

**An evaluation of home-school partnership relations
developed in designated disadvantaged (DEIS) post-
primary schools to enhance students' literacy and
numeracy skills**

Doctorate in Education

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctorate of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

An evaluation of partnership relations, developed with parents of junior cycle students, to enhance student achievement in a sample of designated disadvantaged post-primary schools.

Using a case study research approach the aim of this study is to develop an understanding of how home-school partnership approaches contribute to advancing student learning and achievement. Efforts made by schools to involve parents in the development of their children's literacy and numeracy levels, which determine achievement, and access to the entire curriculum, are addressed throughout the study.

Contextually this study is conducted within the current emphasis being placed on quality assurance, school self-evaluation, school leadership and organisational effectiveness. Designated disadvantaged (DEIS) post-primary schools are in receipt of additional resources in order to alleviate educational disadvantage. Planning at individual school level requires annual action plans to address problems in relation to attendance and retention, attainment and progression, literacy and numeracy and partnership with parents and others. School planning is subject to external evaluation by the Department of Education and Skills.

Key research questions addressed in this study include evidence of leadership and planning which exists within DEIS post-primary schools to promote learning partnership relations with parents. Specific structures or arrangements in schools, to promote parental involvement in the development of their child's literacy and numeracy skills, are examined. The study investigates evidence of collaboration between school management, teaching staff, programme co-ordinators and parents. The perception of parents in relation to links between the school and home and their role in the development of literacy and numeracy is examined. The study aims to highlight models of home-school partnership relations which contribute most to positive student educational outcomes. Findings indicate that the emphasis is on parents being responsive to school requests for involvement in school-based activities. Appropriate structures and strategies to support parental involvement in learning in the home have not yet evolved in DEIS schools. Links between DEIS schools, parents, students and disadvantaged communities also need to be co-ordinated and developed.

From an ontological and epistemological point of view this study is conducted within the naturalistic paradigm using an evaluative case study research design. A conceptual framework of parental involvement designed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) concerned with the problem of difficult-to-reach families is used to scaffold the research. Data is collected using focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Ethical considerations are relevant at all stages of the research.

Acronyms

CBAL	Computer Based Assessment of Literacies
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DE	Department of Education (1921-1997)
DENI	Department of Education Northern Ireland
DES	Department of Education and Science (1997-2010)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (2010-present)
DfE	Department for Education
EDC	Educational Disadvantage Committee
EPISLL	Effective Partners in Secondary Literacy Learning
EPRA	Engaging Parents to Raise Achievement
ERC	Education Research Centre
ESCS	Economic, Social and Cultural Status
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
FG	Focus Group
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HSCL	Home School and Community Liaison
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
LAOS	Looking at Our School – An Aid to Self-Evaluation
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied Programme
L2LP	Level Two Learning Programme
NALA	National Adult Learning Agency
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NCSE	National Council for Special Education Needs

NCTE	National Council for Teachers of English
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PGDE	Post Graduate Diploma in Education
PI	Parental Involvement
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Assessment
PPEF	Post-Primary Education Forum
SCP	School Completion Programme
SSP	School Support Programme
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Chapter 1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the focus of my research, which is an evaluation of partnership relations developed with parents of junior cycle adolescent students in a sample of designated disadvantaged post-primary schools. These schools are in receipt of additional resources under a 2005 government funded *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) programme. Specifically, using a case study research approach, my aim is to develop an understanding of how home-school partnership approaches may contribute to advancing student learning and achievement. Efforts made by schools to involve parents in the development of their children's literacy and numeracy levels, which determine achievement and access to the entire curriculum, will be addressed throughout this study.

In Ireland, the period of compulsory schooling extends from six to sixteen or until students have completed three years of post-primary education. The Irish education system is made up of early childhood education, primary, post-primary, further education and training, and higher education. The post-primary sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Post-primary education consists of a three-year junior cycle, followed by a two or three year senior cycle, depending on whether the optional transition year is chosen. Students transfer from primary to post-primary education at the age of twelve. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years and the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme or Leaving Certificate Applied examinations are taken at the end of senior cycle and mark the end of post-primary education. While the Leaving Certificate Programme is entirely subject-based the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme includes three compulsory link modules on enterprise education, preparation for work and work experience. The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme aims to prepare students for adult and working life. Courses are offered in three main areas, vocational preparation, general education and vocational education. After post-primary schooling students transfer to further education and training or higher education. The National Framework of Qualifications

(NFQ) provides a structure to compare and contrast the level and standard of different qualifications. It is a system of ten levels based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence, and it incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, wherever it is gained. School qualifications awarded by the State Examination Commission, further education and higher education awards are included in the Framework. The Junior Certificate is a level three award.

The background to my research area and the overall context within which the study is conducted is outlined in this chapter. This context includes the current emphasis on accountability and quality assurance, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) planning, school self-evaluation (SSE), and school leadership and effectiveness. Launched in 2005 by the Department of Education and Science (DES, 1997-2010), DEIS is the most recent national programme aimed at alleviating educational disadvantage. The context within which the DEIS action plan was launched is further explored this chapter. The criteria under which schools were designated disadvantaged are detailed in chapter two. A significant element of DEIS is known as the School Support Programme (SSP) which is in place in about six hundred primary and two hundred post-primary schools with the highest level of disadvantage.

DEIS schools are in receipt of additional resources to address educational disadvantage. These include a more favourable pupil-teacher ratio, funding, and assistance with school planning. As part of the SSP interventions such as the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and the School Completion Programme (SCP), are available to each DEIS school. DEIS planning at individual school level requires three year action plans which include measures to be implemented to address problems in relation to attendance and retention, attainment and progression, literacy and numeracy, and partnership with parents and other agencies. In 2007/08 the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES) reviewed the impact of DEIS planning in eight primary schools, (DES, 2009). The report highlighted the need for a leadership style which emphasised collaborative decision making and strategic planning. Further evaluations of the DEIS planning process in

primary and post-primary schools were undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (2010-present) (DES, 2011) and the Education Research Centre (ERC, 2011). Evidence suggested that the DEIS programme is having a positive effect on addressing educational disadvantage as gains in literacy and numeracy levels were being achieved. The Inspectorate reported that post-primary schools were implementing interventions to improve partnership with parents and the community.

The development of literacy and numeracy, as core skills, also occupy a central place in the current reform, by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Department of Education and Skills, of the junior cycle educational process in Ireland's post-primary schools (NCCA, 2011a; NCCA 2011b; DES, 2012). New guidelines on school self-evaluation (DES, 2012) place the development of literacy and numeracy at the core of teaching and learning. School principals will be at the centre of planning for evidence-based improvement in their schools. Annual school self-evaluation reports must be made available to the whole school community and also must be available during a whole school inspection by the Department of Education and Skills.

A Programme for International Assessment (PISA), conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) every three years since 2000, to measure the knowledge and skills of fifteen year olds in reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy, reported that Ireland's rank in 2009 dropped from fifth to seventeenth among thirty-nine countries surveyed. To address this problem the Irish government launched a National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among children and young people (DES, 2011). The improvement of teachers' professional practice, effective school leadership, and the involvement of parents in supporting children's literacy and numeracy development, form an important part of this strategy.

A brief description of legislation and Department of Education and Skills policy, introduced since the mid-1960s, to ensure both the formal and informal engagement of parents in schools is outlined in this chapter. Interventions, including the Home School and Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme aimed at involving parents from socio-

economic disadvantaged areas in their children's education and also tackle inter-generational cycles of poverty, are further explored in chapter two.

This chapter provides a profile of the five case-study schools which have participated in this research. It includes details of participants, both from within and outside the schools. A conceptual framework for parental involvement in schools is outlined as is the general purpose of the research and key research questions. The structure and organisation of the thesis is explained. An interpretative approach to social research, the phenomenological perspective has been adopted. Eccles and Harold (1993) suggest that more research is needed to identify the characteristics of parents and schools associated with effective parent involvement in high-risk neighbourhoods, and especially for adolescent children. Using a case study research design, qualitative data collection and analysis, and with ethical considerations to the forefront, my aim is to contribute to the formulation of policy and practice in the complex issue of engaging parents, who are perceived as "hard to reach" (Feiler 2010, p.2) in post-primary schools located in disadvantaged urban areas.

1.2 Background to my research area

The combined effect of the introduction of free post-primary education in 1967, and the raising of the age of compulsory education to fifteen in 1972, was not only a dramatic increase in the number of students who transferred to post-primary school but also an increase in the number of students transferring with delayed literacy and numeracy levels. For the purpose of providing remedial education the report of a special education review committee published by the Department of Education (1921-1997) (DE, 1993, p.81) estimated that some twenty thousand one hundred junior cycle pupils (ten percent of total junior cycle enrolment) would meet the criteria of scoring at or below the tenth percentile on standardized tests in literacy or numeracy. Success in school was determined by the examination system with some students thriving on examinations, while others lost out and, in many cases, dropped out of the school system. Granville (1982, p.21) points out that with few exceptions, the young people who left school at or before the age of fifteen, without having received a Group or an Intermediate Certificate (pre-Junior Certificate examinations), could be said 'to have derived little or no benefit from their schooling'.

As part of my continuous professional development I undertook a Department of Education remedial education course in 1978. Subsequently my work with students at junior cycle level, in need of learning support, and as head of the Remedial Department, included teaching, diagnostic testing, liaising with parents, and the development of literacy and numeracy programmes aided by the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Psychological Service. When completing a Master of Science in Education Management in Dublin City University, between 1995-1998, my research entailed examining policies and practices in the provision of remedial education in a sample of forty post-primary schools. As a practitioner in the field I was interested in studying how schools managed the transition of students, in need of learning support, from primary schools, the organisation and administration of remedial education in junior cycle and the role played by the remedial teacher. Following data analysis of a survey and semi-structured interviews evidence (Murphy, 1998) emerged to suggest that insufficient time, involving school personnel and parents, was spent on profiling and assessing students with literacy and numeracy difficulties as they transfer from primary to post-primary school. Rather than being a smooth transition and a continuity of educational experience, transition to post-primary was an abrupt break at a crucial stage in a student's life. These findings, discussed later in this chapter, were subsequently substantiated in a report *Moving Up* (Smyth, McCoy and Darmody, 2004) by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). In the organisation and administration of remedial education a widespread uncertainty of aims, objectives and methods for dealing with remedial students was identified in schools (Murphy, 1998). Evidence also revealed that students who had not mastered basic literacy and numeracy continued to drop out of school during junior cycle. The remedial teacher still worked relatively isolated from other teaching staff, with lower streams or with students withdrawn from class. These findings contradicted Department of Education, *Guidelines on Remedial Education*, (DE, 1988, p.9), which stipulated that an effective remedial programme should be a team effort involving management, teachers, parents and other professionals working towards the agreement of specific aims, and that such co-operation 'must be deliberately and specifically planned and the responsibility of each involved be clearly delineated and agreed'.

One of the attempts to tackle the issue of students marginalised by the examination system was an Early School Leavers Project, initiated in 1979. This project evolved becoming known as the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) in 1998. The programme targets students of all abilities who are at risk of leaving school. Students participating in this programme are generally from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or may have special educational needs. Profiling students in relation to the achievement of learning targets in all subject areas is central to the programme. Elements of teamwork among teachers and cross curricular links are also emphasised. Students receive a certificate or profile containing details of statements of learning achieved, in both curricular and extra-curricular activities, prior to taking a state examination at the end of third year in junior cycle. Students who leave school before third year are also entitled to a similar certificate, or profile, as evidence of their achievements. An evaluation report published by the Department of Education and Skills in 2005 revealed that in the thirty schools where both qualitative and quantitative data was collected many local short term literacy and numeracy initiatives are undertaken which encourage the active participation of parents. One of the aims of the JCSP is to develop a positive dialogue between teachers, students and parents which will support parents in their role of helping their child to acquire a positive self-image and to achieve success in school. By working collaboratively, the JCSP co-ordinator, home school liaison teacher and school completion co-ordinator can ensure that parents are included actively in their child's education so that they will enjoy full equality of opportunity within the education system. The evaluation report (DES, 2005) revealed that one third of the schools referred to a high attendance of parents at JCSP events while other schools found the involvement of parents as problematic. Parents from very disadvantaged backgrounds were found more likely to attend celebration/award presentations rather than information meetings. Among suggestions made by HSCL co-ordinators to increase parental involvement was to involve parents in classroom activities and as assistants to teachers. Also suggested was the development of interesting statements of learning that parents and students could work on together.

By 2010 over two hundred post-primary schools in Ireland with DEIS status offered the JCSP programme. In 2001 the Minister for Education and Science announced the JCSP Library Demonstration Project to help improve literacy and numeracy standards in selected DEIS schools. By 2009 thirty designated disadvantaged schools, including the researcher's school, were successful in their application for a JCSP library staffed by a full-time librarian. A research report *Room for Reading* (JCSP Support Services, 2005) indicated that a number of Project libraries had introduced specific initiatives, such as paired reading and book clubs, aimed at involving parents in their children's reading. The HSCL scheme's 'Maths for Fun' programme involved partnerships between teachers, HSCL co-ordinators, librarians and parent volunteers. Findings of the evaluation demonstrate that well managed school libraries, through structured library programmes that are implemented, with even the most hesitant readers, can have significant positive impacts.

Following the introduction of the JCSP programme in the researcher's school in 1999, and my appointment as the programme's co-ordinator, opportunities arose, and funding became available, for the annual implementation of short-term literacy and numeracy initiatives, some of which involved parents both within the school and in the home. Due to a combination of literacy development within classrooms, and involvement in short term focused literacy initiatives, standardised testing revealed improvements in literacy levels with some students' reading levels rising by one to two years over the course of an academic year. Improvements in numeracy skills were also encouraging following initiatives that focused on particular mathematical areas such as measurement.

As assistant principal since 2000 my duties extended, following the 1998 Education Act, to becoming school development planning co-ordinator, and head of junior cycle with responsibility for academic, pastoral and disciplinary issues. Collaboration with parents increased as I sought their involvement more in student learning rather than merely attending parent teacher evenings and obligatory post-suspension meetings. Issues such as personal organisation and social skills, assistance with homework, home reading and involvement in paired reading and mathematics in the school, were promoted.

In 2009, in part fulfillment of the requirements of a doctorate programme being undertaken in Dublin City University, I completed a pilot study on the role of the JCSP co-ordinator. Using a case study approach and semi-structured interviews I was interested in studying the experiences of other JCSP co-ordinators in a selection of DEIS post-primary schools from various parts of Ireland. Data analysis and interpretation of findings revealed the difficulties JCSP co-ordinators experienced in relation to whole staff collaboration and co-operation. Where teachers incorporated the achievement of learning targets in their teaching methodology, and engaged in cross curricular links with other teachers, as well as becoming involved in literacy and numeracy initiatives, the benefits to students were reported as significant. Collaboration between the JCSP co-ordinator and other support structures such as the HSCL co-ordinator, SCP co-ordinator, resource teachers, care teams for at risk students, and parents, also varied. Paired reading programmes, involving parents, had been implemented successfully in two of the six case study post-primary schools. Parents were described as her 'best resource' by a co-ordinator in a school where the JCSP programme was confined to a class of special needs students. It was observed by one co-ordinator that parental involvement during times of economic growth lessened due to greater employment opportunities, particularly for mothers.

As deputy principal in a DEIS school since 2010 the continual development of all aspects of DEIS planning, including partnership with parents, is a priority. Stern, (2003) states that involving parents in the education of their children is not an option. It will happen anyway. The question is how can parents be involved most effectively?

1.3 Justification for the research

Educational disadvantage, which continues to be addressed by governments and researchers internationally (Machin, 2006; Archer and Sofroniou, 2008) is described in the Education Act (DES, 1998) as 'impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools'. Included in the strategies adopted by governments is the involvement of parents in their child's education. There is increasing evidence which

supports the beneficial effects of parental engagement in their child's education (Dornbusch and Ritter, 1992; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Desforges and Aboucher, 2003; Feiler, 2010). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1997) parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school, it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) also suggest that engaging parents from the most deprived localities in learning can positively affect educational achievement, and help to alleviate the problem of inter-generational poor educational outcomes and life chances.

1.3.1 ESRI research on junior cycle

The link between adequate literacy and numeracy standards, good attendance and progression within the educational system was highlighted in a series of studies conducted on behalf of the Irish government. A study, *Moving Up* (Smyth, McCoy and Darmody, 2004, p.3) carried out among nine hundred first year post-primary students on behalf of the NCCA by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), found that 'few post-primary schools receive information on all students moving up from primary school. Information that is received is more likely to be verbal than written and generally concerns students' academic performance, behaviour and special educational needs'. Parental involvement on transition is limited to details regarding uniforms, book rental schemes and codes of conduct. Post-primary transition test results in literacy and numeracy are not shared with parents and little if anything is done to equip parents with knowledge of intervention strategies they could use to support their child. An ESRI follow up study of students in second year, *Pathways through the Junior Cycle* (Smyth et al., 2006), found that students in lower academic levels, particularly students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, became disengaged from school in second year. In the third of a series of ESRI studies, *Gearing Up for the Exam* (Smyth et al., 2007) reported a continued decline in third year in positive attitudes towards school with twenty-five percent disengaged from school. One fifth received learning support, the majority of these having low initial reading and mathematics scores in first year.

The relationship between low literacy and numeracy levels, student behaviour and achievement endured throughout post-primary school up to leaving certificate level. Some school processes, according to Smyth et al. (2007) were producing positive results in closing the achievement gap but there were still serious gaps and challenges remaining. Findings from the research revealed that students with delayed levels of literacy and numeracy make little progress in first year in reading and mathematics. Disengagement, experienced mainly by students with inadequate levels of literacy and numeracy, continues in senior cycle and beyond schooling (Smyth et al. 2007). Many adults, some of whom are parents, who return to the educational system to complete their leaving certificate examination, or a post leaving certificate further education course, struggle as they lack confidence due to inadequate levels of literacy and numeracy. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA, 2009) called for a refreshed adult literacy and numeracy strategy following the publication of a National Economic and Social Forum Report (NESF, 2009) which revealed that there was little change in levels of child literacy in disadvantaged areas in the previous twenty-five years, despite increased funding.

1.3.2 Whole school evaluation in DEIS schools

Ten years before the National Adult Literacy Agency's policy briefing *Seeking a refreshed Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (NALA, 2009) the Education Act (DES, 1998) gave statutory recognition to the National Parents Council, parent representation on school boards of management and parent associations. In the context of school development planning the principal and teachers, in collaboration with parents, are obliged to create a school environment which prevents or limits obstacles to learning which students may experience. Themes for self-evaluation, to promote quality assurance, in the Department of Education and Science's *Looking at Our Schools* (DES, 2003) relate to the provision and quality of the support for parents of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in the operation of the school, and the extent to which the school collaborates and coordinates with other community providers in planning provision and delivering educational services for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The expectation exists, from the point of view of whole school evaluation, that DEIS schools, in particular, who benefit from additional staff and other resources,

are pro-active in addressing these issues. The Department of Education and Science's evaluation model *Whole School Evaluation, Management Leadership and Learning* (DES, 2011) aims to facilitate quality assurance in schools through the collection of objective, dependable, high quality data. Questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and formal meetings are conducted during the evaluation period, with students and their parents in order to get their views on the operation of the school. A DES inspection of a DEIS school will, in addition, examine action plans developed to enhance attendance and retention, attainment and progression, literacy and numeracy, and partnership with parents and others. A strong emphasis is placed on parental involvement in learning through the HSCL scheme and also the JCSP programme. The engagement of parents with learning, through the HSCL scheme, is encouraged through home visitation, courses for parents and advice and support in relation to supporting their children's learning in the home. Parents are also involved in programmes and initiatives in the school such as 'Maths for Fun', shared reading or 'Science for Fun'.

1.3.3 Programme for International Student Assessment results

Following analysis of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Perkins et al. (2010) reported that Ireland's rank dropped from fifth to seventeenth among the thirty-nine countries that have data available for both 2000 and 2009. Just over seventeen percent of students in Ireland are low-achieving in reading with a reading proficiency level at or below Level 1a, considered to be below the basic level needed to participate effectively in society and future learning. In relation to mathematics performance Ireland achieved a mean score of 487.1 on the combined mathematics scale, which was significantly below the OECD average of 495.7. Approximately twenty percent of students in PISA 2009 did not have sufficient mathematical skills to cope with everyday life. In PISA 2009 the index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) is composed of six inter-related measures of different aspects of student socioeconomic background: occupational status of parents, educational level of parents, number of books in the home, family wealth, home educational resources, and cultural possessions in the home. Perkins et al. (2010) report that students whose parents have a lower level of education have a significantly lower mean reading score than students whose parents

have a higher level of education. The mean reading score of students who have a low number of books in the home (428.0) is significantly lower than the mean score of students who have a large number of books (543.4). Perkins et al. (2010), also report that on average 23.7 percent of students in schools participating in the School Support Programme (SSP) under DEIS were at a significant disadvantage of almost 70 score-points on the PISA reading scale, compared with students in schools not participating in the SSP programme. Successive governments have tried to boost literacy levels. Despite much investment over three decades the reading outcomes, particularly for a cohort of disadvantaged students, had deteriorated in PISA 2009.

In 2011 Ireland participated in two international comparative studies, involving fourth class students in primary schools, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), organised under the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) based in the International Study Centre in Boston College. In their report *PIRLS and TIMSS 2011* Eivers and Clerkin (ERC, 2012) note that in reading Ireland's ranking is tenth of forty-five states, with only five countries performing significantly better. In mathematics Irish pupils came seventeenth of fifty countries. The ranking of Ireland's primary school students who participated in the 2011 PIRLS and TIMSS study demonstrate some improvement in standards of reading and mathematics among students whose average age is approximately ten years.

PISA 2012 is the fifth cycle of the PISA study and has been carried out in sixty-seven countries, including Ireland. Mathematics is the major focus of PISA 2012 and in addition some information about student performance in reading and science will be provided when the PISA report is published in December 2013. A new element of the study is the Computer Based Assessment of Literacies (CBAL) which assesses reading, mathematics and problem solving.

1.3.4 A National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy in schools, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) sets out targets and a range of measures to improve literacy and numeracy in early childhood education and in primary and post-primary schools, particularly in junior cycle when students encounter texts in new subjects for the first time. The national strategy aims to select challenging targets, set standards, to streamline assessment and reporting to parents, boards of management and the department of education, promote school self-evaluation and target resources to disadvantaged communities. There is agreement in the strategy (DES, 2011, p.9) that ‘children from disadvantaged communities are more likely to experience difficulties in literacy and numeracy for reasons associated with poverty, poorer health, and a wide range of other factors not found in the education system and may not be amenable to school-based solutions’. The Strategy acknowledges that as schools alone cannot improve literacy and numeracy standards parents and communities must play a key role in supporting and encouraging children and young people’s literacy and numeracy development. Engagement with parents is proposed to be a core part of literacy and numeracy school plans, and the national strategy also proposes meaningful provision for the involvement of parents in the classroom, and beyond, in activities that support the development of better literacy and numeracy. It is recommended that schools create opportunities for parents to develop self-confidence in their own capacity to help literacy and numeracy by encouraging parents, through the HSCL scheme, to avail of family literacy programmes. Schools must also continue to engage with students’ parents in order to encourage and enable parents support their children’s learning. Measures are to be implemented to ensure that the message about the importance of parental involvement gets through to parents and the wider community by using the media, well known people and websites. The strategy also aims to ensure that parental engagement in children’s learning is integrated into each school’s School Development Plan, that schools are proactive in supporting parental involvement and heightening parental expectations in standards. Building on existing DEIS provision, the national literacy and numeracy strategy aims to foster the continued development of effective engagement between the home and school.

The National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading involving standardised testing in primary schools is to be extended to assess the performance of students at the end of second year in post-primary education by 2014. Primary schools must provide assessment information when students transfer to post-primary schools to ensure continuity and progression of learning for students. The aim of the strategy is to half the percentage of fifteen-year olds performing at or below Level 1, the lowest level in PISA reading literacy and numeracy tests, by 2020. Building the capacity of school leadership is seen as critically important. School principals and deputy principals must monitor improvements in literacy and numeracy and recognize how assessment can be used to plan and engage in evidence based school self-evaluation to promote student achievement and school improvement.

1.3.5 Reform of the junior cycle

A consultative process, conducted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2011a), for reform of junior cycle education and certificate examination, has been ongoing in recent years in order to address curriculum overcrowding and to allow time for deepened understanding, active learning, the development of literacy and numeracy and other key skills. The Junior Certificate examination, introduced in 1989 to replace the Group Certificate and Intermediate Certificate examinations, aimed to provide a curriculum to achieve breadth and balance. The objective was that by the end of junior cycle, all students, according to their ability, would achieve competence in literacy, numeracy, computer literacy and spoken language skills, and appreciate the value of thinking and learning. Instead junior cycle has become a preparation for the leaving certificate examination, with the emphasis on separate subjects assessed by means of a national centralised examination (Smyth et al, 2007). The JCSP programme is also currently under review by the NCCA as part of its review of junior cycle education. In *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle* (NCCA, 2011b) literacy and numeracy development in junior cycle continues to be prioritised and student academic activity is focused around twenty-four statements of learning.

During the consultative process one of the over-arching concerns raised by the Vocational Education Committee Chief Executive and Education Officers' Association (NCCA, 2011a) was the need to ensure that junior cycle reform will lead to greater equity and inclusion, and the need to ensure that change will not contribute to highly differentiated experiences leading to a further stratified system and even greater educational disadvantage. In *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle* (NCCA, 2011b) proposals emphasise students being responsible for their own learning while generating, gathering and presenting evidence of their learning in portfolios of work for examination. A level three qualification will replace the Junior Certificate examination and a level two learning programme (L2LP) and qualification will be designed for students with particular special educational needs. It is imperative that students with delayed literacy and numeracy levels in DEIS post-primary schools continue to be supported both within school, and in the home, to ensure that they gain a level three qualification. Engagement and dialogue with parents on subjects chosen, student progress, key skills and greater learner responsibility is key to ensuring that the cycle of poverty and educational disadvantage, that persists from generation to generation, continues to be strenuously addressed.

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2012) sets out a rationale for changing the junior cycle curriculum. The key tenets to improve literacy and numeracy standards, set out in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) are integrated within and complement the new junior cycle curriculum. Current assessment at the end of junior cycle based on external examinations is to be replaced with a school-based approach to assessment which will 'emphasise both the process and the product of learning in school the combination of the students' work and final assessment (DES, 2012). Junior cycle reform (DES, 2012), the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES, 2011) and School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012) are to be implemented as parallel and complementary policies. According to O'Callaghan (2012) a crucial pillar of support for the new Junior Cycle will be parents as learning continues beyond the classroom. With the focus on an awareness of *how* students learn as well as *what* they learn the emphasis will be on learning to learn. Parents will not be able to support learning if schools do not engage with them.

1.4 Legislative background to parental involvement in schools in Ireland

Ireland's 1937 Constitution (Article 42.1) acknowledged that it is the inalienable right and duty of parents to 'provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children'. Parental rights and their role in the child's development were recognised but, according to Coolahan (1981) neither the church nor state in the 1940s or 1950s made systematic efforts to involve parents in their children's education. During the 1960s public and media interest in education increased, a decade which Coolahan, (1981, p.132) says witnessed more scope for the individual opinion of teachers, parents and students and the breakdown of the 'old paternalist ethos which tended to confine educational policy to the authority figures, church and state'. Parental influence in school policy and involvement in student learning and outcomes emerged gradually during the 1980s and 1990s. At post-primary level the concept of the community school fostering a reciprocal relationship between the school and local community, allowed two parent representatives on the school management committees. By 1982 parents had gained twenty-five percent representation on primary school management boards and a Council for Parents' Elected Representatives had formed at national level. In 1985 parent associations were encouraged in primary schools (DES, Circular Letter 7/85). Recognition grew by 1991, in primary schools (DES, Circular Letter 24/91) that school family relations were particularly important, that school was an extension of the home, and that parental interest and attitudes to school, books and to education were the single most important influence on a child's learning. A similar emphasis on school family relations was not recognised in post-primary schools but parent associations were encouraged.

A Home School Liaison Scheme (HSCL) to tackle educational disadvantage, a mainstream preventative strategy targeted at pupils at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system, was established in 1990, extended in 1991 and in 2005 under the DEIS scheme. The overall objective (Ryan, 1994) was to alleviate the effects of disadvantage through facilitating the full participation of parents in the education of their children at first and second-level. A Green Paper in Education, (DES, 1992, p.46), recognised the need to 'promote active co-operation between the home, school and

community agencies to encourage parents to support and enhance their children's education and to assist them in developing the relevant skills for this purpose'. A subsequent White Paper in Education (DES, 1995) *Charting Our Education Future*, pointed out that parents bring to a child's education unique expertise derived from intimate knowledge of the child's development, and that parents have the responsibility of nurturing a learning environment by co-operating and supporting the school and other educational partners. Parents were seen as partners in the education of their children supporting the school irrespective of socio-economic background. The White Paper (DES, 1995) advocated a national policy in order to foster active parental partnership in schools with parents involved in direct instruction such as reading and homework. The White Paper proposed the provision of information and training in relevant instructional skills, and the provision of formal educational and training programmes for parents, and recognised that the leadership roles of principals in schools was paramount in helping to achieve this.

1.5 Contribution of adults to addressing inter-generational deprivation and social exclusion

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) "*Sharing in Progress*" (1997) which each European Union state was required to produce was guided by the principles of equality, partnership, empowerment, and investment towards those most at risk. It aimed not only to address material deprivation but also the broader context of the ability to participate in society. Priority recommendations included the removal of barriers which impeded second chance education for adults and the development of basic education skills including literacy, numeracy, communications and technology skills. A Green Paper *Adult Learning in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (1998) outlined the contribution of adult education in addressing inter-generational poverty and disadvantage. The need for investment in adult literacy was seen as a priority as high levels of the population continued to score at the bottom literacy level. In a foreword to *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education Ireland* (2000) Willie O'Dea, Minister of State stated that 'increasing children's participation and benefit from education is heavily dependent on also enabling parents to support their children's learning'. The Education Disadvantage

Committee set up under the Education Act (1998) identified priority areas for action in adult and community education in a submission to the Minister for Education and Science (EDC, 2004). Recognising the role that adults can play in helping to break the cycle of educational disadvantage the Education Disadvantage Committee recommended the establishment of a National Adult Learning Council, intensive basic education, a national numeracy strategy, lifelong learning, family literacy, back to education initiatives, child care, flexible funding and adult education guidance. Both the Green and White Papers on adult education aimed to provide inclusive opportunities for learning at all stages of the life cycle, from birth onwards.

1.6 Parental involvement and legislation 1998- 2005

Publication of the White Paper in Education (DES, 1995) formed the basis for the Education Act (DES, 1998) and a series of other education acts such as the Education Welfare Act (2000) and Equal Status Act (2000); Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) and Disability Act (2005) to provide the legislative framework for a reformed structure. The Education Act (DES, 1998) aimed to deal comprehensively with the rights, roles and responsibilities of all the partners in education at school level. Statutory recognition was given to the National Parents Council, parent representation on school boards of management and parent associations. Schools were obliged to engage in school planning and to adopt open inclusive admission policies. Provision was made for the establishment of an educational disadvantage committee (DES, 1998, Section 32 (1) to advise on policies and strategies to correct ‘impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools’. An inspectorate would evaluate the quality and effectiveness of education in the state and in collaboration with parents, the principal and teachers would assist in the creation of a school environment which aimed to prevent or limit obstacles to learning which students may experience. School planning, including the involvement of parents in the achievement of the objectives of the school, was further reiterated in an Education Welfare Act (2000). Poor attendance and early school leaving, which led to unemployment and anti-social behaviour, had been highlighted as major concerns in the Green Paper (DES, 1992). The Education Welfare

Act (2000), which replaced the School Attendance Act (1926) introduced a statutory obligation (Bleach, 2008) on parents to ensure their children attended school until the age of sixteen and the act also led to the establishment of a National Education Welfare Board to achieve this aim. Schools were to adopt strategies aimed at preventing non-attendance and fostering an appreciation of learning among at risk students. The act stipulated closer contact between schools and families, second-chance education and adult literacy programmes, and the promotion of parental involvement in schools. The Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (2004) emphasised the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream education. Parents were to be consulted in the preparation of Individual Education Plans designed to address specific learning difficulties and the enhancement of literacy and numeracy. The National Council for Special Education Needs (NCSE) in its *Guidelines on the Individual Plan Process* (NCSE, 2006) encouraged the practical involvement of parents in activities such as listening to their child read every evening.

1.7 National Anti-Poverty Strategy

One of the objectives set at the Lisbon European Council (2000) was to make significant inroads into eradicating poverty and social exclusion by 2010. In the context of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy and efforts by the Irish government to bring about social cohesion and economic progress *Sustaining Progress*, (Department of the Taoiseach, 2003-2005, p. 30) included one initiative *Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Literacy and Numeracy and Early School Leavers* in which the government pledged to pay critical attention to literacy and numeracy skills both in schools and for adults of all ages as these basic skills were regarded as a pre-requisite for learning and for social and economic participation. The aim was to halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006, reduce the proportion of adults aged 16-64 with restricted literacy levels to ten to twenty percent by 2007 and to increase retention rates to completion of upper secondary school to ninety percent by 2006. Adult learning opportunities were also to be targeted at those in disadvantaged communities. While recognising that schools alone could not achieve educational equality it was accepted that schools must form partnerships with parents and other agencies in the wider community and society.

Achieving educational equality must be part of a bigger social and economic change agenda if social inclusion was to be achieved. The Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005, p.22) argued that ‘for a child to engage meaningfully in the educational process, parents and families must be supported in being strongly involved in their child’s education, both by the school and the community. A holistic approach, whereby every family member is engaged, should be the ultimate goal’.

1.8 Delivering Equality of Opportunity (DEIS)

The Lisbon European Council (2000) and its aim of eradicating poverty and social exclusion by 2010 led the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, to launch an action plan *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (2005). This plan focused on the educational needs of children and young people up to eighteen years, from disadvantaged communities. Despite reforms to address educational inclusion since the 1980s rates of educational attainment, retention and progression continued to remain low for students from disadvantaged communities. The 2005 action plan was introduced into six hundred primary (total approximately 3000) and one hundred and fifty post-primary schools (total approximately 730) on a phased basis over five years. A standardized system for identifying and reviewing levels of disadvantage was introduced and a new *School Support Programme* (SSP) incorporated other schemes such as the JCSP Programme, the JCSP Library Demonstration Project, Home School Liaison Scheme and School Completion Programme. Targeted measures were to be implemented in order to tackle problems of literacy and numeracy, attendance and retention, attainment and progression, partnership with parents and other agencies. In relation to the HSCL scheme and school planning in a foreword to the DEIS action plan the Minister for Education and Science stated that ‘one of the main objectives of the DEIS action plan is to build on the successful work of the HSCL Scheme over the past fifteen years’. A renewed emphasis would be placed on the involvement of parents and families in meeting children’s education needs, particularly their needs in relation to literacy and numeracy as well as oral language skills of very young children in schools and school clusters participating in the SSP. Planning at individual school level required three year action plans, the promotion of school self-evaluation, the maintenance of a focus on teaching and learning

and the increased inclusion of parents and other partners in the planning process. The DEIS plan acknowledged that educational inclusion required a systematic effective strategy with clear objectives and targets and that progress was monitored and measured, reviewed and evaluated to tackle under-achievement and its inter-generational effects on families and their communities. At primary and post-primary level the action plan envisaged the further development of reading and mathematic initiatives, implemented through the HSCL scheme, which directly involved parents and other family members in classroom or home-based activities assisting children's literacy and numeracy development. A further Government of Ireland document *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* (2007) aimed to reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties, in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities, to less than fifteen percent. The report recognised that key success factors for child literacy included family-focused and community supports, parental cooperation with local initiatives, and effective schools.

1.9 Research on parental involvement in post-primary schools

Since the 1998 Education Act parents are increasingly seen as 'partners' in the educational process. Despite this in a further ESRI study regarding parental involvement in Irish schools, *Behind the Scenes*, Byrne and Smyth (2010) argue that little is known about the extent to which parents are actively involved in post-primary education or about the degree of information shared between the school and home. Byrne and Smyth (2010) address that gap in terms of discussing both the formal and informal roles played by parents in twelve case-study schools serving a variety of communities. Parents are involved in choosing schools, providing advice on subject choice and programmes, as well as organising school activities, and as members of parent associations, and boards of management. However where parents are informally involved, such as in supporting learning and helping with homework and study, the influence on student outcomes was found to be greater. The report revealed that students, who entered school with the lowest reading and mathematics score, were the most reliant on family help with homework. Availability of this help was dependent on the education level of parents. Barriers to

parental involvement included childcare, work commitments, teachers being approachable and welcoming, and parental confidence.

The report, *Behind the Scenes* does not highlight developments taking place specifically in DEIS schools located in disadvantaged areas, in relation to parental involvement in student learning. This study aims to help address this gap by examining the degree to which partnership relations are developed with parents in DEIS post-primary schools in order to advance students' literacy and numeracy levels. Building on existing DEIS provision targets have been set within a national literacy and numeracy strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards in Ireland between 2011 and 2020. Recognising that parents play a vital role in literacy and numeracy development the national strategy *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011, p.19) points out that "parental support for young children not only makes a real difference to their development but, in some circumstances mitigates the negative effects of low socio-economic status or low parental educational attainment". In the context of DEIS action planning and the national literacy and numeracy strategy the aim of this study is to evaluate what progress is being made in relation to parental involvement in student learning in a sample of DEIS post-primary schools.

