the focus group by indicating to the researcher that they wish to leave.
3. **Confidentiality:** everything discussed in the focus group should remain within the focus group and should not be discussed outside of the focus group. Please do not discuss individual comments outside of the focus group as you don't have individual permission to do so. The focus group will be electronically recorded for research purposes and all recordings will be stored securely and protected by a password. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Any disclosures by students during the Focus Group interview that may be considered as Child protection concerns may have to be reported to the relevant authority.
4. **Practicalities:**
   - ONE class period
   - ONE voice at all times during the focus group, students must have the "mic" in their hand to speak

- Respect other opinions
- The researcher will let you know when there are 10 minutes to go
- The researcher will interrupt to move the discussion on
- The researcher will introduce questions and prompts
- Everyone will be given an opportunity and encouraged to speak
- Students don't have to agree or disagree with each other
- Students don't have to convince each other.

5. **Focus Group format**

Time	Task	Instruction/Prompt	Actor
5 minutes	Introductions: Researcher	As above	Researcher
2 minutes	Student introduction; first names and gesture/action by each student	Introduce yourself and identify yourself by first name with a small quick gesture	Researcher & students
5 minutes	Researcher gives out sticky notes and pens. Students to stick sticky notes to flipchart board when complete.	Ask student to identify 3 things they like about this school and 3 things that they dislike.	Researcher & students
3 minutes	Quick discussion on material from sticky notes	What do you like? What do you dislike?	Researcher & students
7 minutes	New discussion on memories, thoughts, expectations of school	What is your first memory of your first few days here at this school? Why did you come to this school? Who made the choice for you to attend this school? How did you feel when you started school here? Has that changed now? What were your expectations when you started school?	Researcher & students

3 minutes	New discussion on how the school community engages each other	How do students engage with students in this school? How do students engage with teachers in this school? How do teachers engage with students in this school?	Researcher & students
2 minutes	New discussion on what changes students might make to school	If you were in charge in this school, what changes would you make?	Researcher & students
7 minutes	New discussion on student goals	What do you want to do when you finish school? What are your current goals in school? What are your future goals for the remainder of yourt time in this school? How does your school support you in achieving these goals?	Researcher & students
6 minutes	New discussion on school "in class" and "out of class"	Can you describe the types of things you do in class? How do you feel about the things you do in class? (like/dislike etc) What other things can you do in school but out of class, extra-curricular activities etc? Where in school do you go to do these activities? Where do you go to hang out at break time	

		Is there a lunch area in the school? Are there enough student spaces in the school?	
3 minutes	New discussion on future things to look forward to for students and concerns for students	What do you look forward to in school? What concerns do you have/what do you worry about?	Researcher & students
2 minutes	Conclusion	Thank you for participating Question to students about taking still photos of spaces in their homes that represent a connection for them with school.	Researcher & students

Appendix Fifteen

List of Researcher Generated Visual Images of Research School (Images available on an accompanying USB as per permission granted by the research school)

1. School lobby	2. Student Deposit Box	3. Payment Deposit Box
4. Religious artefact	5. Corridor Photo Display A	6. Corridor Photo Display B
7. Recycling Bin	8. Trophy cabinet A	9. Trophy cabinet B
10. Gymnasium A	11. Gymnasium B	12.Gymnasium C
13.Gymnasium D	14. School corridor achievement photos	15.School corridor Security camera
16.School corridor storage cupboards	17. School Corridor A	18. School Corridor B
19. School Social Area A	20. Religious Artefact B	21.School Social Area B
22. School Social Area C	23. Signage at Staffroom	24. Location of Staffroom
25. School lockers	26. School lobby B	27. Roof of School Lobby B
28. School Tuck shop (closed)	29. Side Door to Tuck shop	30. Internal Office
31. School Signage	32. Cleaning Cupboard	33. Coat pegs A
34.Coat pegs B	35. Inside classroom	36.Overhead projector A