1.10 Profile of case study schools and participants

The five DEIS post-primary schools chosen for study in this research serve disadvantaged communities and are located on the north and south side of Dublin city. *Ash College*, established in 1936, is co-educational. The JCSP programme is offered in junior cycle and the college benefits from a JCSP library staffed by a full time librarian, the HSCL scheme and SCP programme. Senior cycle is composed of a Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the traditional Leaving Certificate. To fulfill its aim of encouraging life long learning full-time, part-time day and evening courses for adults are a feature of the college, as are a range of Post Leaving Certificate Courses. Ash College, located on the periphery of Dublin's inner city, largely serves students from that area. As Dublin's inner city population continued to grow between the 1960s and 1980s the solution to overcrowding, dereliction, and decay, was to move people to new suburban areas with little regard for inner city urban

renewal. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed an increase in social problems, drug use and crime in the inner city. The relocation of people was accompanied by population decline as traditional inner city industries moved to new industrial estates on the outskirts of Dublin. The decline in the physical fabric of the inner city was recognised when Urban Renewal Acts in 1986, and 1994, led to some refurbishment of social housing, and the development of enterprise areas. Urban regeneration incentives led to office and apartment development with a new generation of highly educated employees availing of new residential developments and job opportunities. Levels of education are an important indicator of overall affluence, and deprivation, and Dublin's inner city is highly segregated in this regard (Trutz, 2008). The lowest levels of education continue to be found in areas populated mainly by lone parents living in local authority housing which still accounts for over half of all accommodation in Dublin's inner city. In recent years this area has also witnessed the development of a multi-cultural society as migrants gravitate to urban centres for jobs and accessible accommodation. Despite refurbishment of social housing significant problems remain. Old neighbourhoods have become more marginalised as a new class of more educated people move in. Lone parents are the dominant family type in old neighbourhoods and those with the most basic education are more disadvantaged than before, as they have not benefited from urban renewal. Areas of local authority housing also have drug availability and high crime rates.

Despite being located outside the Ballymun area on Dublin's north side close to Dublin Airport, *Beech College* mainly serves students from that area. Dublin's inner city population halved between 1961 and 1991 as families were relocated to new state of the art social housing, in the form of tower blocks, built between 1966 and 1969 in Ballymun. Lack of amenities, large open grass areas devoid of trees, and poor transport links hampered this new social housing experiment from the outset. New housing added in the 1970s was rented by tenants of the flat blocks and subsequently purchased. This led to a large tenant turnover and vacancy rate in the tower blocks. Vacant flats were used to house single and homeless people on the housing waiting list. Ballymun became a symbol of poverty, drugs, alienation and social problems. The formation of tenant associations and a Ballymun Housing Task Force led to some refurbishment of the tower

flats in the early 1990s. Refurbishment was replaced by the regeneration of the Ballymun area in 1997. Demolition of the tower blocks, which began in 2003, was accompanied by the emergence of the new town of Ballymun. Despite regeneration the legacy of social problems such as unemployment, poverty, drug use and crime continue despite the many voluntary and community organisations developed to tackle these pervasive issues. *Beech College*, founded in 1974, is composed of female students many of whom travel from Ballymun. It offers the JCSP programme but does not benefit from a JCSP library. The college has developed its own library. The HSCL scheme and SCP programme are available. Senior cycle programmes include a Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and Leaving Certificate. Parent participation is encouraged in classrooms, as are close links with the schools local community and also with the community of Ballymun.

Hazel College was founded in 1962 and is a boys' school. It benefits from the JCSP programme and HSCL scheme but does not have a JCSP library. Programmes offered include the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Leaving Certificate. Hazel College sees education as a partnership involving links with parents/guardians, adult education and meaningful relationship with organisations in the local community. *Spruce College*, established in 1964 to provide second level education for young boys, has developed into a co-educational college in junior and senior cycle. It offers the JCSP, SCP programme and has a HSCL scheme as well as activities and courses for parents and other adult students. Its day and night-time english language classes have served the local community for over forty years. At senior cycle level the Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate are available. Both *Hazel College* and *Spruce College* are located in different areas within Finglas which is a residential suburb, with a village core, on the northside of Dublin city. The area experiences a high level of disadvantage. Finglas has a total of thirteen DEIS primary schools and six DEIS post-primary schools. Finglas struggled to benefit during the economic boom years as levels of educational attainment were low, lone parenting was the norm, and the male unemployment rate exceeded fifty percent. During the economic boom between 2000 and 2008 some districts experienced significant growth

and development but now many developments remain unfinished. Third level participation rates are below national averages and the social class structure falls mainly into the semi-skilled and unskilled classes, (Tolka Area Partnership, 2013). Unemployment rates remain well above national averages and household composition of lone parents is high, particularly in areas of local authority housing. A 2006 census revealed serious levels of deprivation with levels of disadvantage either marginally below average, very disadvantaged, or extremely disadvantaged. Profound educational disadvantage in some areas has a major impact on individual life chances. Priority attention by the government is given to Finglas, and other disadvantaged urban areas, under National Development Plans. A large teenage population is a source of stress for parents due to physical violence or substance misuse. Many statutory services operate in the area which aim to provide an integrated service approach to address social exclusion.

Larch College is located in Crumlin in Dublin's southside. In the 1930s and 1940s Crumlin was part of Dublin's outer suburbs but, with the expansion of the Greater Dublin area, it is now regarded as part of Dublin's inner suburbs. Crumlin is part of the Kimmage, Walkinstown, and Drimnagh Area Partnership. The bulk of the housing is local authority housing much of which has now, through tenant purchase schemes, moved into the private market. The area was well established before the onset of the drugs problems in Dublin yet the area became a popular location for organised crime during the 1980s when the drug problem moved out from Dublin city centre. Over sixty percent of the housing stock in the South Inner City are flats built during the 1940s and 1950s, such as Dolphin House, Fatima Mansions and St. Teresa's Gardens. Newer housing developments stand out as experiencing the highest levels of problems with drugs and other social problems such as unemployment, educational under-achievement, lone-parent households and poverty (Loughran and McCann, 2006). A sense of fear leads to some people being reluctant to engage with the broader community. Since 1996 many services for drug users and their families have developed, and an improvement has occurred in the numbers staying on in post-primary schools. *Larch College*, founded in 1952, benefits from the JCSP programme and JCSP library, HSCL scheme and SCP programme. At senior cycle the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied

programmes are offered. The college also has a number of Post Leaving Certificate adult education programmes.

Three key members of staff from each college, principals, HSCL co-ordinators, and JCSP co-ordinators, each responsible in a leadership capacity, and as part of their specific roles for encouraging parental involvement, and home-school partnership relations, were chosen as insider participants in this research. Two of the principals are relatively new in their roles having previously served as deputy principals within the case study schools. Three principals have served between fifteen and twenty years in their colleges and have had the responsibility of implementing many changes within their colleges in order to address educational disadvantage. The position as JCSP co-ordinator can rotate within schools as retirements, changes in post of responsibility duties, or promotions, occur. The JCSP co-ordinators included in this study have occupied the role for between four to ten years. During this time the JCSP co-ordinators have attended annual in-service training, and have benefited from resources, and funding, through the Junior Certificate Support Service now subsumed into the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). One of the HSCL co-ordinators is new to his post with the remaining four HSCL co-ordinators occupying their positions for approximately twenty years. During this time they have collectively witnessed developments within the disadvantaged areas they serve and work to implement programmes, and other opportunities, to promote partnership relations with parents.

Parents, as customers or outsiders, from each college were interviewed as were a senior JCSP librarian, and a community literacy co-ordinator. Two focus group discussions were conducted one with parents from Beech College and, in order to pilot test interview questions, another focus group discussion was conducted with JCSP co-ordinators from outside the five case study schools. A more detailed profile of each parent who contributed to this study is given in chapter five. As three of the case study schools have JCSP libraries staffed by full-time librarians, and the remaining two schools have developed their own libraries, a senior librarian, with considerable experience of the impact which JCSP libraries have on the development of literacy and numeracy levels

and parental involvement, is included in the study. A community literacy co-ordinator, who is involved in the development of a transition to post-primary programme for students in Ballymun and who also co-ordinates a community literacy programme for parents of primary school children, is also included in this study. The aim is to shed some light on the role played by adult community literacy programmes, links developed between schools and community literacy providers, and the impact which these programmes may have in raising student achievement.

The aim of this study is to evaluate partnership relations developed with parents of junior cycle students with the aim of advancing student learning, particularly the development of students literacy and numeracy levels. Through the analysis of interview and focus group data from a combination of inside and outside participants the aim is to develop an understanding of the level of home-school partnership relations developed within the case study schools, and to what degree home-school partnership relations are contributing to student learning.

1.11 Conceptual framework for parental involvement

According to Bauch, (1989), the growing interest in more effective parent involvement in schools has produced several ways to classify or describe ways parents are or should be involved. Models of parental involvement can provide a framework for evaluating current efforts and as a basis for planning for the future. A model of parental involvement designed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) focuses on parental sense of efficacy and parental role construction. This model is concerned with the problem of difficult-to-reach families. Three major constructs are believed to be central to parents' involvement decisions. 1) Parents' role construction defines parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children's education and appears to establish the basic range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of children. 2) Parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school focuses on the extent to which parents believe that through their involvement they can exert positive influence on their children's educational outcomes. 3) General invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement refer to

parents' perceptions that the child and school want them to be involved. This model, used by the researcher in helping to formulate interview questions, and as an aid to analyse data, is discussed in chapter two.

1.12 General purpose of the study and research questions

The general purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which a partnership relationship is developed with parents, with the aim of advancing student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, in DEIS second-level schools. Key research questions used while interviewing participants revolve around the following issues:

1. What is the school's vision and purpose for engaging parents. What evidence of leadership/planning is demonstrated within DEIS schools to promote partnership relations with parents of junior cycle students.
2. What specific structures are in place in schools to promote parental involvement. What specific steps have been taken to involve parents in the development of their child's literacy and numeracy skills.
3. Is there evidence of collaboration between school staff, such as the JCSP co-ordinator and the HSCL co-ordinator, in planning for partnership with parents to address the educational needs of underachieving students.
4. Why do some parents become involved, more so than others, in their child's learning. What specific types of involvement do parents choose.
5. What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience.
6. What models of partnership between the school and home contribute most to positive educational outcomes in relation to literacy and numeracy development, particularly for adolescent students.
7. What are the perceptions of parents in relation to links between the school and home and their role in the development of literacy and numeracy.
8. What are the perceptions of other stakeholders, both inside and outside schools in relation to the role of parents in the education of students who are under-achieving.

From an ontological and epistemological point of view I aimed to conduct my inquiry within the naturalistic paradigm using an evaluative case study research design. Data was collected using two focus groups and twenty semi-structured interviews. Ethical considerations are relevant at all stages of the research, during planning, choosing methods to be employed, data analysis, presentation of the report and its findings.

1.13 Summary and structure of thesis

This chapter outlines my reasons for undertaking this study and describes the relevance of the study in the context of recent legislation, whole school evaluation and educational reform. A background to parental involvement since the 1937 constitution is provided which describes how the role of parents in schools has evolved to the extent that schools must now set targets in order to develop a partnership relationship with parents to enhance student achievement. A conceptual framework for parental involvement is introduced, a profile of five case study schools is given as well as key research questions.

Chapter two traces the evolution of partnership with parents and outlines policy in Ireland aimed at breaking the cycle of educational disadvantages. The association between parental involvement and student achievement is explored as well as school effectiveness in the area of parental involvement. The rationale behind my decision to choose Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement, as a tool to scaffold this study, and to assist in making meaning of qualitative data collected to evaluate key research questions, is explained. This model, along with legislation and policy, influences the themes chosen in the literature review.

In order to study this aspect of the social world, details of the interpretative research approach and methods used to conduct this research are provided in chapter three.

Chapter four and five are concerned with data analysis described by Quinn Patton (2002), as discovering patterns, themes, and categories as verbatim transcripts are dissected with the aim of achieving, what Mason (2002) describes as a detailed, contextual and multi-layered interpretation. Chapter six provides a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a background and justification for an evaluative study of home-school partnership relations, developed in designated disadvantaged (DEIS) post-primary schools, aimed at improving literacy and numeracy standards. In order to scaffold the research a conceptual framework and key research questions were identified. Key research questions focus on school leadership and planning for home-school partnership, school structures and staff collaboration to promote home-school partnership, parental involvement choices and barriers to parental involvement in schools, and the perceptions of parents and other stakeholders regarding partnership relations developed to advance student achievement.

This chapter begins with a background to the idea of partnership with parents. Partnership as a concept is defined and the issue of parental responsibility (Bleach, 2008) is discussed. The theory of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) as a conceptual lens in the context of developing learning partnerships is debated. The evolution of partnership approaches developed in Ireland with parents from disadvantaged communities in response to legislation and policies aimed at breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage and social exclusion is outlined. The importance of home-school partnership with parents aimed at promoting student learning and achievement, particularly in relation to literary and numeracy standards, is highlighted. Particular attention is given to the involvement of parents of adolescents and the benefits of this involvement in relation to attainment in literacy and numeracy and overall achievement. The issue of school effectiveness is explored and examples of effective schools and their attempts at home-school partnership to promote literacy and numeracy are described. This chapter ends with the rationale behind my decision to choose Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model of parental involvement as a conceptual framework to support this study and to aid data analysis and interpretation of findings

2.2 Background to parental involvement in schools

The potential for parents to improve academic achievement, and the need for constructive home-school partnerships, is now internationally accepted as a priority by governments, researchers, professionals and parents (Bastiani, 1993; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; DEECD, 2008; DES, 2011). The recognition of the extent to which parents matter means that school-parent partnerships are at the epicentre of policy-making in a range of countries (Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall, 2009, p.2).

The concept of parental involvement in their children's educational achievement is not new. In colonial times, as described by Ashton and Cairney (2001) parents were responsible for the education of their children and, even with the introduction of formal education, schools were seen as an extension of the home, and the community, with the local teacher supporting parental and community values. Urban growth associated with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century resulted in schools being located further away from homes. This resulted in the relationship between parents, and the school, becoming more impersonal and school and family functions becoming more 'disparate' (Ashton and Cairney, 2001, p. 145). Teachers controlled parental engagement, telling them no more than was essential for them to know. Gradually education moved further away from parents as teachers became trained professional specialists and schools and teachers operated in loco parentis.

In placing parental involvement in its historical context Mannan and Blackwell (1992) identified a rise in societal influence on children's lives as the parents' role declined. Parents became more reliant on schools to understand a child's ability, personality and intellectual potential. Seeley (1993, p.229) refers to the rationale which society used for delegating functions such as public health, welfare, and education, to government agencies. Once these functions are delegated under this model, the primary responsibilities left for citizens are to pay taxes and hold officials responsible for the delivery of these services. Reliance on this delegation model in public education, according to Seeley (1993) creates a gap between families and schools which has become

institutionalised in the roles, relationships, and mindsets of not only school staff but parents, students and citizens.

Legislation in the developed world internationally has led to compulsory schooling, up to the mid-teenage years, for students with a variety of academic ability, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. This has led to a 'paradigm shift' (Seeley 1993, p.231) to a partnership rather than a delegation model to increase parental involvement in education. Seeley (1993) points out that schools began to realise that the existing model, held onto through peer pressure as well as institutional inertia, of delivering professionalised and bureaucratised educational 'services' to passive and apathetic students and distant parents would be inadequate for achieving their goals.

The idea of parents as partners and co-educators emerged in the United States with the Head Start Programme (1965) introduced to cater for low-income pre-school children as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society campaign. In England parental involvement in the education of primary school children was emphasised in the Plowden Report (1967) and in the education of children with special education needs in the Warnock Report (1978). The Bullock Report (1975), concerned with standards of English in schools, also recommended parental involvement in an attempt to improve the understanding and effective use of English among primary and secondary school children.

In 1997 the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation conducted a cross-national study of schools and families in nine OECD countries, including Ireland, to compare home, school and community partnership approaches. Kelley-Laine (1998) outlined the reasons given in the study for involving parents in schools. These included democracy, accountability, consumer choice, and the raising of standards, as findings revealed that where there were good home-school relations these happened. Addressing social problems, tackling disadvantage and improving equity were also identified as reasons, as standards improved when parents were shown how to support students more effectively at home. The reasons given by parents for becoming involved in schools were student achievement, opportunities for parental education, such as improving their own

literacy and numeracy, the ability to influence school policy, support for the school and support from the school. Parental involvement in the study varied from collective to individual involvement. Individual involvement was more widespread and was considered to have a more direct impact on instruction. Psycho-social support offered by schools to families included parental education to increase parents' confidence and competence, especially those from economically disadvantaged areas. Kelley-Laine (1998, p.342) concludes that as formal education becomes more important parents and policymakers prefer that school walls become more 'permeable' to enable families, schools and communities work in partnerships that are better understood, more effectively planned and more fruitful than those of the past.

In the United States of America one of the main aims of the *No Child Left Behind act* (NCLB) (2001) was to encourage parents of disadvantaged, or underachieving students, to get involved in their children's education. The NCLB act held that parental involvement enhances academic performance, leads to better classroom behaviour, improves reading skills and lifts teacher morale. The Act points out that involvement should to be maintained from pre-school through to high school and identified the need for training for parents of disadvantaged children on how to be involved. In *Every Child Matters* (DfE, 2003c) UK government plans for supporting parents included extending family learning programmes, parenting support, ensuring better communication between parents and schools and developing parent education programmes. In Ireland the DEIS action plan (DES, 2005) placed a renewed emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education in schools participating in the School Support Programme.

2.3 Definition of home-school partnerships

Parental involvement and partnership in education has been the subject of considerable research, (Epstein 1986; Degado-Gaitan 1991; Chavkin 1993; Ashton and Cairney 2001; Bleach, 2008). Policy rhetoric emphasising parents as partners has been accompanied by a search for ideal partnership arrangements between homes and schools to enhance student achievement. Home-school partnership relations are recognised by Epstein (1986)

and Degado-Gaitan (1991) as promoting a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility in children's education. According to Pugh and De'Ath (1989, p.68) partnership is 'a working relationship that is characterised by a sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate'. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability. The Scottish Executive (2007) in its publication *Reaching out to Families*, also suggests that partnerships are built on mutual respect and a two-way process of schools and parents learning from each other, a process which Feiler (2010) argues should be a positive and constructive framework. Block (1993) points out that partnership means to be connected to another in a way that power is roughly balanced. Views of partnership are based on mutual trust, common goals and two-way communication. It is a collaborative relationship between two parties and parental involvement in schools, according to Block (1993), is a means of establishing it.

Swap, (1993, p. 67), identified four partnership models. A protective model exists when parents hand over responsibility for educating their children to the school, teachers concur with this and parents see teachers as answerable for children's learning. A school-to-home transmission model, with the direction of contact being from teachers to parents, recognizes that parents' active involvement in children's learning contributes to higher achievement and teachers view parents as a valuable resource in transmitting school values and skills to children. A curriculum enrichment model sees the school develop the curriculum so that it reflects the values, history and culture of the various communities it serves. It acknowledges that parents have expertise and skills that can broaden and augment the curriculum. In a partnership model a collaborative relationship impacts on all aspects of the school's ethos. A whole school approach among teachers leads to children succeeding and standards being raised. Extended family members are committed to working with the school and community resources are used to enrich the school's curriculum and provide support to the staff.

Jackson and Remillard (2005) argue that Swap's partnership model may be suited to schools where children are not achieving well and point out that extensive collaboration

between teachers and parents should include two-way communication and opportunities for informal gatherings with more families involved, and for longer, and being productive and purposeful. Allen (2007) agrees that an important factor in developing the sort of partnership described by Swap (1993) is a school's willingness to establish collaborations that are built on the diversity of family and community practices. In an examination of home literacy and numeracy practices, and the roles of home and school in fostering children's literacy and numeracy development in Australian schools, Warren and Young (2002) note that the rationale for parent / school partnership is to maximise learning opportunities. Warren and Young (2002, p.226) also observe that 'as we move into productive partnerships, schools need to ascertain the knowledge parents have and do not have and incorporate these strengths and weaknesses into two-way conversations when working together to support children's, and adults' literacy and numeracy development'.

2.3.1 Partnership and parental responsibility

Principle Seven of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) states that 'the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents'. A policy in England, *Every Child Matters* (DfE, 2003c) and in Ireland a white paper in education, *Charting Our Education Future* (1995, p.139) emphasised parents' responsibilities such as nurturing a learning environment, co-operating with and supporting the school, and fulfilling their special role in the development of the child, irrespective of socio-economic background.

Bridges, (1994), considers that competing conceptualisations of the relationship between parents and schools reflect different views of the roles, rights and responsibilities of parents, the conditions under which schools will work most effectively, the professionalism or otherwise of teachers and the circumstances in which children's learning most effectively takes place. Bridges focuses on parents as puzzled bystanders, supporters, partners, governors, co-educators and customers. Principals and teachers often talk with satisfaction and comfort about having supportive parents, or with frustration about the absence of such support, particularly when parents have exercised a

choice in sending their child to a particular school. Bridges, (1994), claims that in making that choice parents are entering into a relationship which entails obligations of support. As co-educators, parents must be regarded as a major developmental and educative force in their children's lives. Macbeth (2005) agrees that parents are integral to schooling, that parents, not teachers are primarily responsible in law for the education of their individual child and are therefore first-line clients of the school.

Parents, as the prime educators of their children, are expected to provide 'school-trained' children (OECD 1997, p.25; Bastiani, 2000, p.24). They must meet the developmental needs of their children for safety, security, routines and rules. As role models for their children, parents must demonstrate consistent respect for all other 'legitimate authorities' in the child's life (Garanzini, 2000, p.249). Parents have the responsibility to prepare their children with the necessary life-skills for functioning in school and society. In a pre-election speech given by Barack Obama (2008) at Mapleton Expeditionary School of the Arts in Thornton, Colorado, while emphasizing the need to adequately support schools and teachers, he declared that there was no program or policy that could replace parental involvement in their child's education. From day one he contended that responsibility for children's education must start at home.

In Ireland the Education Act (1998) gave statutory recognition to the National Parents Council Primary and enshrined the right of parents to be consulted and informed on various aspects of school organisation, including their children's records, school plans, policies and accounts. The act, however, did not, according to Bleach (2008) set out the role and responsibilities of parents in relation to their children's education and a subsequent Education Welfare Act (2000) made parents responsible solely for their children's school attendance. However, apart from ensuring that their children attend school regularly, neither laws nor policies in Ireland can force parents to be involved in their children's education (Bleach 2008). Conaty (2005-2006) considered if the role of parents as prime educators was a mere aspirational statement and whether the onus was on parents, or on schools, to ensure children could read and numerate.

2.3.2 Social class, social capital and learning partnerships

O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005, p.65) argue that the theory and practice of social capital as outlined by Coleman (1988, 1990), Putnam (1993, 1995) and Bourdieu (1986), is useful as a 'conceptual lens' for informing learning partnership approaches for social inclusion in education, and helpful in highlighting ways forward for educational institutions working with disadvantaged groups. Coleman (1988, 1990) considers that social capital exists in the structure of social relations built up over time between individuals. These relationships lead to productive activity as obligations and expectations, the flow of information, norms and sanctions, and skilful leadership are used for the benefit of people and educational achievement. Putnam (1993, 1995) contends that a well functioning society results from the amassing of social capital where moral obligations, social values, especially trust, and social networks, such as membership of voluntary associations, lead to coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.

According to O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005) Bourdieu's theory of social capital offers socio-cultural explanations for why disadvantaged groups remain excluded from the educational process. Three interrelated constructs are key to Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory. Habitus is dispositions that shape action. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005, p.68) look upon habitus as objective structures and subjective perceptions, social and cultural messages shaping individual thoughts and actions which are a product of prior experience and which impact on human behaviours. In terms of home-school relations, the temperaments and orientations parents and teachers have towards each other are part of their habitus. According to Bourdieu (1990) habitus positions groups and individuals to play the game of schooling more and less easily. The second construct, field, includes in its parameters, roles, and goals of interaction; it comprises implicit definitions of how teachers should engage families and what counts as success. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005, p.70) see field as a 'structured space of forces and struggles' consisting of an ordered system and an identifiable network of relationships that impact on the habitus of individuals. Education is a field since it sets its own rules that regulate behaviour. When certain individuals enter the field they have a greater capacity to manipulate 'the rules of

the game' through their established capital appropriation. Those in disadvantaged contexts may 'play the game without questioning the rules'.

The final element in this model is capital which O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005) divide into four categories. Economic capital, such as income and resources, enables individuals to purchase educational services. Economic capital, however, relies on social capital, such as networks and contacts for individual gain. In education this means access to areas of expertise, resources and support and is a question of who you know rather than what you know. The third category, cultural capital, comes in three forms, objectified, embodied or institutionalised (Grenfell & James, 1988). Objectified forms may be books, necessary for the early acquisition of literacy and numeracy, or may be qualifications or the availability of computers. Embodied forms may be connected to an educated person such as accent and learning disposition, and institutionalised forms may be the type of school attended. Symbolic capital represents ways in which capitals are perceived in the social structure. All forms of capital define positions and possibilities for individuals engaged in any field such as education. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005, p.73), while dismissing the idea that working-class parents are not interested in their children's education, contend that any debate on educational disadvantage and learning partnerships for social inclusion must take Bourdieu's theory of social capital into account and that learning partnerships must work *with* and not *for* disadvantaged groups.

2.4 Parental involvement and breaking the cycle of disadvantage

Social policy has been dominated by the proposition that a cycle of deprivation and exclusion operates that causes disadvantage to be passed on from one generation to the next (Feiler 2010). By the mid-twentieth century this theory began to have an impact on educational provision with the implementation of government programmes such as *Head Start* (1965) in the United States. In the United Kingdom an early prevention programme for young children *Sure Start* (1998) and a National Literacy Trust (1993), to support family literacy and reduce social exclusion, were introduced. Glass (1999) noted that early intervention schemes, such as *Sure Start*, should be two generational, based on consultation and involvement of parents, local communities as well as children, and last

long enough to make a real difference. Lewis (1996) argued that poverty is a complex issue, blame tends to be passed around and solutions are too fractured to have an impact. Lewis (1996) agrees that not having literacy skills usually makes it impossible to break out of the intergenerational cycles of poverty and suggests that support networks for young parents must be consistent and continuous until the school system becomes a partner with parents.

Smyth and McCoy (2009) note that in Ireland the concern with educational inequality and social exclusion dates back to an Investment in Education Report (OECD, 1965) which revealed significant social class and regional disparities in educational participation. Clancy (1999) argues that little state intervention had occurred pre-1960s as the education system was dominated by the restoration of the Irish language, political and cultural issues and the Catholic Church. Changes in Ireland's economic outlook in the 1960s resulted in education being seen as an investment in people. In the State's own economic interests increased participation in education was necessary. Progressively parents, regarded as 'silent partners' by O'Sullivan (1992, p.465), began to view education as important for employment and, according to Coolahan (1994), demanded a greater say in decision making and new forms of partnership in education.

Despite the fact that educational policy in the 1970s and 1980s emphasised increasing participation rather than reducing inequality, an attempt to alleviate the problems of educational disadvantage began with the Rutland Street Project (1969), a pre-school programme for three to five year olds in Dublin's inner city. The project aimed to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to later school success and to increase the involvement of parents, who traditionally had little or no say in education policy, through home visits, parent teacher meetings and involvement in classroom activities (Weir and Archer, 2004). In an evaluation of the programme by Kellaghan (1977) parents reported improvements in verbal communication with their child and, in the long term, participants were marginally more likely to take public examinations such as the Intermediate or Leaving Certificate.

With the aim of alleviating delayed achievement and social exclusion, Department of Education policy in the 1980s continued to target pre-school children in disadvantaged urban areas. A *Disadvantaged Area Scheme* (DAS) (DE, 1984) introduced in selected primary schools in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, was extended to other schools. Representations made by the Combat Poverty Agency to the educational research centre led Kellaghan et al. (1995) to recommend family possession of a medical card, residence in local authority housing, long-term unemployed parents and the educational attainments of parents and lone-parent families, as socio-economic indicators to be used in designating schools as disadvantaged. Similar criteria were also accepted as prediction of student achievement and attainment. Weir and Archer (2004) reported that by 2002 ten percent of all primary schools were designated disadvantaged. Twenty seven percent of post-primary schools were designated as disadvantaged, when the additional indicators of pupil attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy in first year, and the number of early school leavers at approximately fifteen years old, were taken into account. The designation of schools as disadvantaged has been DES policy to combat educational disadvantage since 1984. Other elements recommended by Kellaghan et al. (1995) included curriculum adaptation, with a focus on literacy and numeracy such as the JCSP programme, and a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in post-primary, smaller classes, pre-school provision, and a high degree of parental involvement both in their own homes and in the school. Kellaghan et al. (1995) also recommended a unity of purpose and high expectations in schools, and a unity of purpose between parents, teachers and the wider community.

The Home School Liaison (HSCL) Scheme, initiated in 1990 as a pilot project in fifty-five primary schools that were part of the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, was extended in 1991 to thirteen post-primary schools which served children from the original fifty-five primary schools (Weir and Archer, 2004). Measures adopted to combat educational disadvantage (Smyth and Hannon 2000) included an *Early Start* Programme (1994/5), modeled on the Rutland Street Project, to promote language and cognitive development to prevent school failure (Lewis and Archer, 2003). The *Early Start* Programme was supported by the HSCL scheme to help parents become more involved in their child's

education. The HSCL scheme, mainstreamed in 1993, was expanded several times so that by 2003 HSCL co-ordinators served 278 primary and 189 post-primary schools and with 150,000 families reached by 2005 (DES, 2005).

Schools participating in *Breaking the Cycle*, introduced in 1996 to thirty-three primary urban schools, also participated in the HSCL scheme. Other benefits of this scheme included reduced class sizes, additional funding and in-service training for teachers. Schools were obliged to engage in implementing five year plans and administered standardised tests in reading and mathematics in third and sixth class during the first and fourth year of the project. In their analysis of the scheme Weir, Milis and Ryan (2002) reported that results were disappointing with over a third scoring below the tenth percentile in reading and over forty percent scoring at that level in mathematics. Weir, Milis and Ryan (2002) also indicated that teachers became more sceptical of their own ability to improve pupils' performance as they considered that factors beyond their control, such as poor attendance and low parental expectations, were beyond the scope of the schools.

In 1998 the US Congress initiated a Comprehensive School Reform Programme (CSR, 1998) built on the premise that schools needed school wide reform and comprehensive plans rather than isolated and separate interventions for students with the greatest academic needs. Recommendations to improve literacy and numeracy included embedding the teaching of reading and mathematics in school wide plans, promotion of high expectation and the implementation of family support programmes while engaging parents and community members through the integration of services. In Ireland the Education Act (1998) emphasised school planning and recommended the formation of an educational disadvantage committee to advise the Minister on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage.

Measures to involve parents in their children's education continued to be promoted under *Giving Children an Even Break* (Weir, 2004a) launched by the Minister for Education to tackle disadvantage in primary schools. Schools already in receipt of additional resources

under the *Disadvantaged Area Scheme* and / or *Breaking the Cycle* pilot project would retain their entitlements and also receive additional funding. To qualify schools were obliged to devise three year development plans and engage in collaborative planning with local statutory and voluntary agencies.

To tackle educational disadvantage improved attendance and the retention of students in school was further emphasised in a Department of Education *School Completion Programme* (SCP) (DES, 2005). The programme led to the amalgamation of an 8-15 *Early School Leaver Initiative* (1998) and *Stay in School Retention Initiative* (1999). The programme aimed to have a positive impact on retention by implementing in school and out of school actions to prevent early school leaving. Based on the concept of integrated services SCP co-ordinators and other personnel adopted a bottom-up approach while working in partnership with families, HSCL co-ordinators, community, youth and sporting organisations and with relevant national statutory and voluntary bodies.

2.4.1 Joined up thinking and multi-faceted approaches

In its report *Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage* (EDC, 2005) the Education Disadvantage Committee (EDC), claimed that the definition of educational disadvantage in the Education Act (1998) focused on the formal school context and did not refer to education which occurred in other settings. This led to a lack of joined up thinking on educational disadvantage. A comprehensive holistic approach was needed as presented in the *National Development Plan 2000-2006* (Government of Ireland, 1999). There was not only a need for all schools to embrace diversity in order to achieve equality of outcomes but also there was a need to go beyond schools to end educational disadvantage and accept that the deficit model of disadvantage which formed the basis of previous interventions was now inadequate.

Archer and Weir (2005) agreed that one-dimensional approaches focusing on particular aspects of disadvantage such as pre-school education or parental involvement had yielded limited success in the 1990s as there continued to be substantial gaps between the performance of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children. Archer and Weir (2005)

called for a multi-faceted approach involving curriculum reform, smaller classes, pre-school intervention, high degrees of parental involvement in and out of school, school development planning, financial resources and a high level of involvement of community agencies. Archer and Weir argued that a vast amount of evidence indicated that children's academic achievement is greatly influenced by the kind of educational roles adopted by parents. Research findings (Kellaghan et al. 1993; Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995) influenced the design of interventions for dealing with disadvantage such as parental involvement in pre-school and school going children's homework, workshops for parents and increased involvement in school activities. However, programmes which focused on what parents did in the home were found to have the most impressive results, (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Deforges and Abouchaar, 2003) and interventions in combating the inter-generational nature of educational disadvantage such as family literacy programmes, (NALA, 2009)

Since the establishment of the Rutland Street Project, all schemes had recognised the important role of parents and evaluations were generally positive in relation to parental involvement (Ryan, 1999; Conaty, 2002; Archer and Shortt, 2003). The improvement of literacy and numeracy had been central to all schemes, but according to (Weir et al., 2002; Archer and Shortt, 2003) had not been assigned sufficient priority. In the context of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy an initiative within *Sustaining Progress 2003-2005* aimed to pay critical attention to literacy and numeracy both in school and for adults. In 2005 the DEIS action plan, discussed previously, was launched.

2.4.2 The Home School and Community Liaison Scheme, educational disadvantage and the development of literacy and numeracy

An evaluation of the HSCL scheme, (Ryan 1994, 1999, p.3) noted that major effects of the scheme would 'likely be long term rather than short term'. Ryan's analysis of reading and mathematics achievement revealed gains for third class but not for fifth class. A substantial minority of parents remained uninvolved. Conaty (2002) identified four important changes resulting from the HSCL scheme; improved attitudinal changes by schools towards parents, parent participation, school development and the insertion of the

school into the community. Coinciding with Conaty's (2002) findings a Department of Social, Community and Family National Anti-Poverty Strategy (2002) proposed halving the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006 and pointed out that concerted attempts to raise the expectations of parents and teachers about what students could achieve was required and it was also necessary to identify what forms of parental involvement were most effective. The HSCL teacher's role was to work with adults, such as parents and teachers, whose attitude and behaviours affect the lives of children. HSCL teachers were involved in activities such as home visitation, organising courses designed to enhance parents' skills in assisting their children's education and raising awareness among parents of their ability to support their child's educational attainment.

A further evaluation of the HSCL scheme was conducted by Archer and Shortt (2003). This expenditure review, commissioned by the Department of Education and Department of Finance was conducted as part of a *Strategic Management Initiative* which all government departments were required to carry out on significant areas of activity (Delivering Better Government, 1996). Archer and Shortt's (2003) report analysed the HSCL scheme in the context of tackling poverty and educational disadvantage. Data from surveys of HSCL teachers and principals were used to establish what progress had occurred in relation to Conaty's (2002) recommendations, and to ascertain additional positive or negative effects of the scheme. Trends which emerged indicated that HSCL teachers and principals tended to regard the changes relating to attitudes as more common than changes relating to behaviour. Principals and HSCL teachers were less convinced of the impact of the scheme on pupils. A survey of HSCL teachers by Archer and Shortt (2003) revealed that the enhancement of communication between home and school, and the development of courses for parents were regarded by HSCL teachers as the most important type of parental involvement. Activities which did not rank as important were the involvement of HSCL teachers in assisting parents' self-confidence to be engaged in learning in the home, programmes to help with transfer to post-primary schools, literacy and numeracy activities, such as paired reading, and parent classes in english, irish and mathematics.

A publication by HSCL co-ordinators, *From Vision to Best Practice* (DES, 2006) stated that the basic principle governing the HSCL scheme consisted of partnership with the emphasis on developing the potential of parents, teachers and the community through the process of partnership in order to provide a seamless service to students. Parents were to be encouraged to avail of opportunities organised by the HSCL teacher in consultation with teaching staff, JCSP coordinator, SCP personnel and community agencies. Creative use was to be made of JCSP school libraries, beginning with hobby courses and progressing to more formal literacy and numeracy, information technology and adult education courses. Through home visitation, involving a third of the HSCL coordinator's time, confidence needed to be instilled in parents who may have been alienated from the education system in the past and the role of parents as prime educators was to be affirmed as students spent eighty-five percent of their waking time up to the age of sixteen in the home and the community.

Heeney (2006) argued that the improvement of literacy and numeracy is a central concern for the HSCL scheme using a collaborative whole school approach. Materials needed to be designed and adapted and incentives created for parents to attend courses. Heeney highlighted the need for constant literacy and numeracy monitoring, testing and evaluating. Schools must be seen as extensions of the home and in future their value systems must be geared to serving the community by empowering people by giving them confidence and skills. Heeney (2006) argued that partnership between schools, the home and community is very important in building social capital. In looking to the future Heeney insisted that parental involvement must continue to be a cornerstone of DEIS action plans as the rights of parents as prime educators was now enshrined in legislation.

2.4.3 Tackling educational disadvantage / closing the 'achievement gap'

Smyth et al. (2007) stated that despite the fact that the experiences of disadvantaged groups have been the subject of reflection and research for at least two decades of intervention and investment in an attempt to close the achievement gap some positive results have been achieved but still serious gaps and challenges remained. Smyth and

McCoy (2009) observed that international research on educational inequality, revealed three main policy strands to combat educational disadvantage, early childhood education, (Levin, 2009; Temple and Reynolds, 2007), measures to boost academic achievement such as intensive literacy and numeracy programmes, (Borman and Hewes, 2002) and targeted funding for disadvantaged schools and areas, (Puma et al., 1997).

Smyth and McCoy (2009) highlight the fact that second-level principals of DEIS schools reported serious literacy and numeracy difficulties among more than a quarter of their students compared to one in twenty of non-DEIS schools. School principals were generally positive about the focus on literacy and numeracy along with funding for educational resources within the DEIS programme, but expressed reservations about the capacity of DEIS schools to close the gap between their children and their counterparts in non-DEIS schools. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009, p.2), say that it is possible to 'buck the trend' of performance associated with socio-economic status but, while effective schools can and do make a difference, this cannot be achieved by the school alone. Parents are a crucial and vital component in reversing the pervasive influence of socio-economic status on school achievement.

2.5 Parental engagement and student achievement

A broad consensus has emerged that parental involvement enhances educational outcomes among children and young people, (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). Research findings, (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002, Deforges & Abourcher, 2003; Feiler, 2010) have shown a positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement in reading and mathematics, IQ scores, and an array of attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Improved achievement holds true for all types and ages of students. It has also been argued, (Tizard et al., 1982; Cotton & Wiklund, 1989; Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall, 2009) that by supporting learning in the home parents can have the greatest influence on the achievement of pupils.

2.5.1 Parental involvement in schools or engagement in student learning in the home

Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) distinguish between parental involvement and parental engagement. Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that both build on each other, but engagement with learning in the home should be the ultimate aim of all school and parental engagement if there is to be a positive impact on student achievement as parents can be involved in school activities without being engaged in their children's learning. Henderson and Mapp (2002) argue that parental engagement occurs where parents are actively involved in supporting learning in the home through extension or support activities, homework or online activities. Parental behaviours and practices such as expressing aspirations, communicating with student and teachers, imposing rules in the home all influence a child's learning. Heath & Clifford (1990) point out that parental encouragement for educational achievement operates independently of social class and, combined with support supervision and help with homework and study, is a very important influence on educational achievement levels. Parents need to know they are an integral part of the learning process. According to Sheldon and Epstein (2005) this could be achieved by schools planning family-involvement activities that encourage and enable interactions between students and family members relevant to the mathematics curriculum.

While involvement with the school and engagement with student learning are different but not independent processes Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that getting parents across the school threshold is difficult and that activities focused on getting parents into the school tend to be premised on parents being reactive to the school's needs, rather than proactively seeking to be engaged in learning. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) argue that schools must recognise that parental engagement is not about the school but about strengthening the triangle between school, student and parent. Involving parents is not an end in itself, involvement must be linked to learning and parents need all the information to go with this.

A review of literature conducted by Desforbes and Abouchaar (2003, p.4) to establish research findings on the relationship between parental involvement, parental support and

family education on pupil achievement and adjustment in schools distinguished between spontaneous parental involvement and interventions designed to enhance parental involvement. In relation to spontaneous parental involvement Desforjes and Abouchaar (2003, p.4) reveal that good parenting in the home and participation in the work of the school is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status. Desforjes and Abouchaar (2003) found that a large number of approaches to promote parental involvement existed including parent training programmes, initiatives to enhance home school links and family, and community education. Evaluations of this extensive activity reveal that there is an increased commitment among providers and demand and appreciation by clients for these interventions.

2.5.2 Parental aspirations

Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009, p.6) suggest that it is necessary to remove the idea that interventions won't work with 'hard-to-reach' parents. There is agreement (Fan and Chen 2001; Deforjes and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall 2009) that these parents lack self-efficacy but the net result of engaging parents from the most disadvantaged communities can have a far greater impact on learning than engaging families in more affluent settings. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009, p.15) also argue that parents' support for learning in the home is far more important to student achievement than their social class or the level of education and that parental engagement is 'still the most under utilized way of raising school performance'. What is needed is empowering schools that have the will, skill and persistence and that broad areas of activity and dedicated programmes aimed at engaging parents are identified and implemented.

Snow et al. (1991) examined the complexity of interactions between home and school in the development of literacy among low-income children and challenged the belief that low-income parents do not care about their children's educational achievement. In an exploratory study of the attitudes and practices of disadvantaged minority parents, regarding the issue of involvement in their children's education, Chavkin and Williams

(1993) found that all parents were concerned about their children's education and wanted to take an active role in a variety of activities such as home tutor and co-learners with teachers and principals. This view is supported by Bermudez and Padron (1987a) who contend that disadvantaged parents are not apathetic but need to know more about their role, rights and responsibilities in the education of their children.

Lareau (2000) argues that parents from disadvantaged areas with less cultural capital share middle-class aspirations for their children but lack confidence and the knowledge of how to help their children. They leave academic matters to the teacher as they fear teaching their children the wrong way and see school and home as separate spheres (Wrigley, 2000). Auerbach (2007) notes the unintended consequences of parental involvement and asserts that opportunities and resources for families are unequally distributed and privilege the middle-class. Graue and Sherfinski (2011) assert that cultural similarities between middle-class teachers and middle-class parents set up an economic trading ground that limits the options available to lower-and working-class families. This implies that power lies with the middle-class.

The role of the state as good parent (Bleach, 2008) in DEIS schools is to ensure that socio-economically disadvantaged families develop capital that will align with the resources available to middle-class families. This is achieved through additional funding and programmes such as the SCP, HSCL and JCSP. The question is do these interventions make a difference?

2.5.3 A deficit model

Kellaghan et al. (1993) identified a deficit model in the 1960s which assumed that at-risk families lacked skills, resources and stimulation necessary to assist their children. This progressed to a difference model in the 1970s and 1980s which assumed that home and school cultures were different making it necessary for children to adapt in order to learn (Zigler and Berman, 1983). Kelleghan et al. (1993, p.92), recognised an emerging empowerment model in the 1990s which sought to 'empower parents to assume and perform their various roles more effectively'. The empowerment of parents was reflected

in Education Acts (1988, 1996) in Great Britain and in Ireland with the Education Act (1998). School-home partnerships, particularly with disadvantaged parents must, therefore, strive to develop the will to work *with* (not just *for*) disadvantaged groups (O'Brien and O Fathaigh, 2005) as these parents are guided towards adopting an empowering role in their child's education.

Cotton and Wikelund (1989) contend that parents of disadvantaged and minority children can make a positive contribution to their children's achievement in school if they receive adequate training and encouragement such as providing written instructions with a send-home packet or providing workshops where parents see demonstrations in school. Cotton and Wikelund (1989) contend that too often discontinuities between school personnel and the communities in which their schools are located, lead to school personnel viewing parents and surrounding community as needing to change and having little to offer.

2.5.4 Families as funds of knowledge

Feiler (2010, p.31) argues that support schemes should not be deficit focused as families have 'funds of knowledge' of abilities and resources that need to be built upon. Professionals must recognise parents as the child's principle educator and see parents as important sources of information (Swick and Graves, 1993) who are willing to become involved in their children's academic life (Epstein and Dauber, 1991). Bourdieu's reliance on an economic model frames practices of families living in poverty from a deficit perspective because the power of any form of capital inheres in its perceived value in any field. Bourdieu (1990) used an economic metaphor involving capital that can be traded, accumulated, and invested. Very few researchers in this tradition have viewed the particular resources available to low-income families as valuable in the school marketplace.

Keddie (1973, p.8) notes that the term 'cultural deprivation', popular in the 1960s among educationalists, refers to the complex of variables believed to be responsible for retarding a child's progress in school. Keddie argues that no group can be deprived of its own

culture and concludes that working-class groups are considered to have cultures which are dissonant with, if not inferior to, the 'mainstream' culture of society at large. Children who are culturally deprived are therefore considered less 'educable' than other children.

Parents of these children may lack confidence when questioning educational decisions or contributing to their child's learning. This may result in parents withdrawing or becoming hard to reach. Schools must look at initiatives aimed at engaging parents while recognising that families' social and cultural capital or 'funds of knowledge' can contribute to curriculum enrichment (Moll et al., 1992, p.133). Rogoff (2003) relates examples of the abundance of skill, patience and diligence used by parents when supporting their children's learning and claims that to overlook this form of expertise and assistance when pedagogic planning is under way is a wasted opportunity.

A key concept of a *Funds of Knowledge for Teaching Project* conducted by Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005, p.72) is a rejection of a deficit view towards low-income, non-dominant communities. The focus should be on the resources, experiences and knowledge present in any community 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being'. Examples are given such as caloric funds, funds of rent, ceremonial funds, social funds, cooking, construction, sewing and time management.

A key concept in the research (Gonzalez et al., 2001; Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005; Civil and Bernier, 2006) investigating the 'funds of knowledge' of diverse populations adopts an anthropological perspective for viewing the households of low-income and minority students as repositories of diverse knowledge bases. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory describes the social interactive nature of young people's development and the social contexts in which learning takes place. Vygotsky recognises the importance of support or scaffolding provided by competent others such as grandparents, older children, teachers or parents to develop children's thinking and learning. Rather than schools imposing learning programmes on the community schools and families need to work

together so that children benefit as everyday concepts (proximal stimuli) provide the conceptual fabric for the development of schooled concepts (distal stimuli).

Auerbach (1989) also supports a social-contextual approach to family literacy to help eliminate inter-generational cycles of illiteracy. Children grow up in a web of institutions, including the family, and like an ecosystem what happens in one part affects the other parts. This idea is based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Perkins et al., (2011) suggest that a useful way of thinking about the literacy performance of marginalised and minority groups is to consider multiple effects at different levels such as in the home and community, within the education system, within schools and subject areas, and the individual student. Each of these different but inter-related layers has some influence on a student's achievement and engagement in reading.

2.5.5 Parenting styles and student achievement

In a study by Deslandes et al. (1997) examining the influence of parenting style and parental involvement in schooling on academic achievement at the secondary level it was found that three factors, parental acceptance, supervision, and psychological autonomy granting, contributed to school achievement. Deslandes et al. (1997) found that parenting style can be conceptualised along two dimensions, parental acceptance-involvement and strictness-supervision, which can be combined to create a fourfold parent typology: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, or neglectful. Students with higher grades come from parents who demonstrate an authoritative parenting style defined by a combination of high levels of warmth and acceptance, behavioural control and psychological autonomy granting (Steinberg et al., 1992). Therefore according to Deslandes et al. (1997) adolescents who perceive their parents as being firm, warm, involved and democratic perform better at school than do their peers.

Dornbusch and Ritter (1992, p.116) found that adolescents whose parents gave them affective support performed better than their peers and that 'encouragement supports internal motivation by giving responsibility for further actions to the student'. The student internalises the values of the parents. To foster parental affective support joint

teacher-parent-student planning, such as programs of study, problem-solving, career counseling, workshops, seminars for parents to learn tutoring skills, use of resource materials for homework, and career planning, are required. Parent support groups and awareness through local newspapers, radio and television to reach more families are also recommended.

2.6 Adolescents and literacy and numeracy

Literacy is now considered to be developed over a person's life and like the early years of schooling, adolescence is a critical time for developing literacy skills and attitudes. Snow and Biancarosa (2003) stress that there is a need to co-ordinate research and evaluation in order to help close an adolescent literacy achievement gap. Moore et al. (1999) also recognise the increased interest in adolescent literacy and the growing sense of urgency to address the literacy needs of pre-adolescent and adolescent students. Literacy needs include decoding, fluency, vocabulary, background knowledge and critical thinking (Chall and Jacob, 2003). Moore et al. (1999) argue that decoding is not enough to produce proficient, flexible adolescent readers as students need to learn to read to learn as literacy is the prerequisite to academic achievement in secondary school and beyond. As content demand increases in secondary school, literacy demands also increase. In relation to adolescent literacy Snow and Biancarosa (2003) see the potential for struggle for disadvantaged students in discovering ideas and making meaning, analysis, synthesis, organisation and evaluation. Due to socio-cultural differences, parental stress and poor health, familial experience dictates recitation rather than interpretation as the correct response to literacy.

Russell and Granville (2005) found that age and stage of schooling, time and effort, child persuasion and perceived benefits for their own child were identified as the main influences on parental involvement in their child's education. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found that involvement diminishes as the child gets older and is strongly influenced by the child taking an active mediating role. Differences between parents and their level of involvement are associated with parental perception of their role and their levels of confidence (Epstein and Dauber 1991; Eccles and Harold 1993; Hoover-

Dempsey and Sandler 1995, 1997; Carpenter and Lall 2005; Hill and Taylor 2004) in fulfilling it. This is particularly true among disadvantaged parents who may have left school early and are unable to cope with more advanced and technical schoolwork now that they perceive that their children have moved beyond working on basic reading and spelling or drilling on mathematical facts.

Eccles and Harold (1993) contend that the decline in parent involvement as children move into secondary school may reflect the stereotypic belief that parents should begin to disengage from their adolescents at this stage. Adolescents may want greater autonomy but they still need to know that their parents support their educational endeavours. It is important that schools strengthen the role available to parents during these years particularly where students' literacy and numeracy standards are delayed.

2.7 School effectiveness and parental involvement

Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009, p.77), note that 'parental engagement seems to be the worst problem and the best solution' in terms of raising student performance and that effective schools which make it possible to 'buck the trend' of performance associated with socio-economic status are the ones with parental and community involvement. Bleach (2008) observes that legislation such as the Education Act (1998) or publication of policy documents, cannot alone produce desired changes as the implementation process is more complex, long-term and demanding. The reality in schools may not reflect the rhetoric of national policy.

Fullan (2000) claims that negative school cultures, unstable districts and fluctuating policies all take their toll once central government driving force recedes. Earl, Watson and Torrance (2002) in an evaluation of England's National Literacy and Numeracy strategy, identify the need for professionalism in teaching in today's world. They also identify the need for effective, agile, flexible and responsive teachers reaching out to parents and the community. Improvements are also sought in school leadership and measures to help parents and communities support their children's literacy and numeracy development.

Cairney's (1995) research of one Australian *Effective Partners in Secondary Literacy Learning* (EPISLL) programme, which provided a framework for bridging home and school literacies, demonstrated that there is little justification to believe there is any less reason to expect a partnership relationship with parents just because the students are older. Schools need to go beyond token involvement (Cairney and Munsie, 1995) and recognise the vital role played by parents in secondary education as less attention is paid in the literature to this cohort of parents who have specific needs. Representations made by a group of socio-economically disadvantaged parents, who needed practical help with secondary school, led to the EPISLL program which contained a mixture of short lectures, workshop activities, and practical demonstrations. The programme was seen as well planned and suited to needs of parents who gained new strategies and new knowledge about literacy and learning to assist children. The programme also contributed to parents' personal growth and growth in confidence. Schools, according to Cairney (1995) are among the most stable institutions in society, and short of a total transformation in the society within which they are embedded, they will not move quickly, However, move they must.

2.7.1 Standardised testing

The National Literacy and Numeracy strategy (DES, 2011) aims to extend by 2014 the current administration of standardised testing of english and mathematics in primary schools to all eligible students in post-primary schools at the end of second year in junior cycle. Schools will be required to report to parents, their boards of management and the department of education about the progress students are making compared to national norms, and assist parents in understanding assessment information.

In the US following a re-examination of standardised test scores, and placing the emphasis on annual learning gains rather than on learning levels, Harris (2007, p.367) identified 'high flying' schools that achieved high reading and mathematics scores despite serving disadvantaged populations. Harris (2007) argues that the NCLB act (2001) is flawed as it sanctions schools whose students do not reach a certain proficiency level each year in annual state achievement tests in reading and mathematics. Harris

argues that holding schools responsible for factors that are outside their control may lead to unintended consequences such as teaching students how to take the test or by focusing more resources on students just below the level of proficiency where the possibility of improvement in scores is greatest. Harris (2007) accepts that school accountability, high expectations and data driven decision making, prominent in educational policy, is needed but accountability and other solutions will be undermined if it is not recognised that schools are not the only or main cause of low literacy and numeracy levels. All stakeholders, students, parents, schools and governments need to change their ways to increase the equity of outcomes. Epstein (2004) points out that the NCLB act (2001) requires schools to give serious attention to parental involvement, to support student success in school. Schools must help parents understand state standards and assessments and provide materials to help parents assist their children's achievement at home. Harris (2007) agrees that effective schools can make a difference in addressing underachievement but they cannot address the problem alone. Gordon and Louis (2009) note that teachers, administrators, parents, and community members need to be involved in what each party can and should contribute to a child's learning.

In Ireland the introduction of standardised testing in post-primary schools, to monitor progress in literacy and numeracy, is planned within the context of a National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy to be implemented by 2020. Section 22(2) of the Education Act (1998) stipulated that principals and teachers should regularly evaluate students and periodically report the evaluation to the students and their parents. The act did not state that this evaluation should be in the form of standardised testing. Subsequently a circular letter 0056/2011 (DES, 2011) directed primary schools to assess students twice during their primary school years, at the end of first class or beginning of second class and at the end of fourth class or beginning of fifth class.

Standardised testing has occurred in post-primary schools in Ireland over the years. Guidance counsellors have administered tests during student entry for the purpose of allocating students to classes and to highlight the need for support teaching. Support teachers have, in addition, administered diagnostic tests in order to target specific learning difficulties and to monitor the progress of individual students. Since the

introduction of the JSCP programme, and the JCSP Library Demonstration Project in thirty post-primary schools, an emphasis has been placed on pre- and post testing of short-term literacy and numeracy initiatives, as well as the annual testing of JSCP students, to measure progress in these skills in order to justify continued funding. A movement towards higher stakes testing is also evident in more recent policy initiatives such as (DEIS) Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DES, 2005), Whole School Evaluation and School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012) which require the use of data from standardised tests to measure the degree to which literacy and numeracy targets are being met. School self-evaluation annual reports and improvement plans must be shared with the whole school community, including teachers, students, parents and boards of management. Reports and improvement plans must also be available to the inspectorate.

In a recent review commissioned by the national council and curriculum and assessment, *Standardised Testing in Lower Secondary Education*, Shiels, Kellaghan and Moran (2010) report that controversy has not arisen in other countries where parents have been supplied with information regarding test scores. One of the negative effects may be that parents may engage in coaching children to improve test scores. While examining options for reporting to parents Shiels, Kellaghan and Moran (2010) point out that parents need support in interpreting scores and the implications for their child's learning.

2.7.2 School leadership and school climate

Simon (2004) claims that schools may make assumptions that parents from disadvantaged areas are unlikely to become involved and deny these parents access to resources that schools are capable of bringing to families' involvement decisions. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) recognise that barriers influenced by context and culture may be wrongly interpreted as resistance or intransigence and suggest that differential strategies are needed to secure the engagement of a diverse range of parents. Harris and Goodall (2007) maintain that parental engagement is only possible with some groups if major efforts are made to understand the local community and if the relationship is perceived to be genuinely two-way. Harris, Andrew- Power and Goodall (2009) note that by holding most events aimed at engaging parents in student learning in

schools reinforces the idea that parents are expected to be responsive to the school. The meaning of parental engagement means different things to the school and to parents. School culture, therefore, creates dissonance between what parents and students want and what the school offers them.

With the primary aim of giving a voice to parents on the periphery Hanafin and Lynch (2002) conducted research in schools located in areas with high unemployment, dependence on welfare payments, and early school leaving. The study revealed that working-class parents' voices do not impinge on the operation of the school as these parents felt their role was to rubber-stamp decisions already made. Failure to participate in the schooling process could not be attributed to a lack of interest among the parents. Responsibility lay with the structures and practices of the school system as it operated in the working-class areas of these communities. The life experiences and cultural capital of middle-class professionals were insufficient to understand the educational requirements of working-class families to whom they provide an education service. Warren and Young (2002) describe the frustration expressed by parents with the type of dialogue between school and home which was mainly concerned with behaviour and not about how to assist with learning. Warren and Young (2002) argue that productive partnerships between schools and parents when it comes to the development of literacy and numeracy need to be addressed in teacher development.

Gordon and Louis (2009) point out that schools may claim the existence of democratic or participatory structures in schools but in reality a gap exists between participatory rhetoric and practice. According to Tschannen-Moran (2001) some principals and teachers assume that low levels of parental involvement reflect parents' low interest in their child's education. Evidence indicates the opposite as parents, including inner city, low-income parents, generally display positive attitudes toward their children's education development (Patrikakou & Roger, 1998). Esptein and Dauber (1991) suggest that parents do not know how to be productively involved in their children's education and most parents need direction and help from the schools. Kruse & Louis (2009) claim that

the policies, pressures, and programs to fill this void in meaningful ways are currently inadequate

2.7.3 *School leadership*

To ensure that parents are engaged positively with their children's learning Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) maintain that supportive leadership ensures that three key processes are in place, a clear vision and purpose, that all staff are on board, existing practices are audited, and future development plans are set. Principals must make it clear that every parent matters and that every parent is reachable.

Gordon and Louis (2009) examined how leadership styles affect a principal's openness to community involvement to improve student achievement. Gordon and Louis conclude that there is a need to examine if a culture of openness to community is reflected in teachers' sense that they and parents are sharing the work of educating children. The study also looked at how participatory and shared school leadership structures related to student learning. Results indicate that where teachers perceive greater involvement by parents, and where teachers indicate that they have a school environment where they practice shared leadership, student achievement is higher. Griffith (2001) found that the characteristics of the student population make a difference. Principals who were more focused on instruction and saw themselves as missionaries carrying out the goals of the community were more effective in achieving parent involvement in lower socio-economic status communities. Griffith (2001) points out that the master teacher likely provides support for improving disadvantaged students' academic performance either directly or indirectly through teachers. This behaviour, as well as a principal who adopts a missionary role, is more likely to be received positively by socio-economically disadvantaged parents because they want their children to achieve academically. Griffith (2001, p. 183) argues that principals need to have an acute awareness of, and have the ability to diagnose and work with, the 'powerful social forces that shape schools, districts, and communities'.

Transformational leaders, according to Giles (2006) are determined to build capacity through actively involving parents and teachers in programs or activities that have potential to directly or indirectly affect student learning. According to Giles (2006) a transformational leadership style which aims to involve, engage and empower parents has the capacity to address social justice issues in marginalised communities. Giles also points out that principals need to focus on ‘distributed capacity building’ if a whole school improvement plan, aimed at increasing parental involvement, is to be achieved.

2.7.4 *Effective school practices*

Evaluative research, on parental and carers’ involvement, in UK primary and secondary schools by the Office for Standards in Education, *Parents, Carers and Schools* (2006/2007, p.4) found that the most effective schools showed ‘versatility, flexibility and determination’ in their efforts to engage families. Schools reviewed and evaluated and changed until they found what worked. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009, p.18/19) observe that schools serving disadvantaged areas face multiple challenges such as low literacy and numeracy standards on entry, at risk students, lower levels of social and cultural capital and low self-efficacy. Students from low socio-economic status families are also more likely to be dissatisfied with school. This phenomenon of ‘double jeopardy’ and the fact that parents of these students see education as important but as something that happens in schools, and not in the home, make it imperative that these schools take the lead in implementing effective parental involvement strategies.

Feiler (2010) describes UK projects which adopted non-deficit approaches to involving parents. *The Letterbox Club*, pioneered by the University of Leicester’s School of Education, aimed to improve the educational outcomes of children in foster care. Books, mathematical activities and other materials, such as library membership forms, are sent directly to children. The goal was to improve children’s attitudes and attainment in literacy and numeracy and to increase foster parents’ confidence in helping learning at home.

The concept of school as a community resource is becoming more widely recognised internationally. Examples include Full Service Schools in the United States, Open School in Sweden and School Plus in Canada. Dyson and Robson (1999) propose that schools should be a resource for the community rather than the community as a resource for the school. In Scotland Integrated Community Schools work closely with other agencies to reduce social exclusion. *Drop in for Coffee* (Illsley and Redford, 2005) was developed in a group of Integrated Community Schools. Informal invitations were sent to parents, crèche provision was provided and parents decided on their own activities such as crafts, computer skills, literacy and numeracy and creative writing. Accredited certificate courses were offered and the majority of parents progressed to adult education. Many parents had negative experiences themselves when they attended school and had no formal qualifications. An *Inspire* initiative (Bateson, 2000) developed across three hundred and seventy schools, supported by Birmingham Local Authority, was aimed at getting all parents involved in reading and mathematics. It was identified that adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy are more likely to experience social exclusion, be unemployed or in low-paid unskilled jobs, be homeless or offend.

The *Home-School Knowledge Exchange* project (Feiler et al. 2008) was carried out by staff in the Graduate School of Education in the University of Bristol. Rather than imposing school values on less advantaged families (Hughes and Pollard, 2006) the project recognised that families possess extensive ‘funds of knowledge’ (Feiler 2010, p.91). The aim was to recognise and build on existing home practices by becoming more sensitive to families’ social capital and fostering links through the development of bridging mechanisms between families and teachers. Parents know how children approach learning, what motivates them and what they want to find out about. However, parents may know little about curriculum subjects such as literacy and mathematics. To enhance literacy and numeracy a video was used to communicate with parents. Also videos of literacy and mathematics lessons were developed, accompanied by a booklet explaining aspects teachers wanted to highlight and other ideas for helping children.

Using longitudinal data from elementary and secondary schools, Sheldon and Epstein (2005) examined the connections between specific family and community involvement activities and student achievement in mathematics at the school level. Analysis indicated that effective implementation of practices that encouraged families to support their children's mathematics learning at home was associated with higher percentages of students who scored at or above proficiency on standardised mathematics achievement tests. Sheldon and Epstein (2005) note the problems associated with students' mathematics proficiency, particularly in poor urban schools, and that efforts to improve students' mathematics learning have focused on improved teacher education and modified curriculum with little attention to developing connections between schools, families, and communities as components of mathematics reform. Where schools worked to involve families and community members results revealed that an overall average of fifty one percent of students met or exceeded satisfactory levels of proficiency on standardized mathematics tests. The research examined the relationship between the implementation of specific family and community involvement activities and changes over time in mathematics achievement tests. Analyses indicated that only one type of involvement, learning-at-home activities, consistently related to improvements in students' performance on mathematics achievement tests.

A study lasting one year by Villiger et al. (2011) examined the effects of a school/home-based intervention designed to enhance the reading motivation and comprehension of Swiss fourth graders. The study which involved pre and post testing was conducted with one group of students who had parental participation and one group without parental participation. Analysis showed that the intervention had significant effects on reading enjoyment and reading curiosity highlighting the potential of the family in the sustained promotion of reading motivation. No effects were found for reading self-concept (perception of one's own competence in reading) or reading comprehension.

2.8 Models of parental involvement

Research conducted on parent-school partnerships has culminated in a variety of models, or conceptual frameworks, of parental involvement which influence student learning

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995; Deforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Epstein (1995) presented six functional typologies of parental involvement.

Type of involvement	Defintion
Parenting	providing housing, health, nutrition, safety; parenting skills in parent-child interactions; home conditions to support study; information to help schools know child
Communicating	school-home/home-school communication
Volunteering	in school help in classrooms/events
Teaching at home	help with homework, help with educational choices/options
Decision making	membership of PTA/governors
Collaborating with the community	contributions to school

Figure 1 Epstein's (1995) conceptual framework for family-school-community involvement

Joyce Epstein's (1995) model of parental involvement identifies six areas within the field of parenting and home-school links where there exist opportunities for schools to develop partnership approaches with parents to raise children's achievement. In relation to parenting, schools, through their home-school and community liaison schemes, can help families establish home environments to support children as students. Schools develop means of communicating with parents about school programmes and student progress. Where parents are willing to volunteer schools can assist with recruiting and organising parental help and support. The provision of information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, such as family mathematics, assist parents with learning in the home. As one ascends through Epstein's hierarchy more empowering involvement is achieved as parents acquire knowledge, skills, confidence and trust. By including parents in school decision making partnership relationships are developed through shared views and actions. In the highest stage of

empowerment parental beliefs of self-efficacy increase as schools encourage parents to collaborate with the community and identify and integrate resources and services from the community to support school programmes and student learning and development.

According to Bauch (1994) the value of a model or category system is in representing the range and type of activities that might be incorporated in any school parental involvement programme. While Epstein's (1992) model may seem as school dominated it does, however, have an inclusive theme. Shepard and Rose (1995) are critical of involvement programmes which are a collection of disjointed activities with no clear purpose or sense of direction. A key element of recent educational reform movements has been to increase parental involvement in the academic lives of their children. While parents may be involved in school decision making, volunteering and advocacy, they may not be engaged in their child's learning in the home. This is seen by Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1993, p.278) as the 'most salient out-of-school context for student learning'. Research conducted on parental involvement in schools (Dornbusch and Ritter, 1992; Dauber and Epstein, 1993; Eccles and Harold, 1996; Deslandes, 1996; Deslandes et al., 1997) reveal that parents from 'non-traditional' (Deslandes, 1996, p.13) backgrounds with lower levels of education tend to give less attention to children in secondary school and more attention to children doing well than to children experiencing long term difficulties. Students with delayed literacy and numeracy experiencing long term difficulties are particularly in need of parental support in order to achieve academically. Lareau (1989) suggests that factors such as parental education level and income do not explain parents' decision to become involved, their choice of involvement forms, or the effects of their involvement on student outcomes. In order to explain the differences in levels of parental support for students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds Deslandes (1996) suggests that a model (Figure 2) designed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) offers ways of examining the issue of parental engagement in student learning from the parents' perspective rather than from that of the schools.

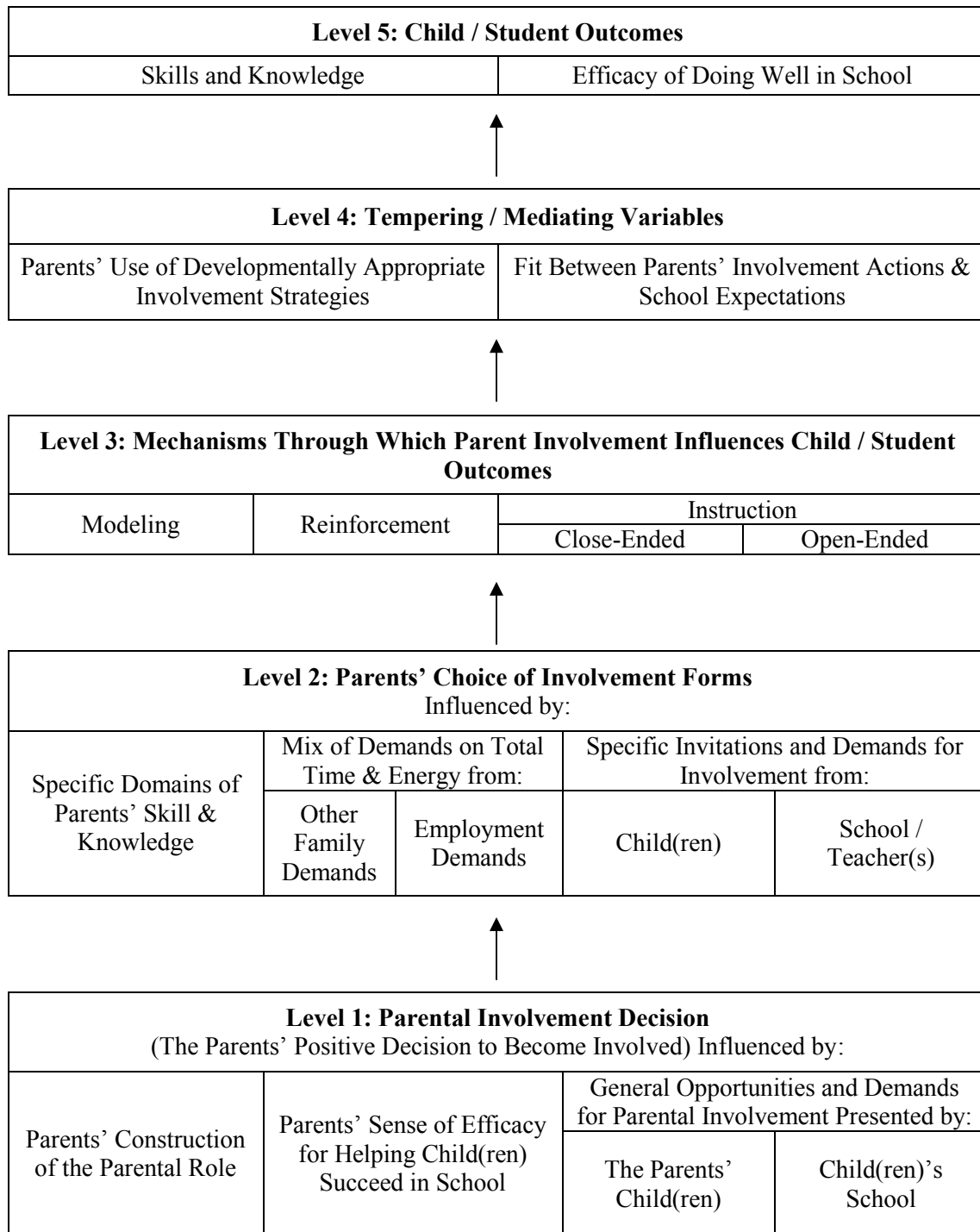


Figure 2 The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) Model of Parental Involvement

This model recognises that parents have varied capacity and motivation to be involved in schooling and extends the parent-focused interpretation by analysing the styles, rather than the types, of involvement and the interaction of style with child needs. As a former

teacher, and now deputy principal working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the general lack of parental engagement with student learning has been, and continues to be, a cause for concern. I have observed, however, a minority of parents who, despite the challenges of disadvantage, play an active role in their child's education. In my role as coordinator of the JCSP programme efforts to engage parents in student learning tended to be short term, when focused around particular literacy or numeracy initiatives, but with little long term effects. While recognising that schools need to engage in self-evaluation and continually renew their efforts to engage parents, for the purpose of this research Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model offers the opportunity to move from a 'school-centric' to a 'parent-centric' (Feiler, 2010, p.69) way of viewing involvement. Analysis of data and the interpretation of findings may reveal new strategies for schools to employ when reaching out to parents.

Level 1 Whether a parent becomes involved

Hoover Dempsey and Sandler (1995) assert that while factors such as parents' education, socio-economic status and income are not unimportant when considering parental involvement in schools, they do not explain why parents decide to become involved, their choice of involvement forms or the effects of their involvement on student outcomes. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that parents' decision to become involved in their child's education varies according to their construction of the parental role. The presence of such a role construction alone is not sufficient because the parent must take the role construction and act on it in order to be involved. A parent must believe that they have the skills, or personal sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed. Parents' sense of efficacy come from four sources (Bandura, 1989a): the direct experience of success in involvement-related activities; the vicarious experience of others' success in involvement-related activities; verbal persuasion by others that involvement activities are worthwhile and the emotional arousal induced when issues of importance to the parent, such as his or her child's success, are at stake.

Parents also become involved because they perceive opportunities, invitations, or demands, from their children or their children's schools. These may be from children's

own enthusiasm, a consistently inviting environment of the school or a regular parent newsletter describing involvement activities. However, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) say that these demand and opportunity characteristics are not sufficient conditions for the occurrence of parental involvement activities. Parents who construe their role as including active involvement and who have a strong sense of personal efficacy for helping their child succeed in school are likely to involve themselves, whether they are invited to do so or not.

Level 2 How parents choose specific types of involvement

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler parents who become involved in school-related opportunities for parents select levels and forms of involvement that are consistent with four specific domain's in the parent's life. In general, parents choose types of involvement consistent with their perceptions of the specific skills and knowledge they bring to the multiple tasks of children's schooling. Parents will choose involvement forms in which they believe they will be successful. Other demands and responsibilities on parents' time and energy will influence a parent's decision about *how* to become involved rather than *whether* to become involved. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggest that parents who construe their role as including involvement in their children's schooling will make the decision to do so. Conversely parents who do not perceive their role as including involvement will, regardless of time free choose not to become involved. Specific invitations, opportunities and demands for involvement conveyed by the child or the schools should also influence the parent's choice of involvement forms. For example, a child who asks for help with homework, or has specific homework assignments which involve parent-child interaction, will tend to encourage parents' homework involvement.

Level 3 Mechanisms through which parental involvement influences student outcomes

At this level the model moves to examining specific mechanisms of parental involvement that have a positive influence on children's educational outcomes. Three primary mechanisms are identified. Parents influence their children's educational outcomes by

modeling school-related behaviours and attitudes which indicate that activities related to schooling are worthy of adult interest and time. This may be demonstrated proximally by spending time reviewing homework and taking an interest in their child's literacy and numeracy development, or more distally by attending a school event. Modeling theory, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) predicts that children will emulate selected behaviours of adults. Parents may take a keen interest in reading themselves or be involved in a basic mathematics course. Modeling on its own, however, does not enable the child to acquire the full range of skills and knowledge necessary to success in school. By reinforcing specific aspects of school-related activities wisely such as by giving their children interest, attention, praise, and rewards they are helping to elicit and maintain children's behaviours central to school success. Reinforcement theory predicts that children will engage in more of the rewarded behaviours, and will be more likely to do well in school. However, reinforcement is not in itself a sufficient condition for school success. Other variables, such as the child's intrinsic interest in the material being taught, will also influence the child's success. Direct instruction, which also influences children's educational outcomes, takes two forms: direct, closed-ended instruction, which promotes factual learning such as checking spellings, and direct, open-ended instruction, involving interpretation, which promotes higher levels of cognitive thinking and ability in their children.

These mechanisms are set within the context of understanding that parental-involvement behaviours constitute just one of several sources of influence on children's educational outcomes. Parental involvement is characterised, however, as a powerful enabling and enhancing variable in children's educational success. Parental instruction, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler argue, is not likely on its own to constitute either a necessary or a sufficient condition for positive educational outcomes, as children's learning outcomes in school are more proximally related to school-based events. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that parental involvement is most significant in enabling children's achievements in skill and knowledge areas where children have arrived at a roadblock and are struggling to achieve. Where delayed literacy and numeracy standards are apparent parental involvement may become critical to children's educational success.

Level 4 Parental selection of developmentally appropriate involvement strategies, and fit between parents' activities, and schools' expectations

The positive influence of parental involvement is tempered by two major variables: parental selection and use of developmentally appropriate involvement strategies and activities, and the fit between the parent's activities and the school's expectations for parental involvement.

In order to select appropriate strategies, which is a critical criterion, a parent needs to have an accurate understanding of a child's abilities. In order to influence a child's learning outcomes parent activities must feel appropriate to the child and be within the range of parental actions that are appropriate for this child. School assistance is crucial in determining appropriate parental actions. Striking this development match tends to be easier for parents of younger as compared to older or adolescent children. Younger children's school work is often well within the range of many parents' personal competences and abilities. Children moving into adolescence normally become more peer-orientated, more independent. The cognitive demands of older children's and adolescents' school work may challenge parents' own abilities. Despite this, research indicates (Entwisle, 1990) that parental involvement continues to be beneficial for older children and adolescents but it must fit the changing developmental needs of the growing child.

To the extent that parents' involvement choices and activities are consistent with the school's expectations, their involvement will have significant chances of influencing student achievement as the child is the primary link between the school and parent. The child occupies a boundary role and lives fully in each adult's domain. If there is a good fit between the two domains the child can give maximum attention to the tasks of each. If the fit is poor the child occupying the boundary role may simply drop out of one domain or the other.

Level 5 Student outcomes

The cumulative effects of all involvement activities are likely to enhance: skills and knowledge development and a personal sense of efficacy for succeeding in school. Skills and knowledge development may take the form of home drills and instruction to ensure a child knows how to spell specific keywords or reinforcement of the value of listening in class. As a parent offers direct or indirect instruction, he or she offers the child experiential sources of efficacy, the parent affirms success in the classroom, reinforces the positive value of academic achievement, and participates in developing the skills to enable academic achievement.