37. Overhead Projector B	38. Overhead Projector C	39. Overhead Projector controls A
40.Overhead Projector controls B	41. Signage on door	42. Outdoor area A
43. Outdoor area B	44. Outdoor area C	45. Outdoor light
46. Outdoor boiler	47.Chained gate A	48. Drinking fountain
49. Hockey pitch A	50 Outdoor signage	51 Hockey pitch B
52. Hockey pitch	53. Outdoor area E	54. Garden area A
55. Garden Area B	56. Radiator cabinet	57 Boys' toilets.
58. Girls' toilets	59. Roll call sheets storage	60. Window protected.
61. School Signage	62. Outdoor bin	63. Outdoor downpipe protected
64. Chained gate B	65. Outdoor area	66. Outdoor signage
67. School Car park for staff	68. Staff Car park signage	69. Gate security
70. No parking bollards on road outside school A	71. NO parking bollards on road outside school B	72. Padlocked gate A
73. Padlocked gate B	74. External of building	75. Locked store room
76. Door signage	77. School signage indoor A	78. School signage indoor B
79. Entrance to Principal's office	80. School Staff car park	81. Student cars parked on road
82. School interior	84. School signage indoor C	

Appendix Sixteen

Participant (Student) Generated Visual Diary Student Consent

Student Name:
_____

Year Group:
_____

Class Group:
_____

Parent Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):
_____

I consent to my son/daughter _____ (student's name) **taking photographs of educational spaces at home** for the purpose of Melanie Ní Dhuinn's research. I understand that these photographs may be included in the research document and will not be identifiable to my son/daughter.
I understand that my son/daughter may choose to withdraw from the research at any stage if they wish to.

Students are asked to take up to 10 still photographs of spaces in their family home that represent a **connecting space between family life and school life** using an SD card inserted into a Digital camera provided by the researcher. Students are asked to return the cameras and SD cards to Melanie Ní Dhuinn.

Parent Signature:
_____

Contact details: (telephone number)
_____

Student signature:
_____

Please feel free to contact me at any stage about this stage of the research process.

email address

Phone Number

Melanie Ní Dhuinn

Appendix Seventeen

Student Visual Diaries Focus group discussion framework

- What is this space in your photograph? Can you describe the space?
- What is in the photograph? Can you describe the objects in the photograph?
- Why did you take this photograph of this space?
- How does this space represent a connection between family life and school life for you?
- Do you like/dislike this space in your home?
- Why do you like/dislike the space

Appendix Eighteen

Researcher Philosophical Position in this Research

Ontological	The nature of reality in my research is multi-layered and multi-faceted involving many different realities of the participants.	Reality is subjective and multiple as seen by the participants in the study.	I use a thematic discourse analysis to report and explicate various themes from the multi-vocality of participants' focus groups, interviews and questionnaires to provide evidence of different perspectives. I embrace the multiple realities by exploring and investigating multiple forms of evidence from different individuals' experiences and perspectives.
Epistemological	How do I know what I know? I am an educational practitioner working in the field. I am conducting a professional doctorate to inform my practice. I	I lessen the distance between myself and what is being discussed by personally conducting my research with various stakeholders in the field over a planned	I collaborate with students, parents, teaching staff and school management by spending time in field with participants, and became an insider.

	explicitly state my position and my proximity to the area of research.	period of time. As a researcher I try and get as close as possible to the participants being studied.	As a researcher I try and get as close as possible to the participants being studied.
Axiological	What is the role of values in research?	As a researcher I acknowledge that my research is value-laden (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and that my individual professional values and biases are present as well as the values gathered from the field.	I openly discuss the values that shape the narrative and include my own interpretation from a practitioner perspective in conjunction with the interpretations of participants. Ethics
Rhetorical	What is the language of my research?	I write in a literary, informal style using a personal voice and use qualitative terms and limited definitions. My "voice" as a researcher and a practitioner is evident throughout the inquiry.	I use an engaging style of narrative, I use first-person pronoun and employ the language of qualitative research throughout the inquiry. The language used by the research participants is of primary importance in my reporting.

Methodological	Identification and articulation of conceptual framework, research design & research questions, generation, gathering & analysis of data, discussion & articulation of explanatory framework	I use inductive logic, by researching and studying examples of successful and autonomous family-school connections and relationships in the post-primary context in Ireland.	I work with details generated by multiple data-gathering instruments before generalisations, describing in detail the context of the study while continually revising questions from the experiences in the field.