Parents offer vicarious experiences that contribute to a child's personal sense of efficacy by, for example, taking time to discuss a specific assignment with a teacher. In doing so they demonstrate the importance in focusing on academic tasks. Many opportunities occur for parents to persuade their children put forward a more effective effort and explain the importance of succeeding in school. Emotional arousal implicated in the development of a personal sense of efficacy occurs when, for example, parents make clear their own expectations for a child's academic achievement and the importance of this achievement to both the parent and the child.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model identifies parent involvement as a *process* that occurs over time and is dynamic. It suggests that parental, school, child, and societal contributions taken *together* constitute the involvement process.

2.9 Summary

The five main themes in this literature review were chosen in response to legislation which promotes partnership with parents, school policy which promotes best practice in planning for partnership with parents, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement. This model, which adopts a more parent centric rather than school centric point of view, looks at why parents become involved, how they choose specific types of involvement, how parental involvement will positively influence a child's educational outcomes and how parents choose developmentally appropriate

involvement strategies. The research is focused on an evaluation of home-school partnership relations developed in DEIS post-primary schools aimed at improving student achievement, particularly literacy and numeracy skills. Themes chosen in the literature review help to place an evaluation of the current status of the research question in five case study schools in the context of legislation, school practice, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement.

The first theme examines the background to parental involvement in schools. It defines partnership and examines the complexities of partnership relations both from a school's and parent's viewpoint. Secondly, the evolution of parental involvement in Irish schools aimed at alleviating educational disadvantage, and breaking the cycle of disadvantage, is traced. It examines structures put in place in schools to promote partnership with disadvantaged parents. Coleman (1988, 1990) suggests that social capital exists in the structure of social relations built up over time which lead to productive activity for the benefit of people and educational achievement.

The third theme in this chapter examines parental involvement and student achievement. Bourdieu's theory of social capital suggests that disadvantaged groups remain excluded from the educational process. The perception that disadvantaged parents are limited in the support they can offer their children to achieve in school is disputed (Vygotsky 1978; Feiler 2010; Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005). The argument has been made that low-income families and their communities should be seen as repositories of knowledge. This chapter highlights the fact that school leadership and school effectiveness, in supporting disadvantaged parents so that they in turn can engage meaningfully in their child's education, is fundamental to planning in DEIS schools. Examples of effective school interventions to support parents and their children aimed at enhancing literacy and numeracy skills are described. The final theme in this chapter justifies the researcher's selection of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement as a conceptual framework to aid the evaluation of home-school learning partnerships developed in DEIS schools. The model helps to frame key research questions and also acts as an aid for the analysis of data.

No research in Ireland has been found which examines home-school partnership relations developed in junior cycle in DEIS post-primary schools aimed at improving literacy and numeracy skills among educationally disadvantaged students. The next chapter gives details of the research design used to evaluate this substantive area. A phenomenological qualitative approach within a fourth generation evaluation framework is used to explore key research questions. This research therefore aims to examine the conscious experience from a subjective, or first person point of view, of multiple sources of evidence, including parents, in five DEIS post-primary schools. A case study research methodology is employed to investigate the phenomenon of home-school learning partnership relations in a real-life context.

Chapter 3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter traced the evolution of parental involvement in schools and offered a definition of home-school partnership. The issue of parental responsibility for learning is explored as well the influence of social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) on parental engagement and students' educational achievement in disadvantaged communities. Rather than accepting that parents from these communities lack resources and stimulation necessary to assist their adolescent children it is argued that schools must adopt effective practices to empower parents by providing adequate training, encouragement and other necessary support structures. This support influences parents' role construction and sense of self-efficacy in advancing their child's learning in association with the school.

This chapter addresses the research design used to evaluate current practices in DEIS post-primary schools in relation to home-school relations and parental engagement in student learning, particularly the development of literacy and numeracy. Due to the lack of qualitative research which explores this substantive issue, from an ontological and epistemological point of view this inquiry is conducted within a naturalistic paradigm. A naturalistic approach to research recognises, from a phenomenological perspective, that reality and truth are the products of individual perception giving rise to multiple constructed realities where meanings and interpretations are negotiated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A case study research methodology is used to evaluate the substantive research question in five post-primary DEIS schools located in Dublin. A qualitative research strategy, using semi-structured interviews and focus groups as the main methods of data collection, is employed. Management of the research including sampling strategies, qualitative data analysis as well as the reliability and validity of the study are outlined in this chapter. Ethical considerations in relation to the study are also discussed.

3.2 Wider context and framework – school planning and evaluation

Cohen et al. (2007) detect a trend in educational research towards more evaluative research where a researcher's task is to evaluate the effectiveness (often the implementation) of given policies and projects. This study aims to evaluate the

effectiveness of home-school learning partnerships developed in five designated disadvantaged (DEIS) post-primary schools through the collection of data from school personnel as inside participants and outside participants including parents. Stake's (1975) responsive approach to evaluation places an emphasis on the researcher visiting each site personally so that through face-to-face contact participants' perspectives, experiences and concerns can be captured. Responsive evaluation, according to Stake (2003) draws attention to programme activity, and to the social plurality of its people. The emphasis is on the quality of programme implementation. Hood and Hopson (2008, p. 415)) argue that 'educational evaluation involves the systematically determining and making sense of the merit, worth, and value of educational policies and programs for the improvement and betterment of society, the influence and / or impact of social and educational policy, and the illumination and identification of program deficiencies'.

The emphasis on the quality of educational services in primary and post-primary schools, which emerged in Ireland in the 1990s, was influenced by the EU, the OECD and the Irish government seeking a return on investment. Leadership effectiveness, strategy, teamwork, rigorous analysis and self-evaluation are required more than ever in a world of continuous change. In Ireland there has been a move towards central control of the quality of education in schools since the publication of the 1998 Education Act. Post-primary schools are required to engage in school development planning and co-operate with inspections conducted by the Department of Education and Skills. The evaluative aim of the Inspectorate defined by the Education Act (1998, Section 13) is to 'identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice, promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools, promote self-evaluation and continuous improvement by schools and staff and to provide an assurance of quality in the educational system as a whole, based on the collection of objective, dependable, high quality data'.

To justify additional funding DEIS schools since 2005 have been required to engage in action planning, setting targets and devising improvement plans in the areas of attendance and retention, attainment and progression, literacy and numeracy and partnership with parents and others. All post-primary schools, including DEIS schools, are now also

required to engage in school self-evaluation which is a reframing of the school development planning process. In a foreword to *School Self-Evaluation, Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2012) the Minister of Education, Ruairi Quinn, says that introducing school self-evaluation to complement external inspections empowers schools to decide on changes they would like to make. This is based on evidence gathered with the overall aim of improving learning outcomes for students, learning experiences and teacher practices. During the school self-evaluation process the principal, deputy principal, co-ordinators of programmes, and teachers, under the direction of the board of management, and in consultation with parents and students, engage in reflective enquiry on aspects of the work of the school. School self-evaluation is integral to the school development planning process as it entails a cycle of gathering evidence, analysing the evidence, making judgements about strengths, informing decisions in relation to areas for improvement, writing annual school self-evaluation reports, devising a school improvement plan and implementing and monitoring that plan. The actions for improvement are highlighted in the school improvement plan which becomes part of overall school development planning. Schools must also aim to ensure that students can meet the literacy and numeracy challenges of each subject and programme of study, and can competently and confidently use and apply the literacy and numeracy skills that are necessary to develop their learning. Annual school self-evaluation reports, which include plans to improve literacy and numeracy standards, must to be shared with the whole school community including parents.

3.2.1 The role of the researcher

MacBeath (1999) identifies learning and teaching, a school's ethos and culture, and good management and leadership, as the three main categories a school can use to gauge different aspects of its quality and effectiveness. Improvement of practice in each of these categories may be externally driven by an inspectorate and externally commissioned research. School self-evaluation places a greater focus on gathering evidence, making judgments and devising improvement plans within schools. These conditions make it imperative to foster good quality practitioner research that generates wise action from inside schools. McNamara and O'Hara (2008, p.6) say that 'formal school and teacher

self-evaluation as opposed to external inspection represents an important component in making schools more effective'. Externally driven government commissioned school research tends to be large-scale relying on quantitative methodologies and statistical analysis, while internally driven practitioner research tends to be small-scale, based on human experience and uses qualitative interpretative methodologies. Previous evaluations of the DEIS program in primary and post-primary schools (DES, 2011; Weir et al. 2011) are based on the collection of quantitative survey data and interviews with principals. Low-income parents as stakeholders in DEIS schools are generally not included. Hood and Hopson (2008, 415) emphasise the need for democratic evaluations to address the 'disparities of power among program stakeholders', particularly those whose 'voices have been minimised in the evaluation process as a result of their being the least powerful in terms of race, gender and / or socio-economic status'

As a practitioner in a leadership role in a DEIS post-primary school self-evaluation and improvement through school development planning is central to my work. While school self-evaluation is primarily about schools taking ownership of their own development and improvement, collaboration and exchange between schools also impacts on improvement as practices are compared. Through the collection of data from both inside and outside stakeholders, reflecting on home-school partnership practices to improve student achievement within the researcher's own school, and examining practices in other DEIS schools, the aim of this study is to highlight examples of successful strategies which can be shared with other schools with a view towards their implementation.

3.2.2 Forms of evaluation

Quinn Patton (2003) sees programme evaluation as the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgements about the program, improve program effectiveness and /or inform future decisions about the program. Evaluative research can include any effort to judge or enhance human effectiveness through systematic data-based inquiry. The original purpose of quality assurance in the US was to ensure certain standards of excellence were being met in federally funded community mental health centres (Quinn Patton, 2002).

Quality assurance with its original emphasis on quality control focused on detecting problems and reducing errors on a case-by-case basis. Now attention is concerned with quality enhancement and rather than relying on summative evaluations which judge whether a programme has worked or not, formative evaluations now emphasise improving programme effectiveness. Accountability demands can be served by evidence that programmes are improving. Formative evaluations aimed at programme improvement often rely on process data which allow judgements about how a programme is working, as well as identifying areas to be improved, and strengths of the programme worthy of preservation and replication at other sites. Implementation evaluation illuminates the extent to which a programme has been implemented and is producing the desired outcomes. It includes attention to inputs, activities, processes, and structures. This in turn informs decision making, as detailed qualitative descriptive information tells the programme's story by capturing and communicating the participants' stories. The five case study schools in this study have been involved in the DEIS planning process for an average of six years. Hood (2001) argues that in order to engage in socially, and culturally, responsive evaluative inquiries the evaluator must have significant shared life experience with those being evaluated. As a practitioner in a variety of leadership roles within a DEIS post-primary school for a number of decades this life experience will help ascertain progress being made in other DEIS post-primary schools in relation to partnership with parents with the aim of improving student achievement.

3.2.3 Fourth generation evaluation and the hermeneutic dialectic

Guba and Lincoln (1991) characterise the first three generations of evaluations as measurement, description and judgement but describe fourth generation evaluation as involving evaluations that are negotiated co-creations of social reality. In collaborative inquiry those being investigated or evaluated participate as informed collaborators. Investigators, too, are under scrutiny and the goal is deepened understanding of the issue which all parties are concerned with, as the evaluation progresses. Greene (2006, p.126) points out that fourth generation evaluators seek 'authentic, localised constructions of program knowledge from multiple and diverse stakeholders through a dialogic process in which the evaluator serves as negotiator'. Hermeneutics, according to Quinn Patton

(2002) can inform qualitative inquiry as its meaning depends on the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted. Meaning is based on consensual community validation characterised by a hermeneutical circle. The reality constructed by the researcher based on their interpretations of the data need to be verified by the participants who provided the data in the study.

3.3 Philosophical approach and its influence on research strategy

Fourth generation evaluators are relativists, and their methodology is, essentially, qualitative. Benton and Craib (2001) indicate that the social sciences have objects of study that differ from the natural sciences and they must develop their own specific methods to study these objects. Human beings and human groups are conscious, reflexive beings who endow their actions with meaning. Knowledge and its production is subjective and is based on experience and insight rather than being objective and best researched using quantitative methods (Trochim, 2006). From an ontological point of view relativists consider that matters relating to reality and truth are the product of individual perception rather than being external to the individual. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) specify that ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions. These in turn affect methodological considerations and issues of instrumentation, data collection and research. A post-positivist qualitative inductive approach uses accounts, participant observation and personal constructs to examine the subjective experience of individuals. A naturalistic approach to the nature of reality accepts that there are multiple constructed realities and that inquiry into these multiple realities will diverge (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). A relativist ontology, which is the belief that all points of view are context dependent and of equal worth, and fourth generation evaluation, allows multiple realities to be expressed.

Phenomenology, a school of thought founded by Husserl (Benton and Craib, 2001), maintains that behaviour is determined by the phenomena of experience and descriptions of experience and interpretations are intertwined. From a methodological perspective the only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the

phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves through qualitative methods, such as conducting in-depth interviews (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). The central endeavour of the interpretative paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. Mason (2002) argues that qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive, so that it is not usual to have an advance blueprint. Interpretative researchers begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. In the field of home-school partnership relations with parents and student achievement Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) claim that to fully understand parents' motivation to become involved, educators need more qualitative studies that focus on this subject. This led me to consider that a qualitative study of home-school partnership relations to advance student achievement would explore what Schon (1995) describes as the messy subtleties and nuances of everyday life and human interaction. With an emphasis on the logic of discovery first order accounts of people's words and actions are analysed leading to generalisations and theory construction. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with the human sources from which the data have been drawn, to ensure that the specific working hypotheses that might apply in a given context are verified (hermeneutic circle), (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3.3.1 Social construction, constructivism, and the role of the researcher

Cresswell (2009) observes that from an ontological and epistemological point of view social constructivism, often combined with interpretativism, is typically seen as an approach to qualitative research. Quinn Patton (2002) argues that the human world is different from the natural world because humans have evolved the capacity to interpret and construct reality. The world of human perception is 'made up' and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs which are perceived as real by real people. Constructivists study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others. The constructivist perspective impacts on program evaluation as different stakeholders have different experiences and perceptions of the program which are all experienced as real. The constructivist evaluator attempts to capture these different perspectives through qualitative methods such as in-depth

interviews and focus groups and then examines the implications of different perspectives or ‘multiple realities’ with the people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest. Quinn Patton (2002) points out that if constructivist evaluators are operating from a social justice perspective they ensure that the voices of those with less power during the evaluation process are equally heard. In my role as researcher in this study my interest is in examining the lived experiences of stakeholders such as principals, JCSP co-ordinators, HSCL co-ordinators and parents in the area of home-school partnership relations, to advance student achievement, in five DEIS post-primary schools. Quinn Patton (2002) concludes that a constructivist perspective to qualitative inquiry emphasises the capturing and honouring of multiple perspectives. The researcher must also be conscious that language structures and shapes understanding, methods determine findings, and that the researcher must take into account the effects that inequitable power dynamics between the researcher and those investigated may affect what is found. A constructivist evaluator must exercise self-awareness and self-analysis during an evaluative study and be conscious about whose voices, and what messages, are represented in the stories being reported. In qualitative inquiry the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data analysis and according to Quinn Patton (2002, p.64) ‘judgments about findings are connected to the researcher’s credibility, competence, thoroughness, and integrity’. Having worked in a variety of capacities as a teacher, JCSP co-ordinator, and deputy principal of a DEIS post-primary school for more than three decades I have accumulated considerable experience in the area of home-school partnership relations aimed at advancing student achievement. While being attentive to my own perspective in relation to the research topic, my interest is in understanding and interpreting the perspectives of research participants from other schools so that collectively the current status of home-school partnership relations may be revealed in the case study DEIS post-primary schools. As parents of students from disadvantaged areas may be considered the least powerful stakeholders in this research a parent-centric conceptual framework is employed which examines the issue of parental involvement in their children’s learning from the perspective of parents whose voices are often minimised.

3.4 Case study research methodology

According to Dadds (1998) different models of practitioner research include action research, self-evaluation, case studies and autobiographies. Stake (1978, p.5) explains that ‘people’s understanding of social problems and social programs is often arrived at through direct and vicarious experience’. The most effective way to aid a reader’s understanding is through the words and illustrations of reports. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) argue that the results of a qualitative study are most effectively presented within a rich narrative, such as a case study report which should provide the reader with enough information to determine whether the findings of the study possibly apply to other people or settings. For the purpose of this study my decision to use a case study approach was also influenced by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Bassey (2007) who define a case as a phenomenon, issue or problem of some sort, which deserves to be explored, and occurs in a localised boundary of space and time. A case is the unit of analysis and studies may be of just one case or of several. The phenomenon in this case study is partnership relations developed by DEIS schools with parents in order to advance student achievement, particularly literacy and numeracy development. Bassey (2007) suggests that a case study may be carried out on multiple sites to include as many varieties of practice as can be found. The researcher therefore proposes to collect data from five post-primary DEIS schools and include a variety of stakeholders related to each school to aid understanding of the complex social phenomenon within the research question. As insider participants, principals, HSCL teachers and JCSP co-ordinators in each of the five participating schools are interviewed. As outsider participants, parents from each of the five schools, JCSP co-ordinators from schools other than the case study schools, a community literacy coordinator and a senior JCSP librarian will be interviewed, or invited to participate in a focus group.

Bassey (2007) describes evaluative case studies as inquiries which set out to explore some educational programme, system, project or event in order to focus on its worthwhileness. The case may be an examination of the extent to which the programme’s objectives are being achieved, illuminative to let people see what is happening, formative to help develop the programme or summative in assessing the programme when it is

completed. The aim is to inform educational judgement and decisions in order to improve educational action through theoretical understanding. Case studies, according to Bassey (2007) are conducted in a natural setting, within the ethic of respect for persons, in order to inform the judgments and decisions of practitioners, policy-makers or other theoreticians. Sufficient data must be collected to create interpretations and test for trustworthiness. The argument constructed should be related to other relevant research in the literature and conveyed convincingly to an audience. An audit trail should enable others to validate or challenge the argument.

As a research design method, case studies are used in many situations. Bell (1993, p. 8-9) points out that a case study research design allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work. The researcher identifies an 'instance' which could be the way a school adapts to a new role, or stage of development in an institution, and observes, questions, studies. A case study provides a three-dimensional picture and illustrates relationships, micro political issues and patterns of influence in a particular context. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 254) case studies strive to portray 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation, to catch the close up reality and 'thick descriptions' of participants' lived experiences, thoughts about, and feelings for, a situation. Yin (2009) says that the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. It allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as organisational and managerial processes and school performance. This is supported by Guba and Lincoln (1985, p.359) who say that a case study is the primary vehicle for emic inquiry. The naturalistic inquirer tends towards a reconstruction of the respondents' constructions (emic), while the positivistic inquirers tend toward a construction that they bring to the inquiry, a priori (etic). Qualitative researchers, according to Cresswell (2009), seek to understand the context of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher's own experiences and background. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community.

3.5 Research methods – data collection

The goal of qualitative research is to rely as much as possible on participants' views of a situation being studied. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the context of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally.

3.5.1 Interviews

Guba and Lincoln (1985) argue that the human-as-instrument is the only instrument which is flexible enough to capture the complexity, subtlety, and constantly changing situation which is the human experience. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) agrees that it is the person with all of his or her skills, experience, background, and knowledge as well as biases which is the primary, if not exclusive, source of data collection and analysis. The human investigator has knowledge based experience, possesses an immediacy of the situation, and has the opportunity for clarification of atypical or idiosyncratic responses on the spot. To investigate the current status of parent-school relations semi-structured interviews offer what Dexter (1970, p.123) describes as 'conversations with a purpose'. Quinn Patton (2002) says that the purpose of interviewing is to allow the researcher enter the other person's perspective. Programme evaluation interviews aim to capture the perspectives of programme participants, staff, and others associated with the programme. A total of twenty-one individual interviews with principals, HSCL co-ordinators, JCSP co-ordinators, parents, a JCSP librarian and a community literacy co-ordinator were conducted. Two focus groups discussions one involving parents from one of the case study schools and the other involving JCSP co-ordinators, representing post-primary schools from outside the case study schools, were completed. The focus group completed with JCSP co-ordinators was used as an opportunity to pilot test my interview questions. Also these JCSP co-ordinators were able to give their views freely knowing that further interviews were not going to be conducted in their schools. Data gleaned from this focus group discussion was sufficient to satisfy the researcher that the substantive question was worthy of further investigation.

Preparation of interview questions involved researching and adopting a model of parental involvement to scaffold this research and a lengthy review of literature relating to

parental involvement in the education of their children. This was completed in order to develop what Yin, (2009:14) describes as ‘sharper and more insightful questions about the topic’. Keeping in mind my substantive research question on parental involvement aimed at developing student literacy and numeracy skills, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995) model of parental involvement and the variety of interview participants to be included in the study, a detailed list of the ‘big’ research questions which the study is designed to explore (Mason, 2007, p.69) was compiled inductively by the researcher. The questions were then grouped into themes and narrowed down into ten questions to serve as an interview guide. (Appendix 1, p. 214). Quinn Patton (2002) suggests the preparation and use of probes regarding detail, elaboration or clarification of answers given (Appendix 2-5, pp. 215 - 224) and also advises that a distinction is made between opinion/value questions, feeling questions, which ask about affective states, and knowledge (factual) questions. Silverman (2006) advises the use of more unstructured open-ended interviews to capture individuals’ attitudes and values. The researcher in this study adopts a semi-structured interview style to capture factual, value laden and attitudinal data.

The first four questions seek to elicit participants’ opinions on home-school partnership and its contribution to student achievement. Participants are asked if partnership with parents is promoted and planned collaboratively in schools. Questions five to seven focus on why some parents more than others become involved, specific types of parental involvement and barriers to engaging with student learning experienced by parents. Finally participants are asked to identify models of parental involvement which positively influenced student achievement, how parental involvement can be improved and participants’ vision and purpose for parental engagement in schools.

Interview questions or categories, which were later used to aid analysis of data, were therefore pre-established, i.e a priori. Yin (2009, p.85) warns that ‘the nature of the interview is much more open-ended, and an interviewee may not necessarily co-operate fully in sticking to your line of questions’. You are intruding into the world of the subject being studied, so clear field procedures are necessary. A set of substantive questions,

reflecting your line of inquiry act as reminders regarding the information that needs to be collected, and keeps the interview on track. To ensure that effective use was made of the time spent interviewing research participants, interview questions were forwarded in advance. The researcher went along with Wolcott (1982, p.157) who claims that it is ‘impossible to embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit’. Interviewing in case study research, however, cannot be entirely routinised. While the interviewer needs to ask good questions and be a good listener, they must also be adaptive and flexible. A good grasp of the issues being discussed is required and the interviewer must be unbiased by preconceived notions and be sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence.

3.5.2 Focus groups

In order to pilot test my ten interview questions, to validate or negate my interview questions, a focus group was conducted with four JCSP co-ordinators representing a variety of post-primary school types nationally in order to investigate their shared perspectives. As my literature review and individual interviews progressed a second focus group was conducted with four parents in one of the five case study schools included in the study.

As a data collection method focus group interviews are a qualitative research technique in which a small number of respondents and a moderator participate in a group discussion about a topic selected for investigation (Bers 1994; Howard et al. 1989). Silverman (2006) describes the researcher as a facilitator of a group discussion rather than a questioner. From a phenomenological perspective researchers arrive at an understanding of multiple realities of the group’s members (Bers 1994). Hess (1968), cited in Bers (1994), identifies advantages to the respondent as synergism, snow-balling when one person’s comment triggers a chain of responses from others in the group, stimulation, security and spontaneity or serendipity. Bers (1994) advises that care in recruiting respondents is important so that the accuracy and usefulness of information is not compromised. This approach is supported by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.377) who advise care with sampling so that every participant is the ‘bearer of the particular

characteristics required or that the group has homogeneity of background in the required area’.

Morgan (1997) points out that reliance is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the researcher, yielding a collective rather than an individual view. Participants interact with each other rather than the researcher so that it is the participants rather than the researcher’s agenda which predominates. It is from this interaction of the group that the data emerges (Morgan 1997; Kruger and Casey 2000). Quinn Patton (2002) argues that the object is to get high-quality data in a social setting where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. Focus group participants get to hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. Quinn Patton (2002) argues that the power of focus groups resides in their being focused, topics are focused usually seeking reactions to shared experience, or a programme, rather than complex life issues, groups are focused by being formed homogeneously and facilitation is focused by keeping responses on target and keeping interactions among participants focused by staying on topic. Krueger and Casey (2000) points out that interactions among participants enhance data quality. Participants provide checks and balances on each other, which weed out false or extreme views while at the same time present the researcher with the unexpected, interactions, insights, ideas and information (Maykut and Morehouse (1994). A disadvantage of focus groups is that the results may not be scientific and generalisable (Bers 1994; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2007). Results should not be used alone as some members of the group are more articulate leading to their responses been give more credence. Dominance of some members and non-participation of others may mean that the data may lack overall reliability.

3.6 Research management

3.6.1 *Sampling*

Miles and Huberman (1994) are critical of qualitative research, which they say is usually weak, with small samples of people nested in their context and studied in depth. Qualitative sampling, therefore, tends to be purposive rather than random to avoid bias.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) agree that participants in qualitative research must be carefully selected for inclusion based on the possibility that each participant will expand the variability of the sample - to increase the likelihood that variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data. To get to a construct, we need to see different instances of it, at different moments, in different places, with different people. This is referred to as maximum variation sampling by Guba and Lincoln (1985), a deliberate hunt for negative instances or variation.

Initial consideration was given to including participants for data collection in this study from my own school but on reflection I decided against this as new appointments, including my own, had been made to key positions which had a direct bearing on the research question. Reviews of various aspects of DEIS planning and target setting were being undertaken by staff members as they settled into their new roles. As a former JCSP co-ordinator, and now deputy principal, I was provided with the opportunity, in a leadership capacity, to be part of ongoing discussions in relation to partnership with parents and planning for literacy and numeracy development. My decision to confine my sample of DEIS post-primary schools to Dublin city was taken due to limitations of time and resources, ease of access and the overall scale of the study. Consideration was given, however, to selecting DEIS schools from disadvantaged areas both on the north and south side of Dublin city to allow for some geographical distance between schools.

3.6.2 Access, sampling and justification of sample participants

Letters seeking permission to conduct research within their schools were sent to twenty principals of DEIS schools. Plain language statements outlining the research were included (Appendix 6, p. 225). Replies were received from eight principals who were willing to take part in the study. The five post-primary schools chosen offered variations in the profile of junior cycle students. Three schools were co-educational and of the remaining two schools one had male students only in junior cycle and the other female. Once permission to conduct my research had been granted further permission was sought from each principal to make contact with other key participants to be included in the study from each school. My working knowledge of DEIS post-primary schools and the

roles played by key stakeholders led me to carefully select a group from each of five schools that would help gain a deeper understanding of parental involvement in student learning to allow for what Yin (2009, p.34) refers to as ‘rival explanations for your findings’. The relationship between participants, the research question and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995) model of parental involvement was a key determinant of the choice of interviewees. The key participants from each school included the principals, home-school and community liaison co-ordinators, JCSP co-ordinators and parents of junior cycle students. In order to pilot test interview questions permission was sought to conduct a focus group discussion with JCSP co-ordinators from outside the case study schools, a JCSP librarian, and a literacy co-ordinator from Ballymun on the north-side of Dublin city. Interviews with all participants were negotiated and times and venues were arranged. Interview questions were forwarded to each participant in advance as well as an informed consent form (Appendix 7, p. 227).

3.7 Data analysis

Interview questions or categories were formulated following an extensive literature review and use of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model of parental involvement. Categories used to analyse the data were therefore pre-established, i.e a priori. Interviews conducted with informants in this case study, however, were semi-structured as pre-established questions acted as a guide to discussions which took place.

To aid data analysis the diagram which follows (Figure 3) demonstrates links between interview questions and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995) model of parental involvement. Interview questions at level one aim to highlight the degree to which school planning and existing school structures influence parental involvement decisions. Level two interview questions investigate the degree to which DEIS post-primary schools are aware of and sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged parents in terms of parental skills, available time, and invitations to be involved in their child’s learning. Interview questions at levels three, four and five aim to highlight DEIS schools’ vision and purpose for involving parents, and the degree to which learning partnerships are formed between schools and home.

Interview Questions	Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model (1995, 1997) of Parental Involvement
<p>What evidence of leadership / planning is demonstrated within DEIS schools to promote partnership with parents of junior cycle students?</p> <p>What structures are in place in schools to promote parental involvement and in the development of literacy and numeracy?</p> <p>Is there evidence of collaboration between the JCSP co-ordinator, HSCL co-ordinator, teachers and parents in addressing the educational needs of underachieving students?</p>	<p>Level 1: Parental Involvement Decisions</p> <p>Parents' construction of the parental role.</p> <p>Parents' sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school.</p> <p>General opportunities and demands for parental involvement presented by the parent's child and child's school.</p>
<p>Why do some parents become involved in their child's learning?</p> <p>What specific types of involvement do parents choose, and what influences this choice?</p> <p>What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience?</p>	<p>Level 2: Parents' choice of involvement forms Influenced by:</p> <p>Parents' skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Mix of demands on time and energy.</p> <p>Specific invitations and demands for involvement from the child and/or school.</p>
<p>What types/models of parental involvement have a positive influence on a child's educational outcomes?</p>	<p>Level 3: Mechanisms through which parent involvement influences student outcomes</p> <p>Modeling Reinforcement Instruction – Close-Ended and Open-Ended</p>
<p>How can you facilitate parents' role, as prime educator, in improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy?</p>	<p>Level 4: Tempering / Mediating Variables</p> <p>Parents use of developmentally appropriate involvement strategies. Fit between parental involvement strategies and school expectations.</p>
<p>What is your vision and purpose for parental engagement in your school?</p>	<p>Level 5: Child / Student Outcomes</p> <p>Skills and knowledge Efficacy for doing well in school</p>

Figure 3 Link between interview questions and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model (1995)

Significant points of information obtained were subsequently probed with new interviewees. Silverman (2007, p.147) says that 'interview interactions are inherently spaces in which both speakers are constantly doing analysis – both speakers are engaged (and collaborating) in making meaning and producing knowledge'. When all the data was

collected retrospective analysis, as proposed by Creswell (2009), followed steps from the specific to the general and involved multiple levels of analysis.

3.7.1 Stages in data analysis

Step 1 Organising and preparing the data for analysis

Following each interview immersion in the data occurred as tapes were transcribed verbatim to provide the raw data.

Step 2 Reading through all data

To obtain a general sense of all the data collected interviews and focus group discussions were re-read. While actively re-reading, highlighting and annotating transcripts research questions which were used to guide and plan the research were revisited in order to help identify units of meaning. It became clear at this stage that new categories were emerging from the data i.e a posteriori categories. All names of people and places were changed to preserve anonymity. Individual schools were re-named as Ash College, Beech College, Hazel College, Larch College and Spruce College. The number of lines on each page of the interviews were counted and assigned numbers. To facilitate using direct quotes from the data a reference system which identified the participant, the school, the page of the interview and specific lines was adopted, for example (Principal: Spruce 5: 23-27). As the data analysis in chapters four and five is presented in narrative format, words are, on occasion, substituted within verbatim quotes to aid fluency.

Step 3 Coding the data

In the third stage of data analysis Cresswell (2009, p.186) recommends beginning detailed analysis with a coding process. This involves taking segments of text and labeling those categories. The following research questions, or pre-determined categories, were adopted as the main categories with which units of meaning, or segments of interview data, were to be matched. The category 'other' allowed for segments of text that were not anticipated at the beginning (Cresswell, 2009).

1. Leadership / Planning for partnership and school effectiveness.
2. Specific structures or arrangements in place in schools to promote parental involvement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy development.
3. Evidence of collaboration between the HSCL teacher, JCSP coordinator and parents.

4. Models of parental involvement which contribute to positive educational outcomes in relation to literacy and numeracy development, particularly for adolescent students.
5. What barriers to engaging parents are experienced.
6. Involvement choices made by parents.
7. Other aspects of parental involvement.

According to Wellington (2000) the process of matching units of meaning to research questions, piece by piece, allows the data gradually shed light on or illuminate those questions. This matching of items of data to research questions provides a structure for writing up and presenting research. Initial description rather than explanation of data was possible as units of data, including direct quotes, were assigned to the research questions headings for each individual interview and focus group transcript. For example segments of text were matched to pre-determined categories, or as an emerging category, for the principal of Spruce College or the JCSP focus group discussion.

To facilitate moving beyond basic descriptions of units of meaning under each research question, for each individual informant, descriptions of segments of text, including verbatim quotes, were combined for all principals of the five case study schools. This aided interpretation of the collective responses given by principals to each interview question. A similar process was undertaken for all HSCL co-ordinators, JCSP co-ordinators and parents of the five case study schools. Care was taken to identify individual schools during this process. Re-reading of these combined descriptions enabled the researcher glean more in-depth meaning from the collective responses of principals, HSCL co-ordinators, JCSP co-ordinators and parents. New categories which had emerged from the data were also identified. These included the role of technology and parental involvement, communicating with parents, wider community and school collaboration, disciplinary issues and parental involvement, junior cycle reform and parental involvement, promotion of parental involvement through a national media campaign, and participants perceptions on how DEIS schools were impacting on inter-generational cycles of poverty and educational disadvantage.

**Step 4 Using the coding process to generate a description of the setting
as well as categories or themes for analysis**

In order to process the large volume of data categorized under the research question headings the next stage involved re-reading and re-drafting participants' responses in order to facilitate data reduction and detailed descriptions for the case study report as well as the development of themes, supported by quotations and specific evidence, to aid interpretation of the data. Cresswell (2009) proposes that themes are analysed for each individual case and across different cases.

Step 5 Representation of descriptions and themes in qualitative narratives

To preserve the uniqueness of each case study school at this stage the views of participants from each individual school, principals, HSCL teachers and JCSP co-ordinators and parents, under each research question or category were re-combined. A structure, with interrelated descriptions or themes, for writing up a case study report for each school gradually emerged.

Step 6 Interpretation of the data

The final step in data analysis (Cresswell, 2009) involves making an interpretation of the data. This meaning may be from the understanding that the researcher brings to the study and also meaning derived from a comparison of the findings located in the literature. New questions may also be raised. By using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement as a theoretical lens in this study my aim is to highlight new strategies which, if implemented, may inform future actions for parental engagement in student learning.

Chapter four presents the findings from insider participants in each case study school. Findings from parents, as outsider participants, as well as JCSP co-ordinators from schools other than the case study schools, a community literacy coordinator, and a JCSP librarian are presented in chapter five.

3.7.2 *Triangulation, validity, reliability and generalisability / relatability of the study*

Lincoln and Guba, (1985) point out that a case study reporting mode is more adapted to a description of the multiple realities encountered at any site. It demonstrates the

investigator's interaction with the site and consequent biases that may occur (reflexive reporting). It provides the basis for both individual 'naturalistic generalizations' (Stake, 1980) and transferability to other sites (thick description) as it demonstrates the variety of mutually shaping influences present. Using a comparative case method in multiple case studies is similar to conducting multiple experiments in quantitative research. The researcher is aiming at replication leading to inductive theory.

Trustworthiness aims to establish confidence in the truth of research findings, to determine if the findings can be replicated in other contexts, and to establish the degree to which the findings are not from the bias or perspective of the inquirer. The operational technique used by the researcher in this case study, to aid trustworthiness, included twenty-one semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions which were transcribed verbatim. Five principals, five home-school liaison co-ordinators, five JCSP co-ordinators and parents in each of five post-primary schools were interviewed to corroborate each other, and to ensure methodological triangulation. The aim was to test out different ontological perspectives to increase credibility.

Methods triangulation, involving focus group discussions, interviews, as well as the triangulation of data sources offer strategies for reducing systematic bias and distortion during data analysis – in each case the strategy involves checking findings against other sources and perspectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). This serves to increase credibility of the study. Comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view in an evaluation, such as triangulating staff views with that of parents and others outside the school setting, leads to the establishment of themes based on the convergence of several sources of data. This adds validity to the study. Another strategy used in this study to ensure validity, and which is also another approach to analytical triangulation, was invite interviewees to verify constructions. Quinn Patton (2002, p.560) points out that 'researchers and evaluators can learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded'.

Conventional trustworthiness criteria, of validity, reliability and generalisability may be inconsistent with the procedures of naturalistic inquiry. Substitute criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability may be employed to affirm the trustworthiness of naturalistic approaches. The credibility of qualitative inquiry, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) claim, depends on rigorous methods that yield high-quality data that are systematically analysed, the credibility of the researcher and philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry. The credibility of the researcher may be determined by professional information which positively affects data collection, analysis and interpretation. This prevents the inquirer from misinterpreting the world of the human instrument and increases the believability of the researcher's findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1985).

Generalisability in this study is aided by the fact that each school can be regarded as an individual 'case'. Stake (2000) states that the first priority is to do justice to a specific case, to do a good job of 'particularisation' before looking for patterns across cases. Stake considers that the vicarious experience that comes from reading a rich case account can contribute to the social construction of knowledge that, in a cumulative sense, builds generalisable knowledge. In chapters four and five data from participants in each case study school is presented under pre-determined categories. Chapters four and five conclude with an interpretation and analysis of findings from across the five schools.

3.8 Ethical considerations

According to Wellington (2000, p.54) an 'ethic' is a moral principle or code of conduct which governs what people do. Following approval for this study from the ethics committee (Appendix 9, p. 232) of Dublin City University letters, seeking permission to conduct research within their schools, were sent to five principals who had agreed to participate in the study. Plain language statements and informed consent forms, which outlined the purpose of the research, gave assurances of confidentiality and sought permission to tape-record interviews, were enclosed. Permission to contact HSCL co-ordinators, JCSP co-ordinators, and parents within their schools, was sought from principals. Interview questions, which acted as a guide to keep interviews on track, were

forwarded to each participant and dates and venues for conducting interviews were agreed. Honesty and openness guided all stages of the research.

Yin, (2009, p.73), argues that “the study of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context obligates you to important ethical practices akin to those followed in medical research. Ethical considerations are relevant at all stages of a research study, during planning, choosing methods to be employed, data analysis, presentation of a report and its findings. Sociologists, according to Benton and Craib, (2001), are often involved in uncovering information about the beliefs and practices of the people they study which might put those people at risk. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) the cost/benefit ratio refers to a fundamental concept and ethical dilemma in social research. Researchers have to weigh up the benefits of their research against the personal costs to the participants being researched. The purpose of the research and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality must be outlined to each participant.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has described the research design and methods used to conduct this qualitative study. This evaluative case study is conducted in the context of accountability and quality assurance in schools which have become increasingly prevalent since the Education Act (1998). The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of home-school learning partnerships developed by practitioners in five designated disadvantaged DEIS post-primary schools, and to highlight examples of best practice which may be shared. To arrive at evidence the focus is on fourth generation evaluation and hermeneutics which involve negotiated co-creations of social reality and consensual community validation. A phenomenological philosophical approach is outlined in this chapter. The emphasis is on capturing the lived experiences and multiple realities constructed by a variety of participants including key school personnel and parents. Qualitative data collection, sampling techniques, a pilot focus group discussion and data analysis techniques are discussed. Finally the validity, reliability and generalisability of the study, as well as ethical considerations are addressed. Chapters four and five present the findings of the

study from the perspectives of insider participants, principals, JCSP and HSCL coordinators and outsider participants, in particular parents.

Chapter 4 Findings from the Perspective of Insider Participants

4.1 Introduction

In chapter three I have outlined the philosophical and methodological approach taken to conduct this evaluative case study on home-school learning partnership relations. To capture the lived experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders inside five DEIS post-primary schools I interviewed the principals, HSCL co-ordinators and JCSP co-ordinators. The findings from this group are presented in this chapter. To provide an outsider perspective the views of parents, JCSP co-ordinators from outside the case study schools, a community literacy co-ordinator and a senior JCSP librarian are presented in chapter five.

To protect the anonymity of stakeholders pseudonyms are used where necessary to protect participants. Verbatim quotes from interview data are indicated in italics and referenced according to the participant, the school, the page of the interview and specific lines, for example (Principal: Spruce 5: 23-27). To add fluency to verbatim quotes words are on occasion substituted within direct quotes. The five case study schools are named Ash College, Beech College, Hazel College, Larch College and Spruce College. In this study the word ‘college’ and ‘school’ are synonymous. The title ‘class teacher’ relates to the position as tutor of a class group with responsibility for pastoral care. The findings for the five case study school are presented under six predetermined categories (Figure 4). The seventh category ‘other aspects of parental involvement’ allows for the emergence of unanticipated data.

The researcher’s interpretation of the findings under each category from the five schools is included in this chapter. This analysis is connected to literature related to the substantive research question. A conclusion summarises key findings from insider participants.

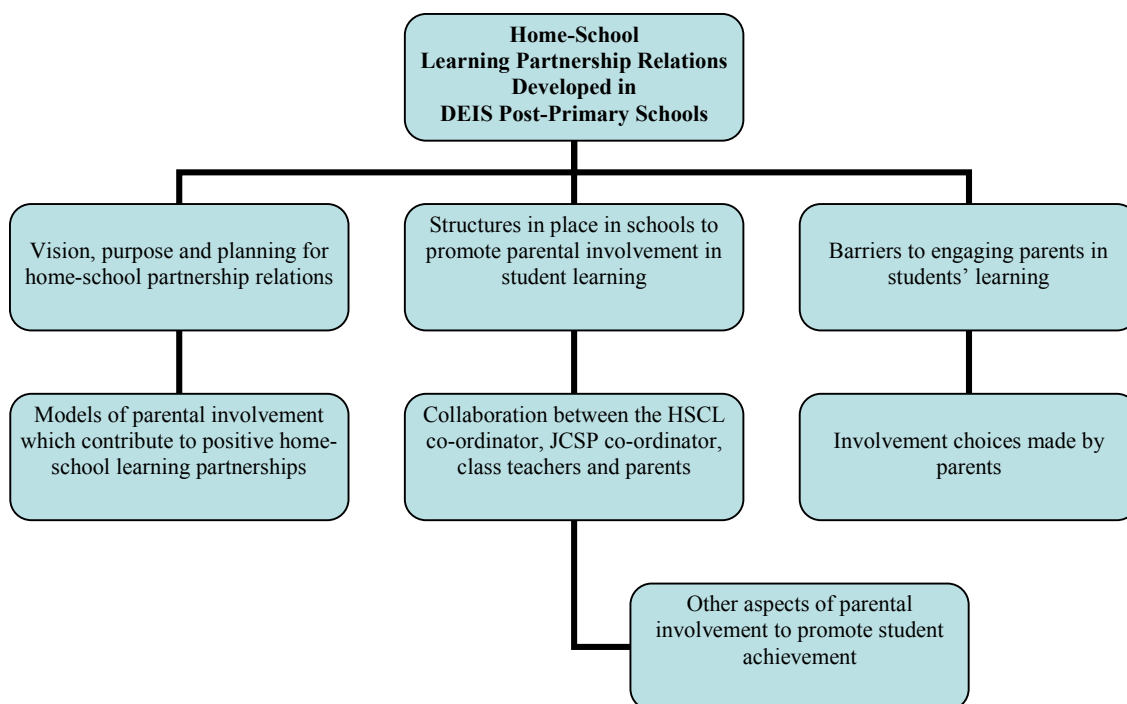


Figure 4 Pre-determined categories for analysis

4.2 Vision, purpose and planning for home-school partnership relations

The principal of Ash College has low expectations of parents from the most disadvantaged areas but appreciates parents who deliver *‘the student ready for school and learning’* (Principal: Ash 1: 15). The HSCL teacher defines partnership as communicating with, and welcoming parents, and providing opportunities for parents to engage with their child’s learning. The HSCL co-ordinator says *‘they are told from the very minute they have contact with us this is a partnership, and we are all on the one side’*, (HSCL: Ash 2: 10-11). The JCSP co-ordinator sees the importance of a team effort between school and the home as this results in students being happier and staying in school longer. Planning for home-school partnership takes place at monthly DEIS committee meetings, with the HSCL co-ordinator taking overall responsibility. A DEIS target for involving parents, according to the JCSP co-ordinator, is for parents to be more familiar with subjects and programmes taken by their children. The HSCL co-ordinator outlines her immediate partnership goals as developing the role of a parents’ group, providing additional transfer meetings, continuing to invite parents to student award ceremonies and enhancing communication with parents through newsletters, postcards,

webtexts, home visits and school reports. Planning for the development of literacy at DEIS committee meetings is delegated to the JCSP co-ordinator, the head of the english department, the JCSP librarian, resource teacher and special needs co-ordinator. The head of the mathematics department has overall responsibility for the development of numeracy.

In Beech College the principal considers that *'no matter what school you are in when parents take an interest in the education of their children their education is enhanced, where there are a lot of disadvantaged kids you can see the difference'* (Principal : Beech 1: 5-8). The principal interprets partnership as parents supporting their children, and the work of the school, by providing a suitable learning environment in the home and taking responsibility for their children's school attendance and setting boundaries. The HSCL co-ordinator considers that partnership relations are developed when parents feel at ease approaching the school with problems which she helps to resolve. The JCSP co-ordinator focuses on the beneficial effects for students when positive relations with parents are transferred onto relationships with students which she describes as *'a win-win situation'* (JCSP: Beech 1: 5-14). The JCSP co-ordinator considers that partnership with parents within Beech College is *'absolutely promoted. I am not saying that we get it right all the time or we get all parents that we need to get'* (JCSP: Beech 3: 3-4).

To *'break down barriers'* (Principal: Hazel 5: 21-22) the principal of Hazel College would like to see parents more involved in the life of the school rather than just being members of a parents' association. The HSCL co-ordinator finds it difficult to measure the benefits of his role, yet is confident that partnership relations exist between all stakeholders in the college. As a member of the DEIS committee the HSCL co-ordinator is responsible for looking after partnership with parents. His focus is on providing information to parents, and students, regarding outside organisations and agencies. The HSCL co-ordinator is not convinced that teachers consider parents in their everyday work as he says:

I don't think teachers have changed their mindset yet. When I started teaching in 1993 there was nearly a perception the parent- teacher meeting was the teacher's right. I'm not quite sure we're there yet with the idea that this is a two way process (HSCL: Hazel 1: 19-24).

The JCSP co-ordinator, who considers that partnership with parents *'is an area that we haven't got a great track record in'* (JCSP: Hazel 2: 14) defines partnership with parents as having parents come into the school and help the school *'and maybe give a more positive attitude towards school and around literacy and numeracy as well and all aspects of social development too'* (JCSP: Hazel 1: 5-6).

While in agreement that home-school partnership enhances student achievement the principal of Larch College says *'if I have evidence to back this up, no'* (Principal: Larch 1: 4). The principal considers that only a small number of school staff promote this partnership and he considers that this *'needs to be changed within the school'* (Principal: Larch 2: 42). The principal is concerned that there is an acceptance that the students have difficulties and that the *'parents presenting them have their difficulties as well'* (Principal: Larch 2: 44-45). The Larch College HSCL co-ordinator agrees that a home school partnership relationship enhances student achievement and sees the partnership relationship as:

like a three-legged stool. You have the professionals, you have the students and you have the parents and if you believe that as fundamental then everything builds from that. You are really looking to build on the constitutional statement that parents are the primary educators, so you are looking to build bridges all over the place (HSCL: Larch 1: 12-18)

The HSCL co-ordinator describes attempts at building bridges to bring parents into the educational system as very fragile. Emphasis is placed on *'mutual respect and understanding'* (HSCL: Larch 1: 45-46) with the most marginalized parents. DEIS partnership goals are decided at team meetings but, according to the JCSP co-ordinator, *'our home school liaison person takes responsibility for linking with parents'* (JCSP:

Larch 2: 20-21). Despite partnership with parents being promoted collaboration with parents varies and is dependent on the individual needs of students.

An *'open door policy'* (Principal: Spruce 1: 35) is promoted in Spruce College but the principal considers that partnership with parents is very general, and not focused enough on homework or reading. The previous year sanctions for non-completion of homework had been implemented without involving parents in the process. A DEIS partnership target is to see *'less involvement around discipline and more involvement around learning'* (Principal: Spruce 7: 17). The principal argues that good relationships with parents are *'vital'* (Principal: Spruce 1: 6) if students are to stay in school longer.

The HSCL teacher, who works in partnership with another HSCL co-ordinator in Spruce College, agrees that a priority is the retention of at risk students in school, and she acts as an intermediary between parents and teachers. Partnership with parents is promoted by *'just trying to get the parents in'* (HSCL: Spruce 3: 9) to coffee mornings and information sessions on courses offered by the college. Planning for parental engagement takes place at weekly DEIS committee meetings between school management and other key personnel. Planning for literacy and numeracy is examined across the whole school in DEIS plans. The JCSP co-ordinator, who is also a class teacher with responsibility for pastoral care, is the literacy and numeracy representative on the DEIS team. She sees partnership as a reciprocal relationship between the school, parents and students and considers that her role as class teacher involves letting *'parents know what is happening with their child, how their child is getting on'* (JCSP: Spruce 3: 6-7). The JCSP co-ordinator invites parents into the college for JCSP initiatives but considers that *'partnership with parents is dealt with mostly by Home School Liaison Co-ordinator'* (JCSP: Spruce 1: 9-10).

4.2.1 Vision, purpose and planning for home-school partnership relations analysis

All insider participants agree that home-school partnership relations enhance student achievement and retention. This conforms to the broad consensus which has emerged internationally which supports constructive home-school partnerships, for students of all

ages, as a means of improving students' academic achievement and attitude to school (Bastiani, 1993; Epstein, 1995; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Feiler, 2010).

The findings from inside participants suggest that partnership with parents in DEIS schools is concerned with how parents can support the work of the school and teachers, rather than how teachers can support parents in helping their child to learn. Parents are expected to show their support by ensuring students are prepared for school and attend regularly. There is also an expectation that parents should be involved in the life of the school, and help resolve behavioural or other difficulties associated with individual students. A school's function is to inform parents regarding academic programmes and student progress, celebratory events, school meetings and provide information regarding outside agencies. A small number of staff including management, and other key personnel, plan for partnership at DEIS meetings with the HSCL co-ordinator taking overall responsibility. There is a perception that the only parents who present in schools are those who have difficulties. The HSCL co-ordinator supports parents in resolving these difficulties and provides parents with information on adult courses.

Policy rhetoric emphasising parents as partners has been accompanied in the literature by a search for ideal partnership arrangements. Pugh and De'Ath (1989, p.68) see partnership as 'a working relationship that is characterised by a sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate'. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision making and accountability. Hornby and Lafaele (2011, p.46) in agreement with Reay (1998) and Wolfendale (1983), argue that the use of the term 'partnership' is problematic as it 'masks the inequalities that exist in reality in the practice of parental involvement'. Swap (1993) identifies four partnership models, a protective model, a school-to-home transmission model, a curriculum enrichment model and a partnership model. Views on partnership relations with parents suggest that DEIS schools are operating between a protective model, where parents hand over responsibility for educating their children to the school, and a school-to-home transmission model where the direction of contact is from the school to the parents. Schools see parents as a resource for transmitting school values to children. The findings indicate that DEIS

planning is confined to a small number of key school personnel, with the HSCL co-ordinator mainly responsible for parental involvement. This suggests that Swaps' partnership model, which involves a whole school approach and commitment to working with families and communities, has not yet evolved in DEIS schools. The prevailing view that students in DEIS schools and their parents present with difficulties is according to Hornby and Lafaele (2011) a recipe for doomed partnership relations as it is based on the premise that one party is a problem.

There is little evidence to suggest that school personnel are involved in developing learning partnership relations with parents to advance student achievement. Ashton and Cairney (2001) maintain that the avoidance of consultation and collaboration with parents concerning pedagogical approaches highlight the power inherent in position, authority and discourse which have the potential to enhance or stifle debate. Ashton and Cairney (2001) found that while parents were invited to help in classrooms, to provide unpaid assistance for staff and supervise homework, they were less likely to be invited to share dialogue about their children's strengths and interests. Ashton and Cairney contend that what is important is that partnership discourses and practices be matched.

4.3 Specific school structures, and collaboration among school personnel, to promote parental involvement in their children's literacy and numeracy development

The data presented here reflect specific activities undertaken by HSCL co-ordinators, JCSP co-ordinators, and class teachers with the aim of involving parents in the development of their children's literacy and numeracy. Data in relation to parent associations, parent- teacher meetings and educational courses for parents is also presented and analysed in this section.

4.3.1 HSCL co-ordinators, JCSP co-ordinators, class teachers

The principal of Ash College encourages a team approach in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy and parental involvement. The HSCL co-ordinator posts a pack to each incoming student containing books and numeracy materials prepared by the mathematics department. The importance of good literacy and numeracy skills is

emphasised at induction meetings and parents are informed when JCSP literacy and numeracy initiatives take place during the year. According to the principal few parents attend events as *'they are day time and parents are either working, or they are involved with younger children, and the distance is also a problem'* (Principal: Ash 3: 3-4). Alternative means are found to ensure the success of initiatives. Fifth year students may carry out paired reading with first year students. Parents are invited to monthly student award presentations organised by class teachers and year heads, but the HCSL co-ordinator notes they do not attend. Parents are no longer invited due to the poor response.

A JCSP reading initiative 'Who Wants to be a Word Millionaire' is designed to encourage parents read for short periods each evening with their child over a period of approximately six weeks. Words are counted for an entire class group and tracked on a trend graph which is displayed prominently in the college. A workshop for parents takes place before the initiative begins and an award ceremony is held for the class group when the target is reached. The JCSP co-ordinator notes that parents did not attend an introductory workshop but some did sign diaries *'to say they have completed this many words or that many words'* (JCSP: Ash 3: 8-9).

According to the HSCL co-ordinator when a 'Maths for Fun' initiative took place special needs assistants had to *'man the tables'* (HSCL: Ash 9:43) as parents were not available to assist. A similar lack of response from parents occurred during a 'One Book One Community' collaborative reading project which involved staff, students and parents in nineteen schools all reading one book and taking part in activities related to the book. The HSCL co-ordinator says that while parents are invited to *'come on some of the trips, they do not take up the offer very often'* (HSCL: Ash 1: 25-26). A 'Drop Everything and Read' (DEAR) project involves the whole school, including the principal, reading silently for a short period of time on an appointed day each week. Mathematic teachers have worked collaboratively in the organisation of a homework club focusing on numeracy and a mathematics week.

Pre- and post testing measures improvements in literacy standards following the completion of literacy initiatives. When asked if individual student improvement, or lack of improvement, is communicated to parents the JCSP co-ordinator says '*I am not sure if that is. I would not personally communicate that as the JCSP co-ordinator*' (JCSP: Ash 5: 4-5). Improvements are communicated to staff at monthly JCSP profile meetings. Collaborating with parents, in relation to recommendations made in student assessment reports regarding literacy and numeracy, does not occur but the principal agrees that this is necessary '*if we are trying to talk reality*' (Principal: Ash 4: 7). All teachers send JCSP postcards home which the HSCL teacher sees taking pride of place in the homes she visits. The JCSP librarian organises a compulsory 'Book in Every Bag' initiative and encourages students to bring newspapers home for their parents. Parents are encouraged to borrow books and, when requested, the librarian will order books for parents. The HSCL co-ordinator perseveres in organising after school activities, which include literacy development, in conjunction with other schools. Few parents attend for information sessions regarding these activities. In the absence of parental involvement within the college the HSCL co-ordinator advises parents to provide a space for homework, to check their child's school diary, and oversee well presented work. The JCSP co-ordinator maintains that involving parents has to '*be very piecemeal and to be very slow*' (JCSP: Ash 10: 13). However, she has witnessed a large turnout of parents at third year JCSP graduation ceremonies '*when they receive the JCSP profile and the reference*' (JCSP: Ash 8: 33-34).

The principal of Beech College agrees that collaboration among staff in a school where students are disadvantaged is very important. The principal has observed some teachers who are less good at collaborating, but in relation to DEIS considerations '*it is a combination of a small staff, the same people, and lots of committees*' (Principal: Beech 5: 18-19). Instead of visiting homes the HSCL co-ordinator in Beech College makes every effort to involve parents in school life. Thirteen parents meet for one hour each Wednesday in a parents' room and are involved in a variety of activities such as producing a newsletter entitled 'Parents Connect', examining school policies, including those related to literacy and numeracy, or on occasion attending classes with students.

Parents make suggestions for inclusion in the newsletter, but it is typed and produced within the college. As far as the parents are concerned, the HSCL co-ordinator says *'it was they who did it and they were very proud of it in the end'* (HSCL: Beech 3: 10-12). Classes attended by parents include a 'Cook In' where parents and their children cook together. Literacy and numeracy development takes place as recipes are read and meal costs are calculated. A 'Working Together' booklet, to encourage interaction between students and parents in relation to literacy and numeracy development in the home, is compiled by the HSCL co-ordinator. The 'Working Together' booklet, successful with eighty percent of parents *'is fun literacy and numeracy activity'* (HSCL: Beech 3: 23). Transition year students check the books each week. The HSCL co-ordinator is involved in induction for first year students and organises fun days for parents during the year. A HSCL notice board in the staff room ensures that staff are aware of very specific and targeted plans to keep parents on board. Targeted literacy and numeracy plans include 'Maths for Fun', now being replaced by 'Science for Fun', and a 'One Book One Community' project promoted by a local committee of parents, teachers and principals. The HSCL co-ordinator, who has a telephone answering service, also uses webtexts, and letters to organise appointments in the school with the least engaged parents. The JCSP co-ordinator, in admiration of the HSCL teacher says, *'she doesn't stand still'* (JCSP: Beech 6: 23), *'she is forever going outside the box to extend herself and extend her area and make sure we all toe the line behind her'* (JCSP: Beech 6: 28-29). The HSCL co-ordinator works independently while organising parental involvement activities. She says *'I kind of came up with a lot of my own initiatives'* (HSCL: Beech 4:1). Formerly 'Maths for Fun' was organised by the HSCL co-ordinator in collaboration with mathematics teachers and parents. The JCSP co-ordinator points out that despite all efforts made by the HSCL co-ordinator to involve parents in the school *'you only get a little group all the time, and sometimes you will get the same group coming back and then maybe you will get two extra the next time'* (JCSP: Beech 3: 8-9).

The JCSP co-ordinator focuses on the administrative aspects of her role in terms of student profiling and organising JCSP celebrations. She encourages staff to send positive messages home regarding students on specially designed JCSP post cards. She informs

english teachers when funding is available for literacy initiatives but does not help organise these initiatives. A 'DEAR' reading initiative, involving the entire school reading in silence simultaneously, has been organised. The JCSP co-ordinator does not ask parents to be involved in paired reading or paired mathematics. She says *'it hasn't occurred at the moment but I don't see any reason why it couldn't happen. Obviously nobody has thought to do it but may do it in the future'* (JCSP: Beech 7: 18-20). The JCSP co-ordinator, who is a mathematics teacher, fears that parental involvement in a new Project Mathematics syllabus will be limited as a result of the high standard of literacy required to interpret questions. Parents are not informed regularly if students' literacy and numeracy levels are below standard. The JCSP coordinator says *'maybe it is something we will do next year because, as I have said, we have had a couple of meetings this year about our DEIS targets and whether we are meeting them'* (JCSP: Beech 5: 4-6).

In Hazel college the principal identifies collaboration and the sharing of resources between school personnel such as the JCSP and HSCL co-ordinators. Barriers being broken down through team-teaching the principal regards as *'tremendously successful'* (Principal: Hazel 5: 9). Parents were informed at a recent parent teacher meeting in Hazel College that a 'Book in Every Bag' JCSP initiative has been introduced, and the principal stresses the idea of literacy homework in an attempt to engage parents. Parents are encouraged also by the JCSP co-ordinator to read with their child at home during a 'Reading Challenge' literacy initiative. Some parents become involved in making displays for a JCSP 'Make a Book' exhibition held annually in Dublin City Council Offices. Less confident parents, according to the JCSP co-ordinator, will attend student award celebrations as *'they are seeing their son succeed and they are also seeing that we are friendly and nice and we are not austere'* (JCSP: Hazel 3: 29-30).

The HSCL co-ordinator accepts that he could collaborate more between teachers and parents regarding student progress. He considers that teachers need to take ownership of literacy and numeracy initiatives. He sees his role *'as providing information about these things'* (HSCL: Hazel 8: 17) and acting as an intermediary between teachers and parents.

The HSCL teacher, however, is optimistic that a ‘One Book One Community’ project which he aims to organise for students, parents and teachers will be successful, as he sees it as *‘a great process, it’s a complete community thing, the local library will be involved, there will be active retired groups’* (HSCL: Hazel 13: 1-2). A ‘Safe Talk’ on mental health awareness, organised by the HSCL co-ordinator in Hazel College, is heavily subscribed unlike coffee mornings for parents of first year students. The HSCL teacher maintains that rather than just dropping children at the gate and *‘not come near the place again’* (HSCL: Hazel 14: 41-42) it is important that he invites new parents for refreshments as early as possible in the new term. He advises parents to check that homework is complete and that school journals are signed. He tells parents that students *‘need organisational skills and this is what we can do within school, but the other eighteen hours a day it’s your job, and what you need us to do to help you make that work’* (HSCL:Hazel 8: 37-40).

In Larch College the HSCL co-ordinator approaches parents with mutual respect and understanding. A parents’ room, resembling a living room, with books and catering facilities, has been developed *‘for parents to realise that, yes, you are important in your school. There is a room allocated to you when space is at a premium’* (HSCL: Larch 4: 12-14). The JCSP co-ordinator considers the parents’ room as neutral territory for students in difficulty or for parents to chat. Care team meetings and parent association meetings also take place in the parents’ room. Parents attend the college for a transition programme and when student psychological assessments are being conducted.

In Larch College all junior cycle students participate in the JCSP programme. The JCSP co-ordinator explains the JCSP programme to parents at induction meetings for first year students by doing *‘a small presentation and we would have some brochures to give parents’* (JCSP: Larch 5: 37-38). The guidance counsellor gives feedback to teachers on literacy and numeracy transition test results. Learning support recommendations made on assessment reports are not shared with parents as the principal says:

We are ok at sharing it with teachers. Having the discussion with the parent can be more difficult and I don't think we are overly good at that. We leave it historically to the feedback they get from the psychologist post assessment (Principal: Larch 8: 9-12).

The JCSP co-ordinator reports that parents have not approached her, or resource teachers, when their child experiences literacy or numeracy difficulties. This may result from parents having literacy difficulties themselves or that some parents *'would see it as something that was school business'* (JCSP: Larch 3: 29-30). It is obvious, however, that some parents assist with homework as students admit when they have got help at home. The JCSP co-ordinator is also aware of some first year students *'whose mum would read novels to them at night before they go to bed'* (JCSP: Larch 4: 8).

Parents are informed of literacy and numeracy initiatives organised in the school but are not invited to be involved. The idea of parents reading with students at home has not been promoted. The JCSP co-ordinator does not consider it necessary to collaborate with parents, or the HSCL co-ordinator, regarding literacy and numeracy development. She says *'in general no that has not been the procedure to date. Now that is not to say that we would not be open to that, it is just not the way we have done it so far'* (JCSP: Larch 3: 20-22). The JCSP co-ordinator is confident that individual teachers emphasise literacy and numeracy skills within their subject areas. She points out that the HSCL co-ordinator attends JCSP meetings, is aware of literacy and numeracy initiatives being organised, and that the JCSP library is available for a parent *'who is keen to read with their child or to come and access books'* (HSCL: Larch 2: 47-48). Parents are invited to attend the third year JCSP graduation. This is a significant event for parents and for students as they progress into senior cycle.

According to the principal of Spruce College the HSCL co-ordinator is not involved to a huge extent in literacy and numeracy development with teachers, or with parents. In the past paired reading involved *'adults who are not necessarily the parents of the existing students'* (Principal: Spruce 3: 6-7) but were parents of former students. The HSCL co-

ordinator organises classes for parents, and coffee mornings, but the principal argues that coffee mornings need to be well structured and parents need a sense of purpose *‘I don’t know if they work that well to be honest with you. I think parents need a purpose to be in here and I have mixed feelings about it’* (Principal: Spruce 5/6: 50/1).

Spruce College HSCL co-ordinator describes her efforts to involve parents. She facilitates induction sessions and gives advice to parents on how they can be involved in their child’s learning at home. A literacy and numeracy booklet, compiled by five schools, is given to incoming students. Students receive certificates on completion of the books as they transfer to Spruce College. The aim is to try and *‘get them already into the mode of doing work at home’* (HSCL: Spruce 2: 13-14). Packs given to students and parents include a dictionary and a novel which can be used in school and at home. A resource teacher disseminates transition test results and assessment report recommendations to teachers but not to parents. The principal says *‘we would not have a policy of sitting down with the parent and discussing it at that level immediately when they come in.’* (Principal: Spruce 2: 11-13). Progress in class is discussed with parents at parent-teacher meetings.

The HSCL co-ordinator describes initial attempts at organising a book club as a failure, due to lack of parental commitment. A revised plan envisages students reading the chosen book in school while parents read it at home. A small number of parents will be asked to volunteer for paired reading of the book with weak students. The HSCL co-ordinator considers that the additional task of promoting literacy and numeracy means that *‘other things suffer but I would think that there is a great sense of achievement when it’s delivered out to the students’* (HSCL: Spruce 6: 26-29). The JCSP programme is offered to all students in Spruce College regardless of ability. The HSCL co-ordinator, the JCSP co-ordinator, teachers, and the librarian collaborate if paired reading is being organised and also during a ‘One Book One Community’ reading project. Mathematics teachers and HSCL co-ordinators from Spruce College, and two other secondary schools, collaborated in the production of worksheets for a mathematics booklet given to first and second year students. Team-teaching occurs with individual classes in the JCSP library.

Parents are invited, according to the JCSP co-ordinator, regardless of what is happening. The response from parents however is poor as the JCSP co-ordinator says *'they do come in for celebrations, we did 'Make a Book', and we wanted to show the parents and it was a very poor turnout'* (JCSP: Spruce 6: 24-26). The principal recognises the need to follow up invitations personally with parents and the importance of the class teacher's relationship with parents. The principal is convinced that parents are more willing to attend end of year JCSP graduations. The JCSP co-ordinator agrees that a large number of parents attend the third year JCSP graduation where students are presented with a profile, containing details of all learning targets achieved over three years, and a school reference. The JCSP co-ordinator, however, recognises the need to explain the JCSP programme to parents as they have said at graduation ceremonies *'this is great stuff that has been going on for three years and you know we weren't really sure when we were getting these postcards what it was all about'* (JCSP: Spruce 6: 31-33).

The JCSP co-ordinator, who is also a class teacher, maintains that there is little evidence to support the fact that parents are involved directly in their child's learning. In her subject area she emphasises keywords which students must comprehend and learn how to spell. As homework *'parents are asked to check their spellings, but it is quite obvious on the most part, that they don't'* (JCSP: Spruce 4: 14-15).

4.3.2 Parent associations

The success of a parent group in Beech College is not reflected in parents' enthusiasm to become involved in the college's parents' association. The principal of Spruce College reported that a very small group of parents were involved in policy development following the school's effort to re-establish a parents' council. The principal finds that the school is *'calling on the same parents all the time'* (Principal: Spruce 4: 19-20). During a DEIS evaluation Department of Education and Skills inspectors met a parent group which was supplemented by additional parents the principal had persuaded to attend. The principal reported that it is increasingly *'harder to get a cross section of parents to come in'* (Principal: Spruce 4: 21-22). Similar views were expressed by Ash College and Larch College.

4.3.3 *Parent-teacher meetings*

A parent-teacher meeting for each class group takes place during the academic year usually in January when the results of internal examinations can be discussed. To ensure greater attendance an open school for all year groups was organised in Ash College. Parents complain of not having enough time with each teacher. The JCSP co-ordinator in Beech College is also critical of parent teacher meetings which allow a brief time for parents to discuss their child with teachers. The public nature of these meetings leads to embarrassment for parents when information about their child is negative. Parent-teacher meetings, according to the HSCL co-ordinator in Hazel College, can be frightening and the expectation exists that the teacher will be dictating. In order to gain discrete knowledge about their child the HSCL teacher sees the merits of getting parents into the school for less formal occasions *'and feeling they are safe here and that they belong here and they are valued'* (HSCL: Hazel 13: 33-34). The principal of Larch College observes that supportive parents attend parent teacher meetings and also help students with learning at home. The principal is interested in analysing the reasons these parents attend and thinks that this may be due to *'lots of communication and lots of effort and time within pre-meetings to make sure you get as good a turnout as you can'* (Principal: Larch 8: 27-29). Parent teacher meetings are flexible in terms of time with separate meetings for examination classes. Child care is organised and is availed of by lone parents. To speed up the process open parent teacher evenings have been replaced with appointment times to meet with tutors and year heads. Parents can meet other teachers on request. To ensure a good response from parents the principal of Spruce College has changed the structure of parent teacher meetings. Students now attend with their parents to discuss academic reports. Parents however *'just meet the class teacher who would have all the results and comments from all the teachers'* (Principal: Spruce 6: 41-42). Changes are being made this year to allow parents speak directly to individual teachers. This may be the only contact some parents have with the school.

4.3.4 Educational courses for parents

Parents are offered courses free of charge in Ash College but the principal states that *'the uptake is not huge for day time courses, they are mainly patronised by retired people seeking to just enhance skills, and maybe IT, but by and large not by parents of our kids'* (Principal: Ash 2: 15-18). Personal development talks from agencies such as the Dublin Adult Learning Centre and courses for adults such as cookery, computers, keep fit classes and evening hobby courses are organised but, according to the HSCL co-ordinator *'they don't really in this school seem to work'* (HSCL: Ash 2: 44). Courses for adults are not provided in Beech College. Inviting parents to attend classes with students is not ruled out in Hazel College. The principal indicates *'we have dipped our toe a little bit in it. You do have to set it up in such a way as it is not threatening at any level'* (Principal: Hazel 5: 17-19). Courses for parents have not been discussed in Larch College but the principal sees it as *'something that could be looked at'* (Principal: Larch 3: 26-27). The HSCL co-ordinator sees the need to work with the adult education coordinator within the college and to steer parents in the direction of courses in the community, or in a nearby College of Further Education. The JCSP co-ordinator describes a parent self-help group which the HSCL co-ordinator had previously organised. Parents participated in cookery and other therapies. This time out for parents helped them support their child. The HSCL co-ordinator in Spruce College organises workshops for parents on a variety of topics. A motivational course is now delivered by a parent who had taken an active role in her daughter's school. The HSCL co-ordinator thinks that *'when parents do that course they become so positive that that rubs on their children'* (HSCL: Spruce 10: 3-4). An adult literacy service is located in the college. The principal explained that parents of existing students do not attend and the literacy service *'runs independently of what we do'* (Principal: Spruce 3: 23). Art classes are not successful as parents do not attend consistently. The JCSP co-ordinator observes that *'they came the first week and then they all started dropping away'* (JCSP: Hazel 5: 26-27). If literacy problems are identified in the home the HSCL co-ordinator encourages parents to attend an adult education literacy programme in the school, or she makes parents aware of opportunities for parent classes in the wider community.

4.3.5 Specific school structures, and collaboration among school personnel, to promote parental involvement in student literacy and numeracy development analysis

Specific structures in schools to promote parental involvement in schools, and engagement with student learning, which emerged from the data include the HSCL scheme, the JCSP programme, a pastoral care system, parent associations, parent-teacher meetings and adult education programmes. Inconsistencies exist between schools in relation to how school personnel interpret their roles within these structures, and the degree to which these structures serve the needs of disadvantaged parents in supporting their child's literacy and numeracy development. DEIS schools have access to DEIS guidelines and checklists (Appendix 8 p. 229) to aid the setting and implementing of targets in relation to literacy and numeracy development and partnership with parents. It is left to DEIS committee members, however, to interpret the guidelines and tailor plans to suit their individual school. According to participants parents, due to lack of interest or inability to become involved in their child's learning, tend to see school professionals as educational experts and responsible for their child's academic achievement. Delegation of responsibility for children's learning to the school has no legislative consequences similar to legislation which penalises parents who fail to ensure that their child attends school regularly. The absence of specific legislation governing parental involvement, according to Hornby and Lafaele (2011) leads to uneven practice within schools. If schools and parents are to work together in productive partnerships government policy must be accompanied by appropriate action, such as strategic implementation, information dissemination and training. In-service training is provided for co-ordinators of specific programmes within schools. Insufficient practical training exists for teachers, as subject specialists, to promote parental involvement. Ideas for implementing DEIS objectives in relation to literacy and numeracy development, and partnership with parents, are shared during in-service training for programme co-ordinators. This contributes to similarities in approaches adopted by HSCL and JCSP co-ordinators to promote parental involvement. Attempts to broaden the participation of parents in school life, including involvement in literacy and numeracy initiatives within schools, are not successful. HSCL co-ordinators have different interpretations of their roles in relation to

the development of literacy and numeracy. Where HSCL co-ordinators do get involved in these areas similar initiatives, such as 'Maths for Fun' and 'One Book One Community' are developed in schools despite a poor response from parents. Schools, however, are slow to adjust their plans.

HSCL co-ordinators attend induction meetings for first year parents, and in two schools HSCL co-ordinators organised literacy and numeracy materials packs for incoming students. Parents are advised to supervise homework and where literacy deficiencies are noted parents are provided with information regarding adult literacy classes. Throughout the academic year HSCL co-ordinators aim to visit the homes of at risk students, particularly the homes of students with chronic absenteeism. Parent rooms have been developed, the most successful of which is in Beech College where a parent core group meets each Wednesday. Parents are invited to coffee mornings, which are not well attended, and JCSP graduation ceremonies which parents do attend.

A number of evaluations of the HSCL scheme (Ryan, 1994, 1999; Conaty, 2002; Archer and Shortt, 2003) have been conducted, and a policy document *From Vision to Best Practice* was published by HSCL co-ordinators in 2006. Heeney (2006) argued in this publication that the improvement of literacy and numeracy is a central concern for the HSCL scheme using a collaborative whole school approach. Materials need to be designed and adapted and incentives created for parents to attend courses. The findings in this study suggest that HSCL co-ordinators may not work collaboratively in schools and may consider the additional task of involving and guiding parents in the development of literacy and numeracy as beyond their remit.

In DEIS schools most if not all junior cycle students are involved in the JCSP programme. Students track their progress through clearly defined learning targets within each subject, and are awarded a detailed profile containing all statements of learning achieved at the end of third year. Additional funding is available for schools to promote the development of literacy and numeracy and also involve parents in these areas. In the case study schools parents are informed when JCSP literacy and numeracy initiatives are

taking place but not necessarily invited to become involved, due to a poor response from parents in the past. The perception exists in schools that parents see the development of literacy and numeracy as the work of the school and not their responsibility. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) argue that because students from disadvantaged areas present with poor literacy and numeracy skills, and are also reluctant to attend school, it is imperative that schools in these areas take the lead in implementing effective parental involvement strategies.

The degree to which JCSP co-ordinators involve themselves directly in organising literacy and numeracy initiatives varies within the case study schools. In Beech College the expectation is that these initiatives are the responsibility of English and mathematics teachers. Parents attend JCSP graduation ceremonies at the end of third year, but in Spruce College parents indicated they were unsure about what the JCSP programme entails. JCSP co-ordinators, who are also subject specialists, collaborate with other teachers in the incorporation of learning targets in their teaching strategies. The findings suggest that parents are not aware of these learning targets and not involved in supporting their children in the achievement of these targets in the home. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) distinguish between parental involvement and parental engagement in student learning. Henderson and Mapp (2008) point out that parental engagement occurs when parents are involved in supporting learning in the home. Involving parents in the achievement of literacy and numeracy learning targets within the home, and giving parents all the information to go with this, is a way of ensuring that parents are engaged in what Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) describe as developmentally appropriate involvement strategies. Attendance at JCSP graduation ceremonies would prove to be far more meaningful and fulfilling for parents if they had, with school guidance and support, been actively involved with their child in the achievement of JCSP learning targets.

A collaborative approach to teaching and the development of literacy and numeracy skills among students is encouraged by principals in the case study schools. Collaboration occurs in the organisation of literacy and numeracy initiatives, DEIS planning, sending postcards to parents, team-teaching, the development of resources, and liaising with

school librarians. According to Gordon and Louis (2009) where teachers indicate that they have a school environment where they practice shared leadership, student achievement is higher. Collaborating with and guiding parents in relation to how they can become involved in supporting their children's literacy and numeracy development is, however, generally not well developed in DEIS schools. Transition test results, recommendations regarding learning support strategies made on assessment reports, pre- and post initiative test results and children's overall literacy and numeracy standards are not shared with parents on an ongoing basis. In an examination of how leadership styles affect a principal's openness to community involvement to improve student achievement, Gordon and Louis (2009) conclude that a culture of openness to community needs to be reflected in teachers' sense that they and parents are sharing the work of educating children.

Ongoing collaboration with individual parents is mainly the task of the HSCL co-ordinator and class teachers. Class teachers, in a pastoral role, are frequently in touch with parents regarding disciplinary issues, academic progress and absenteeism. The class teacher in Spruce College, who is also a subject teacher, maintains that parents do not oversee homework and are not engaged in learning in the home. Warren and Young (2002) argue that parents become increasingly frustrated with dialogue between the school and home is mainly concerned with behaviour and not how to assist with learning. Parents who are continually called upon to attend post-primary schools to deal with disciplinary issues become disillusioned and distance themselves from schools. Disciplinary problems dominate discussion with school personnel while essential academic information, which needs to be shared between schools and parents, fails to be discussed on an on-going basis.

DEIS schools have particular difficulties forming and sustaining parents' associations in DEIS schools. To comply with legislation regarding school governance each school must have a functioning board of management, parent association, and student council. In an examination of types of citizen participation and non-participation Arnstein (1969) identified a typology of eight levels of participation: manipulation, therapy, informing,

consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Informing and consultation progress to the level of ‘tokenism’ that allow citizens to hear and have a voice but lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded. When participation is restricted to these levels there is no assurance of changing the status quo. Partnership enables citizens to negotiate, delegated power and citizen control allow full managerial power. Failure to sustain parent associations in DEIS schools result in disadvantaged parents’ ‘voices’ being unheard. The parent ‘voice’ is limited also at parent-teacher meetings, despite the fact that all case study schools indicate they are prepared to review strategies used to encourage good parental attendance at parent-teacher meetings which take place once each academic year. Efforts are made to streamline the process, but parents complain of not having enough time to discuss their child with individual teachers.

The response from parents to attend adult education courses in DEIS schools is generally poor. A small group of parents have attended a limited number of classes with students in Beech College and a motivational course in Spruce College is popular with a small group of parents. However, where adult education courses are offered they are not necessarily attended by the parents of existing students. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) point out that a parent’s decision to become involved in their child’s education varies according to their construction of the parental role and also the belief that they have the skills or sense of self-efficacy for helping their child succeed. DEIS schools have opportunities for adult education but other demands and responsibilities, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), will influence a parent’s decision whether to become involved. If DEIS schools are not succeeding in attracting disadvantaged parents into schools to participate in courses efforts must be made to find out from these parents, who may want to improve their sense of self-efficacy in helping their children, how schools can best make appropriate educational provision to serve the needs of parents. Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009, p.44) recognize that there is a great variety of ways in which parents are engaged in schools but argue that gains in learning can only be achieved if there is a direct link between parental engagement *for* learning, *through* learning and *about* learning. Parental engagement *for* learning occurs when schools take specific steps to

connect parents to classroom learning. Parental engagement *through* learning occurs through parent education classes, and parental engagement *about* learning occurs when parents actively engage with teachers and students to understand more about the process of learning.

4.4 Barriers to engaging parents in students' learning

The following diagram (Fig. 5) illustrates the main findings which school participants perceived as barriers to engaging parents from disadvantaged communities in their children's learning.

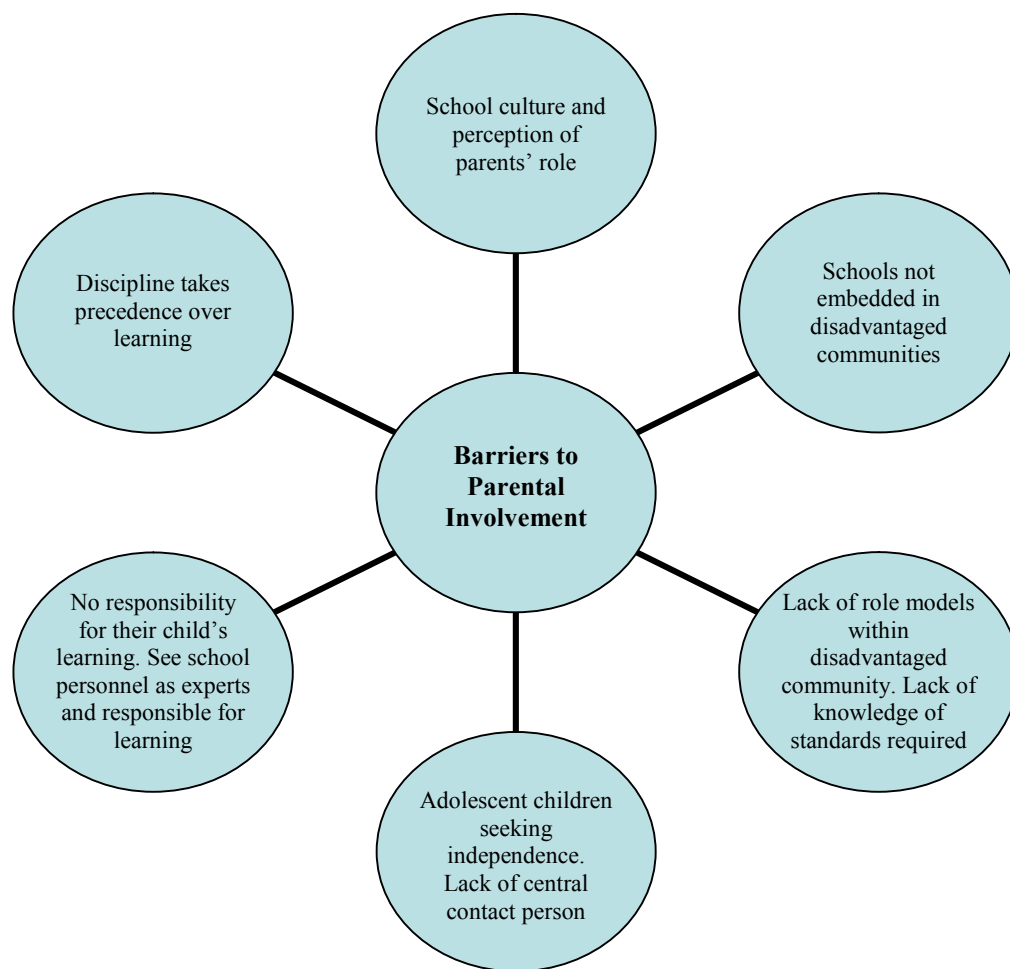


Figure 5 Barriers to parental involvement

4.4.1 School culture and perception of parents' role

The Ash College principal perceives parental involvement as *'traditionally like the parents' council and parent teacher meetings and keeping them informed'*, (Principal: Ash 6:12-13). Asking parents to become like *'mini teachers'* (Principal: Ash 6: 19) will not happen until parents are more educated and are aware of their child's needs. Schools will need *'to be patient'* (Principal: Ash 5: 3) and will require assistance if awareness is to be raised among parents of the important role they play in supporting their child's learning.

The Beech College principal agrees that *'there's probably not enough going home'* (Principal: Beech 6: 33-34) from schools to equip parents with information and skills on how they can support the curriculum at home. The JCSP co-ordinator fears that progress is slow as the school attempts to increase standards of literacy and numeracy standards. The JCSP co-ordinator says *'I don't know that we are achieving as a DEIS school, as a JCSP school. I have huge reservations'* (JCSP: Beech 4: 45-46).

The Hazel College principal considers that parents who have not been through the education system are intimidated by the post-primary educational system and *'feel that their skills are no longer useful and are often embarrassed'* (Principal: Hazel 1: 32-35). The HSCL teacher maintains that parents see their child's education as the teacher's function particularly when they are not aware of how to contribute. With guidance, however, and by making them *'feel part of the process'* (HSCL: Hazel 9: 19) parents will see opportunities for experiential literacy and numeracy learning in the home. The HSCL co-ordinator argues that post-primary teachers, as subject specialists, may consider it not their function to address delayed literacy and numeracy levels.

The principal of Larch College speculates that there may be *'an attitude or culture out there whereby our kids do not do homework and our kids are not expected to achieve and changing that culture is a very slow process'* (Principal: Larch 2: 6-8). The majority of parents, the principal thinks *'want to help but are unsure as to how to help'* (Principal: Larch 2: 12).

The HSCL co-ordinator in Spruce College continually talks to the most marginalised parents about their child's future. She considers that parents may be willing but unable to get involved or perceive that their children can *'fend for themselves more'* (JCSP: Spruce 7: 42) in post-primary school. The HSCL co-ordinator is convinced that this is the time that disadvantaged students *'need more structure, need more guidance and kind of discipline, for want of a better word, so it is kind of a vicious circle'* (JCSP: Spruce 7: 44-45). The JCSP co-ordinator, who is also a class teacher, is unsure if schools should take the lead in providing that structure as she says *'I don't know how you would go about it. My way around it is to keep constantly in touch and whether it is good or bad they (parents) always know what's going on'* (JCSP: Spruce 8: 4-6).

4.4.2 Schools not embedded in disadvantaged communities. Lack of role models

Ash College is not located in Dublin's inner city where most of its school population originates. This is seen by the HCSL co-ordinator as a barrier to parental involvement. The HSCL co-ordinator maintains that within disadvantaged communities families can be in crisis, there is a lack of role models and little understanding of what is required to be successful in education. She measures her work with the most marginalised parents in small incremental steps and instead works directly with the student and other adults, such as youth workers, in the student's life. She perseveres in making parents aware of educational choices within their community and of opportunities for involvement within the school.

Students in Beech College are also from outside its immediate catchment area. The school incorporates the disadvantaged community, from which its students originate, by using facilities such as a public library and swimming pool, and also stage a musical in a community centre. In relation to the development of literacy and numeracy the JCSP co-ordinator maintains:

You have to have people going out into the community to help those parents that don't know how to parent, and are probably struggling with their literacy and numeracy levels themselves. If we don't do that for these children I'm not sure we'll be able to improve their life (JCSP: Beech 8: 32-36)

The Hazel College principal is concerned that, despite the fact that a lot of parents do read, increasingly there is a lack of a role model of a reader in homes so students '*do not value reading as a past-time*' (Principal: Hazel 2: 16). Parental encouragement of reading, the principal argues, often stops at the end of primary school but it is imperative that the child continues to have a positive attitude when they enter post-primary school.

The principal of Larch College has observed that for parents whose child may be the first in a family attempting a leaving certificate, they are unaware of the academic standards required, and therefore have unrealistic expectations. In order to increase attainment levels, Larch College is currently attempting to build from the bottom up by putting much emphasis on junior students with induction and ongoing meetings with parents.

The HSCL co-ordinator in Spruce College agrees that parents who have not gone through the education system are not aware of the standards required. Students are retained up to leaving certificate level, parents have ambitions for their children but they '*leave the homework issue and the study issue to the school*' (HSCL: Spruce 1: 36-37).

4.4.3 Adolescents as a barrier

The HSCL co-ordinator in Ash College notes that adolescent students may not want their parents in the school. She observes that in disadvantaged communities some students grow up very quickly, are living very adult lives and allowed '*take responsibility for their own decisions*' (HSCL: Ash 7: 39). When parents loose control absentee rates increase and her involvement must take a more indirect route, such as working directly with the student or other significant adults in the student's life.

The HSCL co-ordinator in Beech College attempts to involve parents as soon as students transfer from primary school before the adolescent stage of resistance to parental interference sets in. She maintains that '*when they come in they are still in sixth class in their minds and if you can get parents this year, and it is interesting, the children are quite happy about it*' (HCSL: Beech 7: 14-17). The JCSP co-ordinator points out that:

it has to be a very unusual child that is able to cope through all the transition from primary to secondary, and cope with all the different subjects and all that is asked of them, if they do not have support (JCSP: Beech 2: 35-37).

The Hazel College principal agrees that some parents *'allow the child to dictate a lot as they get older'* (Principal: Hazel 2: 4) therefore parental involvement must *'mature into a different kind of support* (Principal: Hazel 1: 25). Parents need to encourage their children to see that literacy is not just associated with torturous schoolwork but is essential as a life skill. The HSCL co-ordinator argues that a delicate balance exists between busy parents, adolescent students who want independence, peer influence and the variety of demands made by teachers in post-primary schools. Where demands from different teachers are inconsistent the HSCL co-ordinator is convinced that *'one crack in the system it's amazing how many children get through, the tiniest little crack'* (HSCL: Hazel 12: 11-12).

The principal of Larch College agrees that as students reach adolescence parents consider their children old enough to stand on their own two feet and increasingly lack confidence in being able to intervene in their learning. This may be due to the fact that *'in primary school the parent is only dealing with a small number of people'* (Principal: Larch 7: 21-22). The HSCL co-ordinator agrees that *'something happens in second level whereby engagement is dropped off and it is really difficult to kind of re-engage with parents again'* (HSCL: Larch 5: 12-14). Adolescent students present with a complex variety of learning and emotional needs which parents, who are familiar with learning styles, interests and hobbies, can help to unravel.

The principal of Spruce College recognizes that when parents, who are experiencing difficulties, are faced with assertive teenagers who are seeking independence *'the parents back off for wanting to try and cope with it'* (Principal: Spruce 4: 38-39). The JCSP co-ordinator argues that a partnership relationship between home and the post-primary school needs to continue until the leaving certificate is achieved as teachers, who become

increasing familiar with students' learning needs, are aware of the supports required. Instead of a decrease in parental involvement parents and post-primary schools need to work in unison more than ever.

4.4.4 Responsibility for student learning- schools or parents?

The principal of Beech College, who associates student absenteeism with poor achievement, proposes serious legislative consequences for parents who are responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly. The principal of Larch College suggests that failure to engage in their child's learning may stem from parental lack of interest, families being in crisis or reluctance to engage in ongoing negativity in relation to their child. Lack of support from parents, the principal considers *'a hard nut to crack'* (Principal: Larch 7: 31). The Larch College HSCL co-ordinator points out that parents, who had negative experiences in school, who are also early school leavers in a single parent family living in a poverty trap, will relinquish their role to professionals whom they see as experts. Parents who do not consider themselves as equal partners feel ill-equipped to converse with professionals as there is a *'power disparity, knowledge disparity and professional disparity'*. It is *'up to professionals to recognise the imbalance ability wise, skill wise, linguistically wise, language wise, literacy wise, status wise'* (HSCL: Larch 1: 35-38). Larch College JCSP co-ordinator observes that despite the fact that the college is welcoming, and parents are free to visit or telephone and discuss their children, parents she says:

Do not see the responsibility for their child's learning as resting with them. If you inform them of initiatives they don't really see it as something they should be participating in, although they are supportive and they want their children to do well (JCSP: Larch 6: 9-14).

The Spruce College principal is critical of parents who allow casual absenteeism which she maintains delays progress, particularly in mathematics. The principal agrees that parents relinquish responsibility for student learning to the school. She agrees that required standards of academic work should be demonstrated to parents and that parents

are requested to oversee well presented homework. The principal points out that at a minimum parents are asked to sign diaries but says:

it sounds blatant to say that parents give up, it is just as if there is some change in attitude when they do move into second level and maybe we don't do the same as the primary schools approach it (Principal: Spruce 7: 8-11).

4.4.5 Discipline takes precedence

Schools, according to the HSCL co-ordinator in Hazel College, are continually in contact with parents when their child presents with disciplinary problems. Compliant children of average ability may not get the same degree of attention. He says:

a good decent child that comes in and does their best is slipping through the net because they're not attracting attention. A lot of parents aren't aware of the true capacity of their child because a teacher's priority is, am I being allowed to do my job rather than has this fella achieved his book age (HSCL: Hazel 2: 38-42).

The JCSP co-ordinator suggests that parents of challenging students see the school 'as the big monster' (JCSP: Hazel 6: 29) following repeated visits in order to discuss ongoing behavioural problems. The Spruce College principal agrees that '*parental involvement in many ways is more around discipline because kids are suspended and we ask them to come in and for year heads, unfortunately the role has become a lot around discipline*' (Principal: Spruce 3: 44-47). The Larch College JCSP co-ordinator also points out that contact with parents is greatest when students present with special educational needs or poor behaviour. The JCSP co-ordinator, who recognizes a '*fine balance*' (JCSP: Spruce 8:18) between learning and good behaviour, argues there is insufficient time to discuss learning issues with parents when discipline becomes a priority.

4.4.6 Barriers to engaging parents in students' learning analysis

The data indicates that complex and contradictory expectations exist between DEIS schools and parents from disadvantaged communities. Schools recognize that there is a need to move beyond present tokenistic practices of involving parents but are slow to change. There is a perception that parents need to be more educated in order to support their child's learning, yet parental participation on educational courses is low. Parents are perceived as delegating responsibility to schools due to being unsure of how to support their children's education. Schools are aware of the need to change their approach in supporting parents but seem unsure of what steps to take. Schools seem to replicate strategies implemented in other schools without questioning their success. School personnel may need assistance and training in developing meaningful learning partnership relations with parents. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall see the need to improve teachers' sense of efficacy for parental involvement, blaming the limited training offered to teachers. Students need to be encouraged by teachers to seek parental help. Student invitations may be implicit (parent observation) or explicit (requests for help). Parents may act spontaneously if for example a student is asked to write a letter to a grandparent. Atkin and Bastiani (1988) suggest that training teachers to involve parents should be included in both initial teacher training and in-service training.

While DEIS schools are improving their own practices to raise literacy and numeracy standards there is an acceptance that change will be slow due to the disadvantaged students and communities they serve. Two schools are located some distance from where their student population originates. This is perceived as limiting parental involvement. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) agree that a determiner of the level of parental involvement is decided at political level in the way school systems are organised. In New Zealand schools have catchment zones which means that the majority of students attending these schools live near the school. Where school zones do not operate in schools, as in Ireland, students travel considerable distances to attend schools of their choice. Despite the fact that Beech College's catchment area is some distance away this does not militate against the school reaching out to that community by using facilities such as the public library and staging a musical in a civic centre. Dyson and Robson (1999) propose that schools

should be a resource for the community rather than the community as a resource for the school. By holding events in the school Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) contend that the idea is being reinforced that parents are expected to be responsive to the school. The meaning of parental engagement means different things to the school and to parents. Parents and students focus on support for students but school staff look towards supporting the school in their work with students. School culture, therefore, according to Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) creates dissonance between what parents and students want and what the school offers them.

Schools consider that there is a lack of role models in children's lives in disadvantaged communities and also a lack of awareness of the literacy and numeracy standards required to progress academically. Parents are ambitious for their children but may not identify the school as a resource for them in raising standards due to a lack of awareness. Schools are also not reaching out to communities to the degree that is possible if deliberately planned. HSCL co-ordinators are proactive in informing parents of educational opportunities which exist in communities but greater links may need to be created between schools and outside agencies so that the provision of adult education is tailored to the needs of parents and their children. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005, p.73) argue that learning partnerships for social inclusion should take Bourdieu's theory of social capital into account and that learning partnerships must work *with* and not just *for* disadvantaged groups.

The fact that students are moving into an adolescent stage of development is perceived as a barrier to parental involvement. Parents in crisis may allow their adolescent son or daughter take more responsibility for decisions regarding their own lives. This desire for independence from their parents, peer influence and inconsistent demands from many teachers in post-primary schools can lead to disorganisation and lack of effort at a crucial stage in adolescents' lives. Despite participants seeing adolescents as a barrier to parental involvement, Deslandes and Cloutier (2002) argue that over three-quarters of adolescents they surveyed were willing to communicate with their parents about school and ask parents for advice for projects. Eccles and Harold (1993) also disagree that parental

involvement declines as children move into secondary school. Adolescents may want greater autonomy but they still need to know that their parents support their educational endeavours. Klauda (2009) contends that evidence shows that parental support for reading continues to relate to children's reading motivation in adolescence despite the common view that parents play a less important role in their children's lives in many ways during this developmental period.

4.5 Other aspects of parental involvement influencing student achievement

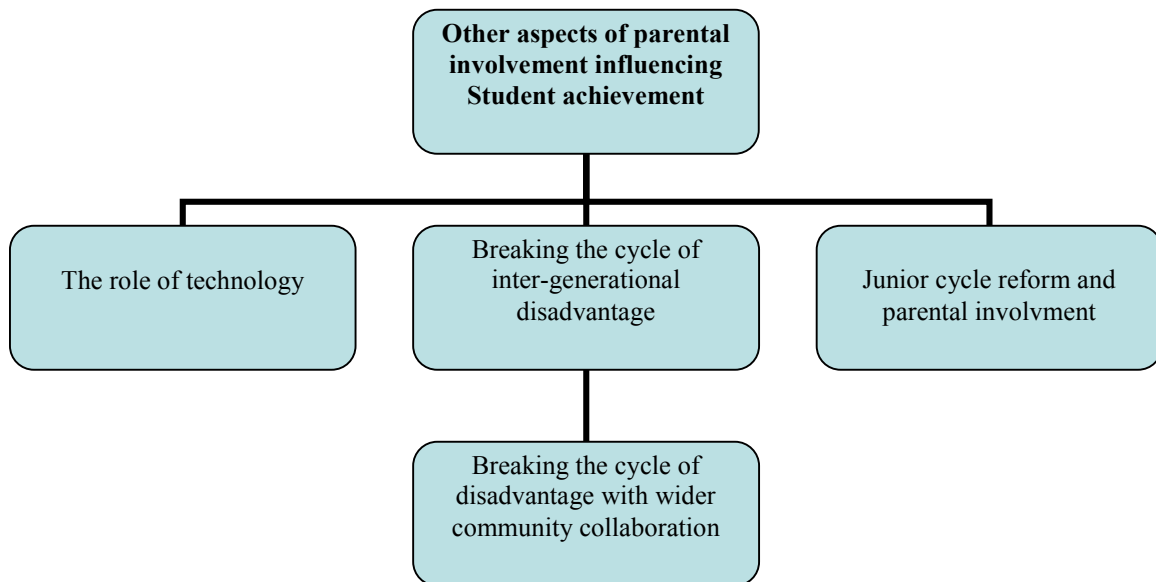


Figure 6 Other aspects of parental involvement influencing student achievement

4.5.1 The role of computer technology

Letters, text messages and a weekly newsletter are used in Ash College to stimulate communication between parents and their children about learning. The HSCL teacher is considering that as ownership of laptops increases *'an internet and email for beginners might get parents into the school'* (HSCL: Ash 4: 21-22). Beech College conducted a survey on the availability of computers in the home and found that most families had computers or laptops. The principal sees the merits of emailing assignments to students and their parents. The principal in Hazel College is in the process of encouraging students to take their own laptops into classes and sees the need for computer courses for parents. A web texting system is used in Larch College to inform parents regarding student

attendance and junior cycle students have printed versions of their textbooks on individual iPads. The principal sees the benefits of sending work home as attachments to emails if students are absent as a way *'of increasing contact and continuity with the school and the parents too'* (Principal: Larch 2: 33-34). The principal considers that the potential computer technology has is *'phenomenal'* and when iPads were introduced for students they were introduced he says:

as a community based initiative as much as a school based initiative. People who have difficulty in literacy and numeracy you can even have it read to you, you can set the speed at which it reads, and people can learn and develop their literacy and numeracy skills in their own home at their own pace (Principal: Larch 6: 30-44).

The HSCL co-ordinator sees the importance of raising digital literacy standards and sees the iPad as *'a Pandora box of wonderment'* (HSCL: Larch 6: 32-36).

4.5.2 Junior cycle reform and parental involvement

The principal of Hazel College sees junior cycle reform, which involves teachers assessing their own students, as *'simply a money saving activity'* (Principal: Hazel 2: 31) and fears that junior cycle students in DEIS schools will be more disadvantaged if parental support is lacking. The principal suggests that a parental guide should accompany each new syllabus. As the new junior cycle curriculum aims to promote learning how to learn, the principal of Beech College argues that more than ever disadvantaged families and schools need to work together. Left to their own devices in the completion of project work students with delayed literacy will, according to the HSCL co-ordinator in Hazel College *'just about possibly scrape a D you know and it's nothing to do with any sense of knowledge or anything, it's purely to do with access to literacy'* (HSCL: Hazel 4: 6-8). Larch College principal considers that strengths can be found in every student, regardless of literacy and numeracy standards, and that the new Junior Certificate will give the flexibility of offering short courses, to build on these strengths, which can be linked to Post Leaving Certificate courses already offered in the college.

4.5.3 Breaking the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage

As principal for many years Ash College principal has observed improvements resulting from many initiatives and investments made in housing, crime rates and retention in schools. He considers that students' *'readiness and willingness and desire for learning'* (Principal: Ash 7: 30) has improved. He speculates that this may be due to modern twenty-first century teachers and their desire to make a difference in the lives of children, and an improvement in the quality of parental involvement. The HSCL co-ordinator in Hazel College considers that if disadvantaged students achieve a leaving certificate this is more than their parents achieved and *'if a generation goes one step beyond its previous generation then they will have succeeded'* (HSCL: Hazel 10 : 2). The HSCL co-ordinator in Larch College is concerned that he still observes children transferring from primary school where poor habits are *'already engrained and small progress is being made'* (HSCL: Larch 3: 47-48). Spruce College HSCL co-ordinator has observed an increase in the number of students achieving a leaving certificate and progressing to college over her twenty years of service. Despite the fact that a variety of schemes and programmes are paying off at this point the HSCL co-ordinator observes an increase in a drug culture, particularly among young men, which stops them continuing in school.

4.5.4 Breaking the cycle of disadvantage through wider community collaboration

Ash College HSCL co-ordinator informs parents of opportunities in the community for parents to become involved in literacy, such as the Dublin Adult Learning Centre, Community Education Schemes, Read and Write, and a Stretch to Learn Programme in the National College of Ireland. Back to Education courses are available within the college but parents do not attend. The HSCL co-ordinator collaborates with agencies in the community such as the North East Inner City (YPAR) programme which is an inter-agency initiative that brings together statutory, voluntary and community services to meet the needs of young people at risk. Parents must be willing to participate and can avail of parenting programmes. In the absence of parental involvement within the college the principal believes that *'there are many older people in this area, aren't necessarily parents of our kids, but would only be too willing to put something back into education for nothing and we should be exploiting that'* (Principal: Ash 3: 26-28).

The HSCL co-ordinator in Beech College makes parents aware of a Strength in Families programme, Read and Write schemes and basic Irish and English classes as well as *'non-threatening classes such as art, yoga and flower arranging'* (HSCL: Beech 5: 7-8).

Parents need non-threatening group activities first to get to the stage where they will ask for help with reading. The HSCL co-ordinator in Beech College sees the 'One Book One Community' initiative as a significant community literacy intervention. The book is launched in a public library, book clubs are set up during the initiative and a closing celebration takes place in a community centre. The Hazel College HSCL co-ordinator is familiar with a 'Steps to Personal Excellence' programme which is aimed at empowering parents and encouraging them back to education. The programme is now organised by a parent who participated ten years ago. This HSCL co-ordinator has been approached by retired people in the community *'who have time on their hands and want to do something'* (HSCL: Hazel 4: 16-17) and are willing to volunteer in the school. Parents with literacy problems in Larch College can be referred to a literacy coordinator in a nearby college of further education. In relation to literacy projects in the community the HSCL co-ordinator says that *'as home school people we bounce off one another, exchange phone numbers, conversations, points of contact, expertise'* (HSCL: Larch 7: 22-24). Persuading parents to participate in courses is a key part of a HSCL co-ordinator's role. Larch College describes this as a difficult area as he says:

You are dealing with human beings and you are trying to bring them along and it is intergenerational disadvantage and it is cyclical poverty. This is not a place for a Messiah (HSCL: Larch 3: 28-30).

The JCSP co-ordinator in Hazel College maintains that a national media campaign *'should be bombarded at parents'* as *'the worst parent in the world wants the best for their child'* (JCSP: Hazel 7: 22-23). Hazel College principal is also convinced that *'parents are only dying to know what to do to help'* (Principal: Hazel 2: 42-43). The principal describes middle-class parents as the *'insiders'* who know how the educational system works how to support their child but in contrast:

We don't let the working-class parents in on all of that sufficiently, and we don't almost nationally at system level properly educate the parents on how they can support their children. We are assuming that they know and blaming them when they do not do it, and it is just not the right way of going about it (Principal: Hazel 3: 13-16).

4.5.5 Other aspects of parental involvement influencing student achievement analysis

Other factors which emerge from the data include how advances in technology may improve home-school learning partnerships and the crucial role of parents within a reformed junior cycle curriculum. A variety of opinions are expressed in relation to progress being made in breaking the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage through wider community collaboration and the need for a national media campaign to promote parental awareness.

New developments in Information and Communication Technology are generally under-used in schools to promote literacy and numeracy among lower achievers (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 1997). While principals in this study regard the increased use of technology in the home an intrusion into homework time, they also argue that technology can be harnessed to improve communication with parents and subsequently between parents and their children in relation to learning. Bauch (1998) sees parental involvement as one of the most powerful means of improving school performance, however barriers of time and resources limit effective parental involvement. With technology teachers can provide remote access to the learning experience of the child. Blanchard (1998) points out that technology can serve the family-school connection in four ways, communication and information, learning and instruction, interest and motivation and resources and cost. Fundamental changes in the approach to the curriculum and assessment in junior cycle to improve the learning experiences of students will involve more independent learning, continuous assessment and project work. Participants in the cases study schools consider it vital that schools and parents work

together in supporting students. Technology may have an important role to play in linking teachers, students and parents as the new curriculum is implemented from 2014 onwards.

Cautious optimism is expressed by participants when asked to consider the combined impact of DEIS schools, partnership with parents, and developments within disadvantaged communities. Concerns are expressed that some students are still transferring from primary schools with poor habits already engrained. An increased drug culture is also a cause for concern. HSCL co-ordinators are proactive in informing parents of agencies which exist in their communities which provide family support, personal development opportunities, and adult education. Retired members of local communities have offered to help schools support student learning. To hasten the pace of improvements in disadvantaged communities a number of participants, fearing that existing problems will persist, agree that a national media campaign would help inform parents of the crucial role they play in influencing their child's education.

4.6 Summary

A small number of key personnel in DEIS schools are involved in planning and promoting partnership with parents with the HSCL co-ordinator taking overall responsibility. There is little evidence to suggest that parents play an active role in planning for partnership either at DEIS meetings or through parent associations. As disadvantaged students and their parents are perceived as having difficulties this gives rise to lower expectations in relation to overall student achievement. While DEIS schools are implementing internal strategies to improve literacy and numeracy standards, evidence does not exist which indicates that consistent productive learning partnership relations with parents are being promoted. Inconsistencies exist among school personnel, such as the HSCL co-ordinator and JCSP co-ordinator, in relation to the interpretation of their roles, in particular their role in the development of literacy and numeracy. Similarities exist between case study schools in relation to the choice of literacy and numeracy initiatives implemented as ideas between schools are shared. Literacy and numeracy initiatives aimed at parental involvement within schools are, however, not successful in attracting most parents. Schools are slow to change practices, they seem

unsure what steps to take, or are unaware of the need to do so. Parental involvement activities and events such as induction meetings, advice regarding supervising homework, attending adult education courses, as well as attending coffee mornings and graduations, are a means of involving parents but not engaging parents in their child's learning. Learning targets within subject areas in the JCSP programme, standardised test results, and educational recommendations within assessment reports, are not discussed with parents. Parent-teacher meetings, which occur once in the academic year, are not structured to allow parents gain comprehensive information in relation to their child's learning needs. Ongoing contact with parents occurs only when disciplinary or attendance problems arise. The perception exists that parents need to support school staff in their work with students rather than school staff providing support for parents in helping their child learn.

Among the factors which DEIS schools perceive as barriers to parental involvement in their child's education are poor parental educational standards, and adolescent students seeking independence. The lack of links with disadvantaged communities, insufficient role models in students' lives, and parents delegating the education of their children to schools, are also seen as barriers to parental involvement. DEIS schools recognise the potential of computer technology in improving parental involvement, and in the development of literacy and numeracy. School personnel see the need for greater parental involvement as the reform of the junior cycle curriculum is implemented. To hasten the degree to which inter-generational educational disadvantage is being addressed DEIS school personnel recognise the need for wider community collaboration and a national media campaign to drive home the message to parents that they play a crucial role in their children's education. The perspective of parents, and other participants from outside the five case study DEIS post-primary schools, in relation to key research questions are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Outsider Perspectives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from participants outside the five case study schools. To pilot test interview questions a focus group of JCSP co-ordinators, from outside the case study schools, give their views on home-school partnership relations developed in their schools, and also through the JCSP programme. The pseudonyms James, Mary, Anne and Sharon are used to protect the anonymity of these co-ordinators. A JCSP senior librarian gives her views on the use of JCSP library demonstration projects within thirty DEIS schools throughout Ireland. Three of the case study schools have libraries staffed by full-time JCSP librarians. The remaining two schools have developed their own libraries. A community literacy coordinator, whose name is Emma for the purpose of this study, is a former primary school teacher. She describes her involvement in the development of literacy within the community she serves. As outside participants, the perception of parents in relation to links between the school and home, their role as prime educators of their children, and their role in the development of literacy and numeracy, is explored in detail in this chapter.

5.2 Profile of parents

Greta's family arrived in Ireland eight years ago. Her son, who is in first year in post-primary school, completed all of his primary education in Ireland. In primary school Greta's son was withdrawn from classes, including Irish, for English language support. Greta is confident that her son speaks English fluently, is good at mathematics, but still struggles with spelling and writing. Her son is not exempt from studying the Irish language in post-primary school as he attended primary school in Ireland. Initially when her son went on summer holidays to his grandparents in Lithuania his mother arranged English lessons for her son. Now that his standard of English has improved he still reads English books but is also getting lessons in written Lithuanian. Clare, Deirdre, Karen and Lisa, whose daughters attend Beech College, participated in a focus group discussion. They are ambitious for their children and support their children's aim of progressing to third level education. Cora, whose twin sons attend Hazel College, owns a shop. She

worries about her sons' progress in school and considers that she was much more involved in her sons' primary school. Ellen's two sons attend Larch College. She left post-primary school following her Junior Certificate examination as she did not like her teachers. She has since worked in cleaning, catering, car manufacturing, and as a home help. Following her marriage, and birth of her twin boys, she returned to work as a home help but now works as a traffic warden for a primary school. Maria, whose five daughters have attended Spruce College, regards herself as a stay at home mother. Her oldest daughter attends Dublin City University School of Nursing and two other daughters are in further education programmes. Following her leaving certificate examination another daughter aims to study sports and leisure management and her youngest daughter, currently in third year, aims to become a physiotherapist.

5.3 Vision, purpose and planning for home-school partnership relations

Members of the JCSP focus group agree that students benefit when parents support the work done by schools. James says *'it is not enough that when they leave us at four o'clock that support stops'* (James: 1: 10-11). James sees that through the JCSP programme barriers between schools and parents can be broken down by using positive communication. Positive relationships are developed with parents when the JCSP programme is explained to parents at an induction meeting for first years. James says *'even that action is something they have never experienced before, where suddenly they are being involved and we are asking them for their opinion and support'* (James: 1: 35-37). Turnout varies from year to year for this special meeting following visits by the HSCL teacher to each home. Anne is less positive about the ability to involve parents in students' learning in DEIS schools. Some parents she feels are either not capable or not interested and visit schools only to solve problems of a disciplinary nature or otherwise. Sharon considers that home-school partnership can be developed by inviting parents into schools to participate in literacy and numeracy activities and she stresses the importance of training parents.

The JCSP librarian, who visits other JCSP libraries, describes positive aspects of the JCSP programme aimed at involving parents who may have had negative experiences

themselves in school. She says that the library project is *'consciously trying to flip that and engage parents for positive reasons'* (Librarian: 1: 16-17). Parents are informed through letters and postcards about the JCSP programme and attend celebrations, book clubs, creative writing sessions, storytellers or visiting authors.

When discussing home-school partnership relations within a focus group one parent in Beech College considers her presence in the school is appreciated by her daughter as *'it makes a difference to them when you are down doing something in the school'* (Deirdre: Beech 1: 13-14). Cora, who was an active participant on a parents' committee in primary school, is disappointed that the same degree of parental involvement is not promoted in Hazel College as she thought *'we'd be going to this school and we'd be all together and we'd be all helping out and fundraising and all that'* (Cora: Hazel 5: 5-6). When asked what home-school partnership means Ellen in Larch College said *'just to be more involved. A lot of parents won't you know, I don't think they feel intimidated but some of them couldn't be bothered because they are working, but I think they should be able to approach someone'* (Ellen: Larch 1: 5-8). She agrees that children *'come on leaps and bounds'* (Ellen: Larch 7: 3) when parents and schools work together and parents push for their child.

5.3.1 Vision, purpose and planning for home-school partnership relations analysis

In planning for partnership between homes and schools emphasis is placed on the need for parents to attend schools in order to receive information or respond to requests made for their involvement in school literacy and numeracy activities. When parents do not respond to these requests they are considered disinterested, or not capable of being involved. Parents too adhere to this perception of partnership. This may be due to an acceptance by disadvantaged parents that schools know what is best for student achievement, and the role parents should play.

According to Mannan and Blackwell (1992) a gap between families and schools developed as, historically, education became more controlled by schools and parents delegated responsibility to schools. A delegation model, however, was replaced by a

partnership model as students with a variety of abilities began to attend schools (Seeley 1993). Gradually the idea of parents as partners emerged as governments realised that in the interests of democracy, accountability, and the raising of standards, that responsibility for student achievement could not rest with schools alone (Kelley-Laine, 1998). A study (OECD, 1997) pointed out that standards improved when parents were shown how to support students more effectively at home. JCSP co-ordinators, the school librarian and parents perceive parental involvement as well developed if parents are responsive to the needs of schools. Parents do not seem to be aware that schools could be more supportive in helping them to support their child's learning at home.

Ideal home-school partnership relations have been the subject of much research (Epstein 1986; Ashton and Cairney 2001). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) observe that the issue of parental involvement in education is notable for extensive policy rhetoric but a variation of its implementation in schools. This gap has come about as a result of the influence of factors at the parent and family, child, parent-teacher, and societal levels, and act as barriers to the development of effective partnership relations. The view of partnership shared by DEIS schools and parents is that parents support the work of the school. An OECD study *Parents as Partners in Schooling* (OECD, 1997) sees a difference in the goals and agendas between families and schools. Parents' goals focus on improving their child's performance, wishing to influence the ethos or curriculum within schools, and a desire to understand school life. Teachers focus on parental assistance with homework, providing a supportive environment in the home, raising money and attending school events. Adelman (1992) sees home-school relations as being based on an agenda of socialisation with schools attempting to shape parental attitudes to support the work of the school. O'Brien and O'Fathaigh (2005, p.70) see education as a 'field' that sets its own rules that regulate behaviour. Working class parents may not have the capacity to manipulate '*rules of the game*' and '*play the game without questioning the rules*'. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009, p.15) suggest that it is necessary to remove the idea that interventions won't work with 'hard to reach' parents and argue that parents' support for learning in the home is far more important to student achievement, and is '*still the most under utilized way of raising school performance*'.

5.4 School structures and collaboration to promote parental involvement in the development of literacy and numeracy

Among the school structures in place to promote parental involvement in the development of literacy and numeracy, which outside participants made reference to while being interviewed, were courses in Basic english and mathematics, the JCSP programme, the HSCL scheme, parent teacher meetings, and parent associations. In relation to courses for parents, organised in collaboration with the HSCL teacher, James says *'we don't approach in the sense of saying to parents you have no qualifications. We kind of put, you know the curriculum has changed so much since you were in school this is just to help you when your child comes to you with maths'* (James: 3: 20-23). James maintains that there may be duplication of courses offered by his school and in the local community. He is critical that collaboration between different agencies, in relation to the provision of these courses, does not occur. James agrees that literacy or numeracy standards or the results of standardised tests are not discussed with parents at parent-teacher meetings. The parents' association in his school may influence school policy in relation to the use of mobile phones and the wearing of uniforms, but would not have any input into literacy or numeracy policies.

Sharon, who is a JCSP coordinator for five years, maintains that an invitation to parents for a reading challenge workshop was the first time in her school that parents attended for a literacy initiative as *'it is just not done'* (Sharon: 4: 41-42). Anne complains of a lack of collaboration in her school in relation to parental involvement and DEIS planning. She says *'in my school I have no knowledge what goes on with our home school liaison officer, absolutely no idea what DEIS plans are in place'* (Anne: 3: 33-35). In relation to helping parents to support their child's learning Sharon agrees that *'we don't help them at all. For those who take the time to come into us we share information or any resources we have with them, but it would probably stop at that'* (Sharon: 6: 16-20). Sharon maintains that poor collaboration among teachers in post-primary schools in relation to the provision of homework leads to parents complaining that students are not getting enough. Sharon points out that this may be explained by the fact that JCSP students may

be allowed complete homework in class as teachers continually complain of homework not being done.

According to the librarian *'family literacy is within the remit of the HSCL teacher but very much our librarian's also'* (Librarian: 2: 22-23). She has witnessed book clubs, crafting courses, paired reading, 'Maths for Fun', and information and communication technology courses for parents, in the libraries she visits. The librarian thinks that HSCL teachers are *'complemented hugely if there is a librarian that they can work with. The library is an ideal venue, they have all the resources, they have all the support of a qualified librarian to facilitate whatever partnership might be arranged'* (Librarian: 2: 39-43).

Greta considers that the partnership relations she experienced with her son's primary school were better than those with Ash College. The highly structured approach to the learning of English in primary school was appreciated by Greta. Now that her son's spoken English has improved Greta thinks that he should be given more difficult books to read in post-primary school as the books seem to be *'for a seven or six year old child with huge letters and lots of pictures'* (Greta: Ash 5: 28-29). Greta has not spoken to the school about this as she wants her son to concentrate on the Irish language. Greta has decided to allow her son attend a homework club for Irish rather than continuing trying to support him at home as she finds this *'very stressful, tears sometimes and we just had to slow down'* (Greta: Ash 5: 10-11). Greta is not familiar with the JCSP programme and has not attended celebrations or award ceremonies in Ash College. Her only memory is of attending the college for a parents' meeting where she had to sign *'lots of rules'* (Greta: Ash 6: 44). The school is always texting her but she does not recall getting invitations in relation to English or maths events which she would attend.

The parents in Beech College consider the fact that students are allowed accompany their parents to parent-teacher meetings as more informative in relation to their child's progress. Parents are critical that transition test results, or the results of educational psychological tests, are not discussed with them. Deirdre points out that most parents will

not ask for this information. Karen agreed that she would work with her child before entering post-primary if she knew her literacy and numeracy skills were delayed. Parents had not given any thought to the idea that schools could support and guide parents in relation to literacy and numeracy development. One parent described being allowed attend computer, mathematics and cooking classes with students as *'brilliant'* (Deirdre: Beech 13: 5). All four parents in the focus group are involved in a parents' group which meets every Wednesday. They enjoy participating in photography and producing a newsletter 'Parents Connect' which is sent to parents three times per year. It is described as *'from parents to parents which we send home, so that they get told that this is happening in the school'* (Deirdre: Beech 1: 27-30). The HSCL teacher asks parents to complete a literacy and numeracy 'Working Together' booklet at home with their children and to assist in a 'Maths for Fun' programme. Parents in the focus group are not aware that Beech College has a JCSP coordinator but are aware of a 'Drop Everything and Read' JCSP reading initiative which involves the entire school reading in silence.

When asked her opinion on home school partnership relations with Hazel College Cora agreed that this benefits students but is not convinced that it is promoted enough. Cora has attended Hazel College for parent teacher meetings, and to discuss disciplinary problems in relation to her two sons. She does not involve herself in her sons' education, and has not been given any learning guidelines from the school on how to help, despite the fact that one son has hearing difficulties and the other son, who Cora claims cannot recite the alphabet, received one-to-one learning support for six weeks. Cora was not informed of the results of transition tests on entry to first year. This concerns her as her sons needed extra help in primary school with english, mathematics and Irish, they currently have difficulty keeping up with class work, and find themselves in trouble. Cora wants her sons to complete a leaving certificate programme but thinks that they are poor readers and one son, who is left-handed, writes illegibly. Attempts made by her daughter to help her brothers have been unsuccessful as *'they just don't come in with nothing, they've no interest in school'* (Cora: Hazel 7: 17-18). Cora has not heard about a JCSP programme in the school and has not been asked to volunteer for reading initiatives such as paired reading. Cora finds parent teacher meetings unsatisfactory as she has

difficulty seeing all teachers in a two hour period. Her husband accompanies her for this reason. Cora was unaware that one of her sons had chosen to drop French until it was discussed at the parent teacher meeting. The possibility of intervening in her sons' learning at home has not occurred to Cora. She has not considered that her sons become members of a local library, or that they read during the summer holidays, or at weekends. In relation to numeracy, Cora says we *'have our own shop and Sean does the markets as well, so the children have to go help, so they learn Maths that way, they would be good at Maths'* (Cora: Hazel 5: 35-37).

In Larch College Ellen's two sons are in the first year of their leaving certificate programme. Ellen has continually taken an interest in all aspects of their learning. During their years in primary school she participated in paired reading and paired mathematics which she considered helped her also as she was *'kind of trying to get the brain going again'* (Ellen: Larch 4: 35-36). Ellen notes that parents are encouraged to be more actively involved in primary school than in post-primary school. She has no hesitation, however, in contacting the HSCL teacher, or the receptionist, in Larch College on behalf of her sons. Ellen recognizes that her sons struggle with Irish and one son has problems with spelling. She finds teachers very helpful and willing to give extra tuition, after school hours, before examinations.

Ellen is unaware of the existence of a JCSP programme as she says *I don't really know what that is* (Ellen: Larch 5: 25). Sending postcards to parents containing positive messages about their children is an initiative within the JCSP programme. Despite not being aware of the programme Ellen is proud to receive such postcards. Ellen has volunteered to join a newly formed parents' association. She is convinced that parents are more at ease approaching her for information than approaching school staff.

In Spruce College Maria is very appreciative that the school has organised a reader, under the reasonable accommodation in state examinations scheme, for her dyslexic daughter. As her daughter has problems with comprehension and spelling Maria was proactive in organising consultations with a speech therapist. Maria explained *'I got her into speech*

therapy and the speech therapist did say that Lauren did store things differently in her brain, and did explain the whole scenario to me (Maria: Spruce 5: 43-45). Maria attends a workshop on adolescents organised by the HSCL teacher with ten other parents. She says it is *'about interacting with your teenagers and conflict resolution, resolve issues and set boundaries and rules'* (Maria: Spruce 1: 3-4). She is unaware of the JCSP programme but has heard about the new project mathematics syllabus from the HSCL teacher. Maria is willing to be involved in paired reading with students in the school if requested to do so. She sees the importance of building relationships with her daughter's teachers by attending parent teacher meetings as she thinks her daughter will *'succeed better if the parent backs them up'*. (Maria: Spruce 2: 19-20).

5.4.1 School structures and collaboration to promote parental involvement in the development of literacy and numeracy analysis

Existing school structures, collaboration in relation to partnership with parents, and the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills, lack co-ordination and coherence. Despite the fact that they are informed about the JCSP programme at induction meetings, parents are not aware of specific learning targets within each subject area. While the parents interviewed are willing to be involved in literacy and numeracy initiatives they have not been invited to do so. JCSP postcards, informing parents of improved attendance, or number of books read, are well received by parents.

Collaboration between school management, the HSCL teacher, JCSP coordinator, teachers, and JCSP librarian needs more focused DEIS planning. There is a need for relevant opportunities for parents to understand their child's learning needs, and relevant opportunities within schools for parents who wish to improve their own literacy and numeracy skills. Collaboration is also required between schools and community agencies to avoid duplication of courses on offer, and also to ensure that courses are relevant to the specific needs of students and parents.

Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) propose that what is needed is empowering schools that have the will, skill and persistence and that broad areas of activity and

dedicated programmes aimed at engaging parents are identified and implemented. In a revised representation of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement, Walker et al. (2005) say that the psychological factors underlying parental involvement behaviours focus on parent's motivational beliefs, parents' perception of invitations from others and parents' perceived life context. DEIS schools' perception that parents see school as responsible for education is not revealed by parents who display a positive self-efficacy, and feel they have a contribution to make. School participants in this study report an unwillingness by parents to attend school literacy and numeracy events. Parents interviewed did not indicate this unwillingness to attend for such occasions. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005) point out that parents are more likely to respond if school invitations indicate to parents that their involvement is welcome and useful, and that invitations include clear manageable suggestions for parents' home-based support of the child's learning. Schools also need to assign work which specifically involves parents, as parents become involved when their child asks. Psychological factors influencing parental involvement such as lacking time and energy to support their child's education were not manifested in parent interviews. Parents were resourceful in seeking help from other family members when they perceived that their own abilities were insufficient. The evidence suggests that parents are involved productively regardless of educational background. The question arises if it is school personnel who fail to invest the time and energy to ensure that parents are systematically engaged in order to advance student achievement. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005, p.40) suggest that school and parental involvement efforts often *'miss the mark'*.

For parents to gain appropriate information regarding their child's learning needs adequate time, to meet with teachers, and other specialists within schools, needs to be allocated. Parent-teacher meetings, as they are currently structured are not serving this purpose. Parent 'voice' is also lacking within school governance structures as parents are not likely to be consulted regarding planning for literacy and numeracy development and improvement. Given appropriate guidelines, parents may be the best advocates for other parents due to close networks within disadvantaged communities, and a willingness to listen to each other, rather than accepting the dictates of an organisation within which

they may have had negative experiences themselves. This lack of connection results in parents being powerless to act, they are unwilling to upset the status quo, and therefore relinquish responsibility for their child's learning to school experts. In the context of Epstein's six typologies of parental involvement (1995) parents in this study have not reached the fifth stage of involvement in decision-making, governance and advocacy, which in turn affects their involvement in the sixth stage involving collaboration and exchange with community organisations.

Parents are aware of their child's strengths and weaknesses but attending parent-teacher meetings, simply for the purpose of building relationships with teachers, is not sufficient if home-school learning partnerships are to be educationally meaningful. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) say that parent-teacher meetings provide a good example of how the goals and agendas of parents and teachers can differ and can act as a barrier to the establishment of effective parental involvement. Differences in goals create conflict which results in frustration as each party seeks to maximise its own agenda. Parents may believe that teachers are seeking a superficial relationship and are only concerned with addressing problems rather than working towards solutions. This disparity between the goals of parents and teachers, according to Hornby and Lafaele (2011) can result in poorly planned attempts to increase parental involvement.

5.5 Barriers to engaging with schools which parents experience and parent involvement choices

During a JCSP focus group discussion Anne expresses the view that parents are responsible for the creation of barriers between schools and home due to their own fear or hatred of schools or *'just embarrassment because they did not achieve themselves'* (Anne: 6: 42-43). Sharon suggests that *'schools do have to be open to engaging with parents as well'* (Sharon: 7: 2-5). Anne argues that communication with parents must be non-threatening and school policies on parental involvement should be communicated to parents. Anne is critical that school reports are sent to parents but further contact with parents occurs only as a school need arises. Parental involvement with learning is not communicated. She maintains that parents have unrealistic ambitions for children with

delayed literacy and numeracy levels due to a lack of knowledge of the educational system.

The librarian considers that there are many parents who say they want to support their children but do not have the means to do so. Parents do not understand the course work and are fearful. The librarian points out, however, that parents can encourage their children to reach their potential. Through an accelerated reading programme librarians and school staff can calculate students' reading success in percentages as students write books reviews, and the number of words read are counted. For adolescent students success such as this can be celebrated with parents, giving students the confidence and knowledge that they are capable.

Emma, a former primary school teacher and now a community literacy coordinator, identifies many barriers to engaging parents in student learning. Some families have a lot of real life issues going on that take their time and concentration. Parents, who had poor school experiences, want the best for their children but may fail to make the connection between achievement and school attendance. Poor literacy and numeracy levels among parents lead to feelings of inequality when collaborating with schools, which in turn makes it more difficult to support children at home. Parents, who have no perception of what is required for their children to negotiate their way successfully through the educational system, and need route maps connecting attendance to literacy and numeracy development, and state examinations. Some parents fail to see a connection between home and school learning, and feel their only duty is to deliver their child to the school gate. Inter-generational unemployment makes it *'very difficult for kids to see the regularity of the work ethic that is needed to be a good student at school'* (Literacy Co-ordinator: 2: 21-23). Emma is convinced that if parents have not been involved with their children's education in primary school *'the chances of getting them to engage at secondary level are very low indeed'* (Literacy Co-ordinator: 4: 2-3). She is also critical of models of parental involvement rolled out in primary schools where parents are seen as useful helping with lunches, cake sales, fundraising, and an extra pair of hands for outings. She doesn't think that:

Parents have been treated with the respect that they deserve. They are hugely influential in relation to literacy and numeracy skills, and we don't take them on board, and we don't embrace what they are offering, and open the doors in a way that they are meaningful partners' (Literacy Co-ordinator: 4: 5-9).

Greta lives in Dublin's inner city and has observed other parents since her arrival in Ireland. She thinks that some parents are unable to help their children, and others are not interested in doing so. She is surprised that at school meetings parents complain about their children receiving too much homework. Greta accepts that she lives in a disadvantaged area and is not judging other parents as they may not understand the educational system, and may consider that the education of their children '*is the school's job*' (Greta: Ash 7: 40-41). When asked if Irish schools should expect parents to be more involved with their children's learning Greta says:

I think our society, you don't have to change the children, you have to change the parents, the way they are thinking. You know first parents have to understand how much more effort he is going to put at home, and the child education is more for the future. It is not that he has to run around and enjoy his childhood, the parents have to understand first and then it is going to come to the children, otherwise it is not going to work (Greta: Ash 8: 1-6).

Greta considers that, unlike in Lithuania, Irish parents are not ambitious for their children to go to a university or college. She points out that the least parents should do is supervise their child's learning in the home, and thinks that failure to do so is associated with economic and social influences, but also it '*depends on neighbourhood, very important, community, very important. I think the school has to work not only with the parents, but with the community as well*' (Greta: Ash 9: 42-44).

Parents in Beech College do not see adolescence as a barrier to involvement in their children's education as they transfer into post-primary school. The parents accept that their involvement in literacy and numeracy development in post-primary school is limited

by their lack of knowledge of curriculum content and point out that a lot of parents would avail of a course in mathematics *'and be able to say no, you did that one wrong, because I don't know if she did it wrong, because I don't remember the method. But I would love to say this is how they do this equation and that's how you do that, so I can check it'* (Karen: Beech 5: 27-30). The parents consider that homework given in primary school has clearer guidelines for parents. The parents suggest that in post-primary school spellings, in each subject area, could also be given for homework. Deirdre says her daughter looks for help and Clare points out that *'if they are doing an essay my daughter reads it out to me and I'd say what I think or maybe you should put this instead of whichever and she'd say yeah, or she'd say no, I think it's better that way, and I'd go if you think just go with what you think'* (Clare: Beech 9: 26-29). Deirdre, who frequently reads for pleasure, enjoyed reading with her children in primary school and suggests that this could be extended to post-primary schools. She says:

There was a little reading everyday and he enjoyed that reading more because it was fun, me and him just sitting doing it. He got to pick the book and bring it home and we would read it and then we wrote what we thought was good, or whatever he wanted to write about it, and it was brilliant. If you do something like that with the bigger kids it'd be great wouldn't it something that wasn't homework (Deirdre: Beech 8: 20-27).

Some parents Deirdre thinks are not interested in helping their children with homework as they find the task too troublesome. The fact that Beech College is located some distance from the students' homes is not considered a barrier to parental involvement. Lisa replies, *'sometimes a little step away can be the best thing that you're not always with the same people, it's nice to go and meet kids from different places as well and have school and parents from different places'* (Lisa: Beech 7: 2-4).

Cora, who was much more involved in primary, school thinks that *'when you get to secondary school doors there is a barrier put up'* (Cora: Hazel 9: 14-15). Cora also gets the impression from her sons that *'they'd only get slagged'* (Cora: Hazel 9: 22) if she was involved in the school. Despite being involved in primary school Cora now seems

unaware of how to help her sons academically in secondary school. She complains that *'they come home with no books, they come home with no pencils, nothing, they don't have homework, they don't have nothing'* (Cora: Hazel 5: 29-30). When Cora approached a former principal about this problem he pointed out that her sons must take responsibility for recording homework in their diaries. She considers that behavioural issues are emphasised more than students' learning needs. Literacy and numeracy standards are not discussed with parents. Cora says:

No, nothing at all, just about the child and how they're behaving in the classroom. It's not about what they need. It's just probably me but I find that they think that they are in authority and make me feel really small. That's just my opinion (Cora: Hazel 3: 28-30).

Cora considers that the reason for parents' lack of involvement in schools is due to shyness, and considers that parents would be involved if encouraged by other parents rather than the school staff. When her sons transferred to Larch College Ellen indicated that she was willing to be involved, if there was a problem, and the school needed her. Being sensitive to her sons' feelings as adolescents, she will inform them before approaching the school. Ellen maintains that some parents are not involved in learning in the home as they see this as the school's work. If parents are not involved Ellen is convinced that students will select easier options in school. She is critical of parents who allow their child choose the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and considers *'that is not good enough for him if he wants to go onto further education or he wants a job'* (Ellen: Larch 6: 12-13). Ellen observes that adolescents, who need a lot of direction, do not receive adequate attention from their parents if they are part of a large family. She is aware of a parent who discarded a school letter, informing parents about additional mathematic classes, without reading its contents. Due to close community networks Ellen considers that this situation may not arise if parents are involved in disseminating this type of school information to other parents.

Maria regards herself as a homemaker and has not worked outside the home. She has always been available for her children on return from school, supervises homework and sees *'keeping communication going with the school'* (Maria: Spruce 2: 2) as important. While Maria had no difficulties helping her children with primary school homework, she admits that this does not apply to post-primary homework. She seeks help from older children when working with her youngest daughter, who is in third year. Maria thinks that parents who do not get involved in their children's school work *'miss out on a lot of opportunities for themselves, never mind for their children and the schools. It is always too late when they find out and some of them just couldn't, they wouldn't be there you know'* (Maria: Spruce 5: 26-30). When asked why these parents are reluctant to become involved in their children's education Maria says *'but it would be lacking for their parents as well so it is a vicious circle that continues'* (Maria: Spruce 6: 44-45). Maria agrees that schools need to help break that cycle. Maria does not agree that adolescents do not want parental involvement in their education. She says:

In certain scenarios they don't but in other cases they like you to be involved. They like your input, they would ask your opinion on something. They could be reading something or they say they have a project for school and they would come to you at the start and ask you ... certain things they will come to you, and they will share, and you will put input. They pretend not to take it on board but they do, and they put it in their own words (Maria: Spruce 7: 7-12).

5.5.1 Parent involvement choices

Since her arrival in Ireland Greta has immersed herself in her own education and that of her son's. Having become reasonably proficient in the English language Greta now studies accountancy. She monitors her son's progress closely, is confident that he speaks English fluently but continues to have difficulty with spelling and writing neatly as she says:

Sometimes he is in a rush no one can understand what he wrote, plus spelling mistakes, all together is very very bad. So that is why sometimes we do one page on writing, we take a page from the book and he has to write' (Greta: Ash 4: 2-5).

Greta says her son is good at mathematics but the fact that her son is not exempt from studying Irish continues to cause much consternation for Greta, who has no knowledge of the language. When asked about parental responsibility and involvement in their children's education, Greta explains that in Lithuania much pressure was put on parents when students were weak academically as schools *'would be forcing and forcing the parents to do something about it'* (Greta: Ash 4: 37-38). This system led to a loss of self-confidence in the children. Greta is aware of the positive and negative aspects of the Irish and Lithuanian educational systems. Greta maintains that in Ireland the very weak get a lot of help but very bright students in a class may not benefit from this.

Responses from parents interviewed in Beech College indicate that they are actively involved in learning in the home. Clare sees the importance of a homework routine. She ensures her son and daughter complete their homework as soon as they arrive home from school. Deirdre feels confident helping her daughter with history *'because it's the same history that I learned in school'* (Deirdre: Beech 16: 8). When asked to identify ways in which mathematics can be incorporated into everyday activities in the home one parent identifies *'cooking is a great way of doing that'* (Deirdre: Beech 12: 20).

Cora involved herself in primary school for eight years with knitting classes, helping in the library, with 'Maths for Fun' and 'Science for Fun'. As she does not have a post-primary education Cora admits that the training she received in order to participate in these activities benefited her personally. An opportunity for Cora arose in primary school to complete a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) english course. An especially appointed teacher taught parents for two hours each Tuesday. Cora expresses an interest in pursuing further studies if given the opportunity. Her husband, who did not attend school, is dyslexic and *reads and writes backwards and he does maths, he does it the opposite to us'* (Cora: Hazel 11: 11-12). Cora expresses a willingness to help her sons if materials are supplied by the school. When asked how parents could be involved in Hazel College Cora says she would like to be *'able to go into the classroom and even sit with them and say, well pretend that they're helping us with our maths rather than we're*

helping them (Cora: Hazel 13: 30-31). As Cora's family owns horses her sons demonstrate a keen interest in reading books about animals. They also watch films and documentaries and seek information about animals on the internet. One of her sons enjoys history. According to Cora *'he's on about the war and all that, he just soaks up everything about that, you know and that is what will get him in the future'* (Cora: Hazel 8: 10-12). Cora thinks that Hazel College does not know about the students' interests unless they are in the top class.

A homework routine is well established in Ellen's home. Her sons are given half an hour to relax before going to separate rooms to complete homework. Ellen, who remained in school to achieve a junior certificate, is supported by her husband who has completed a leaving certificate. This is invaluable, according to Ellen when her sons need assistance, particularly with mathematics. Ellen sought help with mathematics from a teacher in Larch College when her sons were in first year, but now confines her attention to *'a bit of spelling or science'* (Ellen: Larch 2: 36). Ellen regularly signs and checks her sons' journals for comments as she says *'I find now that they would be giving the excuse, ah no, I did that in school, or they didn't do that in school and you have to stand over them and watch them or they would let it go'* (Ellen: Larch 2/3: 44-45/ 1-2). Ellen encourages her sons to read books and the daily newspaper. Sports pages are sought out in the newspaper and if a story appears about a familiar sports figure a conversation ensues. Ellen says *'I would say do you know him he used to live in Drimnagh and now look at him he is in prison or something and that would cause a conversation and then they would pick up the paper and read the whole thing, and they don't realise they are after reading it'* (Ellen: Larch 3: 30-34). Ellen believes that the love of learning is passed from generation to generation. She does not allow her sons the same freedom outdoors which her sons try to persuade her other children have.

Maria reads with her daughter Lauren who has dyslexia and encourages reading at every opportunity, for example reading signs when they are together shopping. Her daughters are not members of a public library, and do not read newspapers but, according to Maria *'it is harder when they have their phones and the internet'* (Maria: Spruce 3:41). When

reminded that the internet is good, as it involves reading, Maria says *'yes I never looked at that yes reading stuff on the internet is good I never thought of that'* (Maria: Spruce 3: 43-44). Maria sets a limit on the time spent on the internet when homework needs to be completed as she says *'you can't let the writing skill go you have to keep pen to paper you have to encourage that'* (Maria: Spruce 4: 23-24). Maria agrees that schools could do more to help parents recognise opportunities for mathematics in the home but realises that:

Yes there would be time like if you were cooking a turkey that you would have to weigh and you have to add twenty minutes for the pound. I was trained in the imperial method, and they have the metric, so now they go to their computer for their formulas and convert from imperial to metric (Maria: Spruce 4: 36-40).

Maria is involved in a parenting course in Spruce College and is aware of other courses available in the community through the HSCL teacher.

5.5.2 Barriers to engaging with schools which parents experience and involvement choices made by parents analysis

All of the parents interviewed, except Cora since her sons entered post-primary school, are motivated and involved in supervising and supporting their children's learning in the home. Their adolescent children have control over information regarding schoolwork and homework, which they transmit to their parents. Parents lack the scaffolding, and guidelines, required to challenge their children which schools could provide. A 'Working Together' literacy and numeracy activity booklet sent to parents from Beech College is relevant and appropriate to the learning needs of students, and also allows evaluative feedback to the school.

The adolescent stage of development is not perceived by parents as a barrier to their involvement in their child's education. The fact that parents are unfamiliar with coursework, and are depending on their children to filter information regarding homework and other school activities, is perceived as a barrier. Parents are unwilling to

embarrass their adolescent children by being proactive in seeking information from schools.

The parents interviewed did not express any fear or hatred of schools. Cora was the only parent who expressed a feeling of inequality. While parents agreed that they did not understand coursework, they expressed a willingness to engage with schools in overcoming this problem. Given the opportunity Cora has been willing to gain a qualification in English and expresses a wish to attend mathematics classes in Hazel College, and also participate in literacy and numeracy initiatives. The majority of parents interviewed indicated that they had attended post-primary school and had completed a Junior Certificate. The fact that the parents had not completed a leaving certificate may be seen as a lost opportunity or void in their lives which, given the right circumstances, they would like to remedy. Curriculum content and teaching methodologies have changed since parents attended schools. Parents are hearing about a new Project Mathematics syllabus, but there is no evidence to suggest that schools are liaising with parents regarding the new approach to the teaching of mathematics which makes the studying of mathematics more relevant to everyday living.

Despite the fact that parents of adolescents from disadvantaged communities are perceived by schools as either not interested or not capable of supporting their child's learning, all parents, except Cora are proactive in helping their children with learning in the home. Parental involvement within schools was more prevalent while children were in primary school. Greta sets strict targets for her son in relation to writing and learning the Irish language. Cora is disillusioned by her sons' lack of interest in home learning and seems unaware of how to intervene. Other parents encourage reading, set boundaries, have a homework routine and seek help from other family members, and from schools when a learning difficulty is diagnosed. Until it was pointed out to them parents were not aware of how household activities could be used as a means to develop literacy and numeracy skills.

Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005) see parent role construction as sets of expectations, or beliefs for behaviour, leading to patterns of ideas that guide choice of behaviours within specific contexts, and the interpretation of others' behaviour within those contexts. Roles also reflect a parent's understanding of their responsibilities within a context and range of behaviours which are appropriate in the context. Roles are socially constructed, contributors to role construction are subject to change, and individuals' role construction are also subject to change. Rather than adopting a passive role, seeing the school as mainly responsible for education, parents in this study are actively involved in their child's learning in the home, and are also supportive of schools. Parents' active role construction is partnership-focused, seeing both the school and parents as responsible for children's education. Cora could be seen as adopting both an active role in the past and a passive role now as her sons attend post-primary school, and she receives few if any invitations to be involved. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005) point out that role construction and self-efficacy are linked and where a weak self-efficacy, and a passive role construction exists, parents will not be involved in their child's education. As role constructions are subject to change by others who are influential in parental involvement such as schools, teachers, and the child, Dauber and Epstein (1993) say that a positive school climate and consistent invitations to be involved in learning in the home will influence parents' decisions. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005) identify specific steps to increase parent role construction. Schools need to offer specific information, develop strong listening skills, be adaptable and flexible and be consistent and interactive in their communications with parents. Specific steps can also be taken to increase self-efficacy by providing parents with specific suggestions, and giving parents feedback on the positive influence of their involvement, such as informing parents of post initiative test results. Schools should develop interactive homework assignments in addition to school-based involvement opportunities. Parents want an active role in their child's education but this study reveals that neither parents, nor schools, seem to be sure how to move towards a partnership model which Swap (1993) sees as a whole school approach towards involving extended family members, and community resources, to enrich the school's curriculum. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) see the need to empower teachers, and their sense of efficacy for involving parents. Many teachers hold positive

attitudes about involving families in students' education, but few receive training in how to develop collaborative family-responsive involvement practices. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) propose the creation of dynamic, systematic, and consistent school practices in order to improve home-school relationships.

Parents have ambitions for their children which in some cases are regarded as unrealistic by schools. Schools should liaise with parents in working towards and embracing those ambitions and not just ask parents to simply encourage children to reach their potential. Parents attend their children's graduation ceremonies in large numbers to mark important milestones. The level of achievement gained by students, along the academic path leading to this stage, would be greatly enhanced if home-school partnership relations were geared more specifically to student learning. Lareau (2000) argues that parents from disadvantaged areas with less cultural capital share middle-class aspirations for their children, but lack confidence and the knowledge of how to help their children. Rather than adopting a deficit approach schools must look at initiatives aimed at engaging parents, and recognise that families' social and cultural capital can contribute to curriculum enrichment (Moll et al., 1992). Schools need to encourage parents by sending home instructions, or by providing opportunities where parents can see demonstrations in school. Schools could demonstrate to parents how to develop links between mathematics and the real world, as proposed by Maguire (2003), to build confidence in mathematics among members of the community. In an examination of the relationship between parent role construction, sense of efficacy, resources, and perceptions of teachers' invitations with parental involvement activities at home and school, Anderson and Minke (2007) found that specific invitations from teachers had the largest effect on the three types of parental involvement. Parents' sense of efficacy and level of resources were less influential than anticipated. Anderson and Minke (2007) noted the implications for school practices, teachers and policy development.

5.6 Other aspects of parental involvement influencing student achievement

Other aspects of parental involvement, which emerged from interviews and focus group discussions with outside participants, were the role of computer technology in promoting student learning, and the need for collaboration between schools and parents, and the wider community, in promoting opportunities for learning.

5.6.1 The role of computer technology in promoting student learning

The librarian is convinced that schools and parents need to engage with technology and also supervise its use. She says:

A number of schools have moodle, they have Ipads and all the textbooks are on them. There are a lot of problems but a lot of potential. Also EDMODO is like a facebook-like interaction, but it is secure and confidential, so a teacher only invites certain students to be their friends, and they can interact and send in their assignments remotely, and young people who have grown up, the digital natives we call them, with technology and keyboards and screens are their day to day way of working, way of living and interacting (Librarian: 4: 3-15).

As the use of technology is seen by school staff as a means of enhancing parental involvement in schools and in learning I explored this idea further with parents. The parents in Beech College are supportive of the school's website which contains a link for parents. One parent says *'you can post stuff and read stuff' which is really good because most people are, would be on stuff like that, you know on social network'* (Deirdre: Beech 14: 20-22). Clare and Deirdre are critical of their children's use of text writing on facebook and when sending emails. They also think that children spend too much time on computers for entertainment. Deirdre points out that adolescents are unwilling to read books, which they consider a school activity, but when at home she observes her children use laptops and reading magazines. Ellen in Larch College sees the benefits of schools communicating with parents by sending course work, and other information, by email. She says:

If the child is at home sick and that came up as an email or homework I don't think they would have a problem doing it because it is on the computer. It is kind of, I have to write this down, but if they are on the computer they will go through that no bother. I think that would be a great idea (Ellen: Larch 4: 6-11).

Ellen agrees that there are computers in most homes. She has an old computer in her attic and her son is teaching her how to use his laptop. Maria in Spruce College agrees that most households have computers or *'if not an older brother or sister would have them and would probably allow them, most houses now would have access to wifi and computers'* (Maria: Spruce 4: 13-14)

5.6.2 Collaboration between schools, parents and disadvantaged communities, to promote parental involvement in the development of literacy and numeracy

Many parents are surprised at the fact that post-primary students spend a greater proportion of their time outside school than inside school. The development of literacy and numeracy needs to be supported at every opportunity while students are not attending school. The librarian points out that the JCSP library project has started to run summer initiatives as she says *'all the research will show that even though students are progressing in their reading over the course of the academic year they stop, if you take away all the supports over the three months of summer, the summer slide kicks in'* (Librarian: 4: 32-34). To counteract this regression in reading levels JCSP librarians encourage book clubs, film clubs, graphic novel development, and creative writing. The librarian sees the training of students, and their parents, on how to use public libraries as part of a JCSP librarian's remit. She is concerned that disadvantaged students think that public libraries have either nothing of interest for them, they have had bad experiences when asked to leave, or they do not have the skills to find materials of interest. The librarian believes that *'the way to introduce disengaged young people to the library is through the school initially'* (Librarian: 5: 22-23). Families do not realise that libraries also have music, DVDs, games, magazines and access to the internet. The librarian maintains that breaking the cycle of inter-generational educational disadvantage will be

dependent on raising parental awareness. Parents are ambitious for their children but do not know how to support their children academically.

Greta in Ash College has learnt to speak English by attending a course in her local area, and is aware of the schools 'One Book One Community' HSCL reading initiative. Deirdre from Beech College knows there are lots of choices for courses in her local community, but confines her attention to a book club in another daughter's school. Clare, also from Beech College, is a member of her local library and will buy books for her daughter when shopping. Magazines, rather than books, however, seem to hold her daughter's attention for a longer period of time.

When encouraged by the HSCL teacher in her sons' primary school Ellen from Larch College completed a computer course, and a course in the Irish language, so that she could help her sons with homework. The computer course gave her confidence with spelling as *'it was correcting it for you'* (Ellen: Larch 7: 29-30). Ellen emphasises the importance of parents learning in a group so they do not feel isolated, or embarrassed. When doing paired reading in primary school Ellen sought help from another parent, rather than ask the teacher, when she was unable to pronounce words. Ellen maintains that many parents are not aware of facilities for personal development in their communities. She is aware of a community centre where community workers encourage *'the girls from the flats and a coffee morning will turn into a book club'* (Ellen: Larch 8: 8-9). Aerobic classes, or a first aid course, may be offered initially before parents are introduced to reading and writing. In order to inform parents of facilities which exist in communities Ellen suggests that schools could post information to parents, or that more advertising be placed in local buildings as *'an awful lot of people wouldn't be going to the school and they wouldn't go up to an office, where they would be going to the shop or the credit union or they might be going to the post office and it is there in front of them'* (Ellen: Larch 8: 19-22). Ellen maintains that lone parents are unlikely to attend their children's school to avail of courses.

Maria in Spruce College argues that facilities within her community have either not been advertised, such as the public library, or are unsuitable for her children to attend. She has observed an outreach centre where *'there would be a lot of disadvantaged kids that go in there, a lot of very angry kids, a lot of kids that dabble in substances'* (Maria: Spruce 7: 34-35). Maria emphasises that literacy courses for parents need greater advertising in local shops or by door to door leaflet drops. Discretion for parents is important to avoid embarrassment. She says:

You could find out if you could be in a room with so many people and you would never speak up. You would be afraid you would be looked down on and another person could have the same problem and got help, but you would never find out because you would not open your mouth. It needs to be advertised (Maria: Spruce 9: 1-5).

Emma, a community literacy coordinator, works with people who support children in primary school and adolescents in post-primary schools. A 'Transition to Post-Primary School' programme is delivered in all local primary schools. She is in no doubt that home school partnership relations enhances student achievement. She says:

If students think that their learning is only of benefit within the confines of the school building then it's never going to have the practical application that's going to embed it in them as a real experience (Literacy Co-ordinator: 1: 5-8).

Her emphasis is on developing reading fluency *'because we felt when children come to post-primary that's an area that lets them down a lot'* (Literacy Co-ordinator: 2: 33-34). Children can de-code and read but may not understand what they are reading. Emma works to raise awareness among parents of the importance of literacy development. She is aware that:

the literacy and numeracy strategy states in its section on parental involvement that children spend eighty-five percent of their time at home, only fifteen percent in the school situation and there is no doubt if you don't use it you lose it. There

is plenty of international research to show that children's literacy skills drop between June and September if they don't use it (Literacy Co-ordinator: 3: 3-7).

Parents of primary school children are encouraged to join a breakfast club where the importance of supporting their children with reading, oral language, and writing skills, are promoted. An after school book club, where reading is used as a means of communicating with their children, also takes place. Emma is amazed at the amount of young adults, who dropped out of school and are now going back to education. She sees these young adults as role models for adolescents and tells them to *'shout out loud to all the kids who are near you, what you're doing, or why you're doing it, and how you're doing it, and what other route you could have taken'* (Literacy Co-ordinator: 4: 27-29). Emma is aware that there are still a lot of hard to reach parents in the community. She has heard parents say that their adolescent children are argumentative about going to school and thinks that *'they wouldn't be saying that if they had any idea how important it is that they attend school. Those parents still have high aspirations for their kids. Because children know that it's a negotiable issue they abuse it'* (Literacy Co-ordinator: 5: 11-16). Emma is convinced that if this applies to attendance it also applies to homework, study and routine.

Emma argues that activities within communities play a vital role in advancing education, and personal development. A summer activity booklet on reading, writing, and oral language, tailored for the area, is produced for children at primary school level. Community workers who are associated with summer projects, aimed at developing talents and skills, have been asked to look for opportunities within these activities for the development of literacy and numeracy. Emma says children love singing *'give them the words of a song, they don't know the words, give them written down, they have to read them, they have to talk about them, they have to sing them, there's your literacy'* (Literacy Co-ordinator: 6: 12-14).

5.6.3 Other aspects of parental involvement influencing student achievement analysis

Parents and the JCSP librarian support the idea of using technology as a means of transmitting materials and assignments between schools and the home. During the interview process I observed that parents had their own email addresses, which were used to forward interview transcripts. Parents, who were not fully aware of the educational potential of computers, were critical of the amount of time their children spent on computers, and text writing used in emails. The potential which computers have to encourage literacy and numeracy development need to be demonstrated to parents. An ‘Engaging Parents to Raise Achievement (EPRA) campaign described by Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) used four different strands to engage parents in student achievement: supporting parents to help their children learn, personalizing provision for parents as learner, iReporting and enhancing pastoral care. The iReporting strand was designed to encourage schools to adopt new innovative ways by using new technologies to engage parents in their children’s learning. Evidence emerged in this study that DEIS schools are beginning to use webtexts to send messages to parents and iPads have been issued to students. Evidence also emerged that parents have computers in the home. Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall (2009) warn that traditional home-school communication methods such as newsletters can be ineffective, as parents do not take the time to read them. Enabling parents to use information to enhance learning in the home may be achieved through iReporting which provides parents with up-to-date information on assignments, and on their child’s progress.

Parents did not see the location of schools as a barrier to their involvement. One parent considered it socially advantageous that her children were travelling outside their immediate community. The literacy coordinator pointed out that disadvantaged parents were coping with difficult life issues which focused their attention. Inter-generational unemployment, and lack role models in the community, also militated against some parents’ ambitions for their children. Greta sees the need for developments within communities to help alleviate those problems. Parents expressed surprise when it was pointed out that students spend a much greater proportion of each year outside school at home, and in their communities. Parents were critical of the lack of opportunities for their children in their communities. This contradicts what HSCL co-ordinators say in relation

to the variety of agencies which exist in disadvantaged communities. Parents are convinced that they need to be made aware of opportunities available within their communities by post, or by advertisements being placed in public buildings which they frequent. The literacy coordinator has organised a breakfast club for parents of primary school children, and summer activities, to promote literacy. Parents in this study were not aware of suitable opportunities for post-primary adolescents and their parents. The communities in which children grow up have a major role to play in fostering the development of literacy and numeracy. In the context of the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people, schools need to forge strong links with the wider community to build supportive networks (DES, 2011). The collective effort of schools, in collaboration with agencies within the wider community, has the potential to bring greater coherence to improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy. This social-contextual approach to help eliminate inter-generational cycles of illiteracy is supported by those (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Auerbach, 1989; Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall, 2009; Perkins et al., 2011) who suggest that the literacy performance of marginalised groups is influenced by multiple effects, at different levels, in the home, the community, and within schools, and subject areas.

5.7 Summary

JCSP co-ordinators from outside the five case study schools, a JCSP senior librarian and community literacy organiser share the same views on developing partnership relations with parents. An emphasis is placed on parents attending schools, school libraries or community centres to avail of classes, literacy and numeracy workshops, or other events organised to promote parental involvement. The perception exists, that through involvement in these activities, parents will more interested in their child's learning. Similar views are also expressed among these interviewees in relation to barriers which restrict parental involvement in children's learning. Parents are regarded as unwilling or not capable of being involved, or families may be in crisis. JCSP co-ordinators, as insiders within their own DEIS schools, and a community literacy organiser, as a former primary school teacher, are also aware of problems, such as the lack of consultation with parents, and lack of collaboration, and leadership, within schools to promote parental

involvement in learning. They are also critical of insufficient support for parents and that greater links between schools and communities are not well advanced.

Parents views on home-school relations, contrary to the views expressed by inside participants, is partnership-focused, seeing themselves and schools as responsible for children's education. Parents interviewed are aware of other parents whom they consider are not involved, and argue that this situation may be helped if more involved parents acted in an advocate role to more marginalized parents. Parents interviewed also considered that they were more involved, both in their own and their child's learning, while their children attended primary schools. They are motivated and actively involved now in their children's learning, and want this involvement to continue.

Parents indicate that they would welcome more information in relation to their children's learning needs, and more specific support in relation to their children's ongoing learning. Given the opportunity they are willing to overcome barriers, such as their own sense of self-efficacy, in helping their child. They do not see adolescents as a barrier to their involvement, but recognize they are less in control due to the variety of teachers and subjects in post-primary schools. Parents seem either powerless to act, or they do not wish to upset the status quo, and their child's position within a school.

Parents are aware of the HSCL scheme but are neither aware of the format of the JCSP programme, nor of the existence of JCSP co-ordinators, within DEIS schools. There was no evidence to suggest that parents were involved in literacy or numeracy activities in schools, or in school libraries, but expressed a willingness to do so, if invited.

Parents are critical of parent-teacher meetings in terms of time allocated to discuss their child, but consider it important to attend in order to build rapport with school personnel. They are ambitious for their children but are dependent on schools to take the lead in promoting home-school learning partnerships. Parents see computer technology as means of promoting this partnership, and also support the idea of promoting more learning opportunities for adolescents within their communities.

The next chapter provides an overall summary of key findings from the perspective of inside and outside participants. It examines the strengths and challenges of the conceptual framework, and offers a critique of methodology and methods employed in conducting this study. The implication of the findings in relation to schools, policy makers, and as a foundation for further research, are discussed, and a model of parental involvement in learning is proposed.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This research set out to examine partnership relations developed with parents of junior cycle adolescent students in a sample of designated disadvantaged post-primary (DEIS) schools. Specifically the research was undertaken to highlight how home-school partnership relations are contributing to the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills, which determine access to the school curriculum, and attainment and progression within the educational system. The development of literacy and numeracy skills are an integral part of the JCSP programme, the HSCL scheme, and are also central to DEIS planning and school self-evaluation. The development of literacy and numeracy is also central to a new Project Mathematics syllabus and the new junior cycle curriculum to be fully implemented by 2020.

As a former JCSP co-ordinator my efforts at involving parents in school-based literacy and numeracy initiatives met with varying degrees of success. A home-based literacy initiative 'Who Wants to be a Word Millionaire', which required parents reading with their child, and completing book reviews, was more successful in attracting the attention of a larger group of parents. Parental involvement in the education of their children has been regarded as an important element of student achievement for at least forty years yet it continues to be a problem particularly in disadvantaged communities. As increasing prominence is being given to the importance of parental involvement in their children's education I am conscious that solutions can not be found to this intractable issue without first understanding the barriers to parental involvement which exist within schools, and at the parent, child, community, and societal level.

Collaboration among teachers, co-ordinators of programmes, deputy principals, and principals in post-primacy schools continues to improve since the introduction of the Education Act (1998). School policies have been devised, subject department and DEIS planning, as well as whole school evaluation, have required a greater sense of collegiality. The DEIS action plan, launched in 2005, acknowledged that educational

inclusion required a systematic effective strategy with clear objectives and targets, and that progress was monitored, measured, reviewed and evaluated to tackle under-achievement and its inter-generational effects on families and their communities. At primary and post-primary level the action plan envisaged the further development of reading and mathematic initiatives, implemented through the HSCL scheme, which directly involved parents, and other family members, in classroom or home-based activities assisting children's literacy and numeracy development. Department of Education and Science guidelines, *Looking at Our School*, issued to schools in 2003 to aid self-evaluation, stipulated that schools should examine the quality of support for parents to participate in the life of the school and the extent to which the school collaborates and coordinates with other community providers in planning provision and delivering educational services for students from disadvantaged areas. This study has also been undertaken against the backdrop of legislation regarding home-school partnerships, Ireland's drop in international literacy ratings, the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategy which emphasises engaging parents in the classroom, and beyond, in activities that support the betterment of literacy and numeracy, and the emphasis placed on the development of these key skills in a reformed junior cycle structure. A Post-Primary Education Forum report *A 2020 Vision for Education* (2013) also lists as a priority the continual active participation of parents in their children's learning in the home, parent participation in school decision making and participating in parent-teacher meetings that are informative and meaningful. Partnership with parents in DEIS schools within the context of this vision will need to be continually evaluated and reviewed. Parents will play a crucial role in supporting the reformed junior cycle, due to commence in 2014, which emphasizes moving away from an examination mentality to a philosophy of learning to learn. Parents of disadvantaged students with delayed literacy and numeracy skills will play a crucial role in the example they give their children. DEIS schools will need to support parents who in turn will need to motivate, support and guide their children to ensure that progress in learning is not hindered.

An initial examination of the literature revealed a shortage of studies in Ireland which sought to evaluate progress being made in relation to parental involvement in student

learning in designated disadvantaged post-primary schools. The most recent comprehensive study of parents' involvement in their children's post-primary education, *Behind the Scenes*, conducted by Byrne and Smyth (2011) argues that where parents are informally involved, such as supporting learning, the influence on student outcomes were greater. I undertook this research to highlight developments taking place in post-primary schools located in disadvantaged areas in relation to parental involvement in student learning, specifically the development of their children's literacy and numeracy skills. My aim was to identify and share best practice among post-primary schools.

An exploration of the literature revealed that parental involvement in their child's learning, particularly among marginalised groups, is as described by Harris, Andrew-Power and Goodall, (2009, p.77), 'the worst problem but the best solution'. The literature also revealed that parental involvement in learning in the home had the greatest impact on student achievement (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Harris and Goodall, 2008). The complexity of any investigation of parental involvement in schools became increasingly obvious as the literature also revealed the many factors which have a bearing on this important area. There is clearly no single answer to the complex issue of partnerships between families and schools. New practices and innovative ideas in relation to parental involvement in their children's learning continue to emerge in the literature (Cairney, 1995; Illsley and Redford, 2005; Feiler et al., 2008). The growing interest in more effective parent involvement has also produced several ways of classifying ways parents are, or should be, involved. My selection of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model of parental involvement, as a conceptual framework in this study, was guided by the fact that the model seeks to explain parents' decisions about involvement in their children's education by focusing on major psychological constructs which influence hard to reach parents. The model also identifies parent involvement as a process that occurs over time and is dynamic. This 'parent-centric' model combined with a detailed literature review led to the development of the following key research questions:

- What is the schools vision and purpose for engaging parents? What evidence of leadership/planning is demonstrated within DEIS schools to promote partnership with parents of junior cycle students?
- What specific structures or arrangements are in place in schools to promote parental involvement? In particular, what specific steps have been taken to involve parents in the development of their child's literacy and numeracy skills?
- Is there evidence of collaboration between the JCSP programme, the Home School Liaison teachers and parents in addressing the educational needs of underachieving students?
- Why do some parents become involved, more so than others, in their child's learning? What specific types of involvement do parents choose, and what influences this choice?
- What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience?
- What models of partnership between the school and home contribute most to positive educational outcomes in relation to literacy and numeracy development, particularly for adolescent students?
- What are the perceptions of parents in relation to links between the school and home and their role as the prime educators of their children – and their role in the development of literacy and numeracy?
- What are the perceptions of other key stakeholders, both inside and outside schools in relation to the role of parents in the education of students who are underachieving?

The key findings to these research questions from the perspective of inside participants (principals, JCSP co-ordinators and HSCL co-ordinators) and outside participants (parents, JCSP co-ordinators from outside the case study schools, a senior JSCP librarian and a community literacy co-ordinator) are presented in this chapter. The strengths and challenges of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement are suggested. A critique of the methodology and methods used in this study includes a reflective consideration of the strengths and limitations of the research design in arriving at answers to my substantive question. Finally, the implications of the findings for

developing learning partnership with parents in designated disadvantaged post-primary schools, and recommendations for different audiences such as policy makers, researchers, and school personnel, are outlined.

6.2 Summary of the key findings

Key findings in relation to the research question are represented from the perspective of inside and outside participants. The main themes which permeate the findings are the meaning of partnership, structures which support partnership, barriers to parental involvement, developments within communities to alleviate disadvantage, and the role of technology in promoting home-school learning partnership. A noticeable feature of the findings is the dichotomy which exists between some of the views expressed by inside and outside participants in relation to these themes.

6.2.1 Key findings from the perspective of insider participants

While insider participants agree that home-school partnership relations enhance student achievement a partnership model, involving a whole school approach and commitment to working with families and communities, has not yet evolved in DEIS schools. A small number of school personnel plan for partnership at DEIS meetings with the HSCL co-ordinator taking overall responsibility. There is no evidence which suggests that parents are involved in the DEIS planning process in schools as recommended in the DEIS action plan. The findings suggest that partnership with parents is concerned with how parents can support the work of the school and teachers, rather than how teachers can support parents in helping their child to learn.

The structures in place in DEIS post-primary schools to promote parental involvement include the HSCL scheme, the JCSP programme, a pastoral care system, parent associations, parent-teacher meetings and adult education courses. Inconsistencies exist between schools in relation to how school personnel interpret their roles within these structures, and the degree to which these structures serve the needs of disadvantaged parents in supporting their child's literacy and numeracy development. Similarities exist between DEIS schools in terms of approaches used to involve parents in literacy and numeracy school-based initiatives. Parents are informed when JCSP school-based literacy

and numeracy initiatives are taking place, but are not always invited to attend due to a poor response from parents to such invitations in the past. The perception exists that parents see the development of literacy and numeracy and overall student achievement as the work of the school. There is no evidence that parents are informed of JCSP learning targets within each subject area. Parents are unaware of the details of the JCSP programme but are happy to receive positive messages home on postcards, and attend JCSP graduations. Attempts at broadening the participation of parents in school life, with the exception of attendance at parent-teacher meetings and graduation ceremonies, are not successful. Class teacher contact with parents is concerned mainly with disciplinary problems, parents associations are not well developed, and parents consider parent-teacher meetings unsatisfactory in terms of the amount of time given to gain information on their child's progress. Adult education courses are generally not attended by the parents of children in DEIS schools. HSCL co-ordinators appear to be mainly concerned with chronic absenteeism, and other family crises, rather than the development of family literacy.

Epstein and Salinas (2004) distinguish between a professional learning community and a school learning community. Collaboration within DEIS schools in relation to planning for literacy and numeracy development is improving as schools engage in a self-evaluation process. This teamwork leads to the development of a professional learning community. Collaboration with parents and the development of home-school learning partnerships is not well developed across the cases study schools. For example, literacy and numeracy standardised test results are not shared with parents. A school learning community involving educators, students, parents, and community partners working together (Epstein and Salinas, 2004) to improve schools and enhance students' learning is not evident in this study.

Complex barriers to parental involvement emerged from the data. The perception exists that as disadvantaged parents are not well educated they delegate responsibility to schools for their child's education. Schools' efforts at involving parents are largely unsuccessful. The perception that any improvement in parental involvement will be slow until parents'

educational levels improve leads to stagnation in the development of innovative parental involvement ideas. This may result from an absence of specific legislative involvement strategies, school leadership styles, and the absence of teacher training in this area. Most parental involvement events are held in schools which reinforces the idea that parents are expected to be responsive to the needs of school rather than schools being a resource for parents in their efforts at supporting their children's learning. School personnel consider, as barriers to parental involvement, the absence of role models in disadvantaged communities, and the lack of awareness among parents of the standards of literacy and numeracy required to improve overall student achievement. The absence of links, and collaboration between schools and disadvantaged communities in the provision of adult education, lead to schools having no record of parental achievements which could be harnessed to support their children. Adolescents seeking independence from their parents, peer influence, and inconsistent demands from a variety of teachers in post-primary schools, are also portrayed as barriers to parental involvement.

DEIS schools are working towards raising literacy and numeracy standards but inside participants express reservations in relation to the impact of their literacy and numeracy interventions. Caution is also expressed in relation to progress made within disadvantaged communities in alleviating inter-generational cycles of illiteracy and educational disadvantage. Among the factors considered which could assist home-school learning partnerships were advances in technology, the anticipated role which parents may play within a reformed junior cycle curriculum, if supported, and a national media campaign.

6.2.2 Key findings from the perspective of outsider participants

The perception of home-school partnership held by outside participants is that parents attend schools in order to receive information and participate in school-based literacy and numeracy activities. There is an acceptance by parents, and other outside participants, that ideal partnership relations envisage parents supporting the work of schools by attending schools when requested, overseeing homework, and ensuring good attendance.

Parents' main focus is their children's performance yet little emphasis is placed on giving parents support for learning in the home.

Collaboration and planning within schools, and collaboration between schools and parents in relation to literacy and numeracy development, lack coherence. Parents interviewed were willing to attend literacy and numeracy school-based events but have not been invited. Parents are not aware of the JCSP programme. Beech College parents, who participated in a focus group discussion, enjoyed attending classes with students and were aware of a 'Drop Everything and Read' initiative, and a home-based 'Working Together' booklet developed by the HSCL co-ordinator. Parents demonstrated a lack of self-efficacy in relation to mathematics but a willingness to engage in mathematic classes. They displayed a sense of responsibility and a positive self-efficacy, regardless of educational background, in supporting their children's learning in the home. Most of the parents interviewed had completed junior cycle education in post-primary school. They are adamant their will children progress into senior cycle and achieve a leaving certificate which they see as a prerequisite for further education or employment. Parents could be considered as adopting an active role construction, which is partnership-focused, as they see themselves and schools as responsible for children's education. The meaning of partnership for parents is to support the work of the school without questioning the status quo, and to celebrate important academic milestones. Parents do not suggest that schools are engaged in developing home-school learning partnerships.

Disadvantaged parents complain of insufficient time to gain information about their child at parent-teacher meetings but due to poor parental representation on school governance bodies are powerless in influencing school decisions and policy. Parents are aware that they are the best advocates for other parents but are dependent on schools to take the lead such as the production of a 'Parents Connect' newsletter organised by the HSCL co-ordinator in Beech College.

The adolescent stage of development is not perceived by parents as a barrier to their involvement in their children's education. Insufficient information regarding test results,

a new mathematics syllabus, and other school work filtered through their child, or the school, without more direct contact with parents, is perceived as a barrier to their involvement in their children's learning. Parents were not aware of how mathematics could be made relevant to everyday living. They are also not aware of the educational potential which computers offer, but do see the benefits of using technology as a means for schools to communicate with parents regarding school work and assignments. Greta, who is from Lithuania, is critical of other parents within her disadvantaged community who allow their children too much outdoor freedom. Parents were surprised when told that their children spend up to eighty-five percent of their time at home and in their communities. They are critical of the shortage of educationally appropriate activities for their children in their communities, and suggest that any opportunities which do exist should be advertised locally in establishments frequented by parents such as shops, credit unions, churches and post offices.

6.2.3 Insider and outsider perspectives

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) point out that parent role construction is shaped by pertinent social groups and relevant personal beliefs, it is therefore socially constructed and subject to change. The social influence may be a teacher or a school. Both inside and outside participants in this study agree that home-school partnership relations enhance student achievement. The emphasis however is not on learning partnerships or support for parents who are engaged, or not engaged such as Cora, in learning in the home. Inside participants consider that parents delegate responsibility for learning to schools and, due to poor parental attendance at school-based events, parents are either unwilling or not capable of engaging in their child's learning. This study reveals that parents are partnership-focused and accept responsibility in overseeing home learning and approaching school personnel when necessary. Parents are ambitious for their children, they accept that their level of skills and knowledge in assisting their adolescent children is not adequate, but they display a willingness to learn. School personnel continue to engage in school-based literacy and numeracy initiatives which do not match parents' needs. Due to inconsistencies in terms of the interpretation of their roles, school personnel are not getting the message communicated clearly to parents that their

participation in either school-based, or home learning, is needed and valued. Schools also need to think ‘outside the box’ in the development of meaningful learning partnerships with parents, an example of which is a ‘Working Together’ literacy and numeracy booklet sent to parents in Beech College. According to Cairney (1995), schools are among the most stable institutions in society as they will not move quickly. Disadvantaged parents may have insufficient social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to question the status quo and therefore rely on school personnel to determine their involvement practices. An evaluative research report conducted by the Office for Standards in Education in the UK (2007) found that the most effective schools reviewed, evaluated and changed until they found what works.

6.3 Strengths and challenges of the conceptual framework

Bauch (1989) points out that models of parental involvement can provide a framework for evaluating current efforts and a basis for planning for the future. Formative evaluations aimed at programme improvement often rely on process data which allow judgements about how a programme is working. Implementation evaluation illuminates the extent to which a programme is producing the desired results by examining inputs, activities, processes, and structures. This evaluative case study explores DEIS planning, implementation activities for home-school partnership, and parents’ perceptions in relation to these activities through the lens of a parent involvement model developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995).

6.3.1 *Strengths*

One of the strengths identified in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995) theoretical model of parental involvement is that it offers ways of examining the question of parental engagement in student learning from a parents’ perspective rather than from that of schools. It maintains that three psychological constructs, parents’ motivational beliefs, parents’ perceptions of invitations for involvement, and parents’ perceived life context influence whether parents are likely to see it as part of their job to be involved in their child’s education. The model suggests that motivational beliefs consist of role construction and self-efficacy. The second construct, perceptions of invitations for involvement, includes the idea that if schools welcome, value and expect parents to be

involved this is related to student achievement. Thirdly, parents perceived life context proposes that parents' time and energy, and also their skills and knowledge, affect the degree to which parents are involved in their child's education.

The model therefore provided a framework for undertaking a literature review and the adoption of an evaluative case study research design to examine progress made in DEIS schools in relation to the research question. A second strength of the model is that it identifies parent involvement as a process that occurs over time, is dynamic and subject to change. The model therefore acted as an aid to formulate interview questions which acted as a guide to discussions aimed at eliciting information on the progress made in DEIS schools to increase parental involvement. While listening to responses to the interview questions the model acted as a backdrop to allow concurrent data analysis to occur during the process of interviewing. The model also aided retrospective data analysis when all the data was collected, tapes were being transcribed and transcripts were re-read.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) say that status does not always explain why parents become involved. Schools cannot hope to influence status but may be able to influence what parents think and do in the process of becoming involved in their children's education. The model may inform schools of appropriate ways to act to increase parental involvement. A third strength of the model is that it highlights the fact that parental involvement in their child's learning is influenced by processes which occur at the parent, school, child and societal level (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). The mix of demands on parents' time and energy due to employment demands, or other family demands, will influence parental involvement decisions. If schools engage in unilateral approaches intended to create more parental involvement they are unlikely to succeed. Schools may need to give greater consideration to the role played by students in parental involvement strategies and engage in continual consultation with parents.

6.3.2 Challenges

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model of parental involvement begins at level one with parents' decision to become involved. The model, which is read from the bottom to the top, first suggests that parents decide to be involved if they see it as part of their role, they believe they can positively influence their child's education, and they feel that their child and the school wants them to be involved. Once parents decide to be involved they then choose activities based on their skills and knowledge, the demands on their time and energy and specific invitations from children, teachers or schools. At level three the model indicates that parental involvement influences children's educational outcomes by modeling, reinforcement and instruction. Level four suggests that if these three mechanisms are mediated by the parents' use of developmentally appropriate strategies and if there is a good fit between parents' actions and school expectations student outcomes, and sense of efficacy for doing well in school, will be improved.

As the model encompasses five levels of parental involvement and offers many variables which impact on the involvement process it was not possible to examine these variables in depth in a study of this size. Secondly, as the model examined the question of parental involvement from the perspective of parents the framework did not offer any guidelines to assist schools in building learning partnerships. School leaders, and other school personnel, need to engage in school self-evaluation in order to formulate effective practices in the area home-school partnership relations. Epstein's (1995) Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model, inspired by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, locates the student at the centre and identifies the three major contexts, the family, the school and the community, in which students learn and grow. The model suggests practices, in the areas of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community, which may be conducted separately or jointly within those spheres in order to influence children's learning and development. Finally Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model does not take into account other issues which influence parental involvement such as the historical context of home-school partnership developments and the wider political, economic or social

environment. Therefore, a broad literature review was necessary in order to place this evaluative case study in context.

6.4 Critique of methodology and methods

As I embarked on an upward journey of discovery over the course of completing a doctoral thesis I had a clear idea of the substantive question I wanted to investigate and an ontological belief that knowledge and its production is subjective, is based on experience and insight rather than being objective, therefore is best researched using qualitative methods. Writing a doctoral thesis, particularly one based on qualitative research methods, offered methodological challenges which marked many milestones along the journey. Encouraged by the support of my supervisor, and by proponents of qualitative research in the literature (Seale, 1999; Quinn Patton, 2002; Mason, 2002; Silverman, 2006), I opted for a purely qualitative study. Greene (2007, p.39) argues that qualitative methodologies are advanced for their ‘perceived superiority as thoughtful studies of lived human experience, as intense in-depth studies of a few cases or a few people purposely selected’. My decision to employ an evaluative case study methodology was influenced by the need for schools to engage in a self-evaluation process which involves gathering evidence, analysing the data and devising and implementing improvement plans. Formative evaluations aimed at bringing about programme effectiveness need process data to improve as participants stories are communicated, and a three dimensional picture and thick descriptions (Stake, 2000) are related in narrative form. Case studies of individual schools provide the reader with enough information to determine the stage of implementation of a programme and whether the findings apply to other people or settings. This aids transferability. Case study research is criticized for generalising from a small sample but quality evidence-based case studies can contribute to knowledge of organisational phenomena that is rich and insightful. Stake (2000) argues that knowledge is socially constructed and in their experiential and contextual accounts, case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge.

As my study progressed I became aware that the need for rigorous data collection and analytic methods had to be addressed. Qualitative researchers who model their studies in

an interpretive paradigm think in terms of trustworthiness as opposed to the conventional criteria of validity, reliability and generalisability. To affirm trustworthiness as suggested by (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) substitute criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are employed. To increase credibility, which refers to the degree to which a researcher can be confident of the study's conclusions, the methods employed in this study include triangulation of methods and multiple data sources in multiple sites (internal and external validity) and the inclusion of a variety of practices and a variety of stakeholders. To add validity to the study, as the conclusions to the study were unfolding, I made telephone contact to gain feedback from an inside participant from each of the case study schools. Two principals, a HSCL co-ordinator and two JCSP co-ordinators were asked to confirm the accuracy of my findings and to comment on whether my interpretations could be upheld. This hermeneutic process contributed to participant validation of the findings. Due to time restrictions I was unable to check the accuracy of my findings with all thirty-one participants who contributed to interview and focus group data.

Dependability relates to the consistency of findings. Quinn Patton (2002, p.93) points out that as completely value-free inquiry is impossible this necessitate steps to be taken to mitigate the influence of biases through rigorous field procedures. An audit trail must exist to verify the rigor of your fieldwork and confirmability of the data collected, because you want to minimize bias, maximise accuracy and report impartially.

Limitations to methodology and methods used in conducting research include threats to trustworthiness which may result from respondents' biases. Parents in this study were selected by either principals or HSCL co-ordinators. My fears that these parents would say what the researcher wanted to hear were allayed as their responses during the interviews were not influenced by an allegiance to their child's school. As I consider that my journey in the exploration of parental involvement in student learning has just begun, future studies may benefit from a mixed method methodology which Greene (2007) argues expands the scope and range of the inquiry. A mixed method methodology would facilitate an increase in sample size, the use of surveys in addition to interviews, and

would facilitate the acquisition of data from other sources, including teachers and students, who were not included in this case study.

6.5 Implications of your findings

Research and evaluation are central to effective policy making. This evaluative case study examines current practices in the development of partnership relation with parents, aimed at enhancing student achievement, in DEIS post-primary schools. Its findings may be of interest to school practitioners, as an aid in planning for partnership with parents. The findings may also influence planning at Department of Education and Skills level as the national strategy for the improvement of literacy and numeracy is being implemented, and also in the area of initial teaching training and the provision of in-service training for school practitioners. This study may contribute to the on-going debate in relation to engaging low-income parents in their child's literacy and numeracy development and overall academic achievement. Finally the findings may serve as a basis for further research.

6.5.1 Implications for schools

Effective schools can make a difference as they engage in reviewing, revising, implementing and monitoring their everyday practice. The findings of this research suggest that if learning partnerships with parents to improve literacy and numeracy standards are to be effective, including in my own school, then current school policy in this area will need to be revised. Socio-economic status does not fully explain parents' decisions to become involved in their child's education. Process variables such as parent role construction and sense of self-efficacy are more powerful than status. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) say that parents' sense of self-efficacy comes from four sources - the direct experience of success in other involvement or involvement-related activities, the vicarious experience of others' success in involvement, verbal persuasion by others that involvement activities are worthwhile, and the emotional arousal induced when issues of importance to the parent such as his or her child's well-being or success, or his or her own success as a parent, are 'on the line'.

This research indicates that parents from disadvantaged communities are more interested in the achievement of their own children than participating as volunteers or being involved in parent associations or other school governance structures. Despite the fact that the Education Act (1998) stipulated that schools must communicate with parents regarding their child's progress this study indicates that post-primary schools fail to communicate regularly with parents regarding matters central to their child's education. Parents' ideas about child development, child rearing and children's future outcome are most important to parents and this belief remains constant across the child's development into adolescence.

This study makes suggestions for school and family practices which may strengthen the incidence and effectiveness of parental involvement across varied school communities. Many of the parental involvement (PI) interventions suggested in the diagram (Figure 7) are already at an early stage of development in schools but lack strategic planning, consistency and persistent effort. Home-school partnerships needs to be re-defined and an emphasis placed on learning partnerships. Rather than adopting a deficit view of low-income parents an emphasis must be put on families as funds of knowledge and a focus placed on learning outside the school setting. Schools will need to consult, collaborate with, and support parents in relation to curriculum reform implications, learning targets and statements of learning within the new junior certificate syllabus. The development of literacy and numeracy as core skills occupies a central role in the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategy, junior cycle reform and school self-evaluation. This must be communicated to students and parents. As parents of students in DEIS schools look to schools for advice and direction they will need support, demonstrations and resources to adopt developmentally appropriate strategies in the home that fit school expectations.

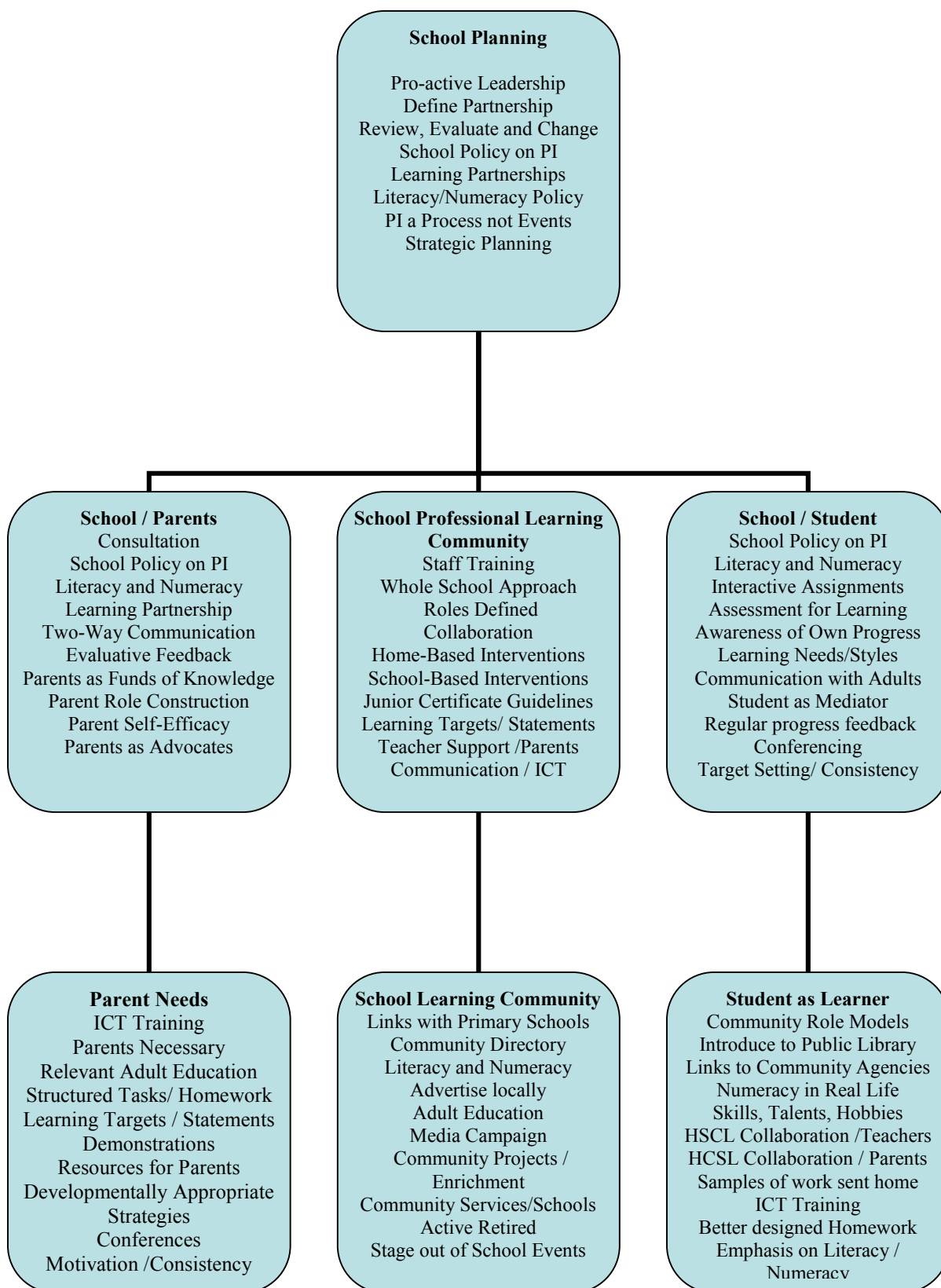


Figure 7 Implications for Schools

As student learning is at the core of all school and parent effort students need to be motivated and affirmed regarding their progress. This could occur during a conference session between student, parent and school personnel. As student learning is not confined to schools and students spend the majority of their time at home and in their communities schools must harness community services and resources in a more productive way.

This study indicates the critical role of school principals, deputy principals, programme co-ordinators and teachers in the promotion of parental involvement. As parental role construction and self-efficacy is socially constructed, and subject to change, well designed school programmes to support learning will make a difference if consistently implemented, and parents are aware that their involvement is welcome, valuable, and expected. To continually empower parents schools will need to provide regular feedback on student achievement through the use of ICT, meaningful parent-teacher meetings and through students. Parents and school personnel will need to work together in enhancing students' abilities to express their own needs as they act as communicators and couriers between home and school. Teachers, JCSP and HSCL co-ordinators will need to switch the focus of literacy and numeracy initiatives, aimed at involving parents, from being school-based to home-based. Schools will need to ask parents more directly what they want in terms of their own needs and the needs of their child.

6.5.2 Implications for policy makers

The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people, to be implemented by 2020, proposes that home and other educational settings must work together. If the strategy is to be sustained into the future the findings from this research suggest that much work needs to be done in order to build school learning communities (Epstein and Salinas, 2004) which help children's learning. The strategy recognises that in many communities projects and family literacy initiatives work to support learning, but the strategy also accepts that the work of these bodies needs to be more effectively co-ordinated. The strategy proposes that collectively the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Education and Skills, the National Adult Literacy Agency, the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, and the Library

Service must ensure that interventions make a real, measurable and positive difference to the lives and learning successes of children and young people. The strategy also stipulates that from 2012 the Department of Education and Skills, school staff, boards of management and parents' associations must ensure that parental engagement in children's learning is integrated into each School Improvement Plan. The findings of this study reveal that teachers and co-ordinators of school programmes require additional training in relation to parental involvement in their child's education. Proposals are put forward in the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy to reconfigure the content of initial teacher training, and the duration of the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), to ensure the development of teachers' skills in literacy and numeracy teaching, and also skills in building partnerships with parents to support learning in literacy and numeracy.

6.5.3 Implications for further research

Research on parental involvement focuses primarily on its influence on children's educational outcomes. Knowledge of parental involvement, and its influence on educational outcomes for children, is likely to be enhanced if researchers focus on the benefits it may create for all involved in the process – the child, parent, school, and the community as a whole.

This study is concerned with evaluating the current status of parental involvement in DEIS schools aimed at improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy. The evaluation of the substantive question is multi-faceted therefore many aspects of the study offer further opportunities for in-depth research. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of parental involvement offers specific points of entry into the process for further research for those who wish to improve parental involvement and the contribution schools can make. As this study indicates that disadvantaged parents are involved in their children's education further research is needed on low-income parents' beliefs about their role in schooling. Future evaluations of the DEIS programme need to ensure that socio-economically disadvantaged parents and students are given equal voice in the process (Hood and Hopson, 2008) and also ensure that the questions asked elicit

the needs of those whose voices are usually minimised. A longitudinal study of one or more students, involving more schools, could be conducted across a school year or over the three years of junior cycle. These studies may shed more light on what models of parental involvement are most effective.

6.6 Conclusion

My research set out to examine current parental involvement practices in DEIS post-primary schools aimed at improving literacy and numeracy levels among junior cycle students. The findings indicate that an emphasis is placed on parents being responsive to school requests for involvement in school-based literacy and numeracy activities. Low-income parents, who rely on school policy for what is best to advance their child's learning, also adhere to this principle despite research indicating that parental involvement in learning in the home is most effective in advancing student achievement. A partnership model, where schools and parents work together in supporting children's learning, has not evolved in the DEIS schools that participated in this study. Factors at parent and family, student, parent and teacher, community and societal level have contributed to this situation. Parents in this study are involved in their children's learning but appropriate structures and strategies have not evolved to provide more direct support to parents in the use of developmentally appropriate involvement strategies that fit school expectations. School personnel, for a variety of reasons, continue to implement parental involvement activities which are not successful in gaining the attention of a larger cohort of parents. Schools must view parental involvement as a process rather than an event. Through consultation with parents, backed by government policy which instills a sense of responsibility in parents that their involvement is necessary, schools will need to implement effective parental involvement strategies aimed at improving parents' sense of role construction and self-efficacy in supporting their child's learning at home. The role of technology in communicating with parents regarding their child's learning needs could be developed in this regard. Despite decades of legislation and policy development aimed at improving the involvement of low-income parents in their children's education the findings in this study indicate that progress is still slow. If at risk adolescent students' overall achievement is to be enhanced schools, parents, students, and communities will

need to work in unison more than ever. Progress is slow in targeting inter-generational educational disadvantage but parents' willingness to learn, and the ambitions expressed by them in this study, for their children to remain in school and progress to further education, strikes a note of optimism for the future.

7.0 References

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Appendix A - Interview questions

Contribution of school-parent partnership approaches in DEIS second-level schools to improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, among junior cycle students.

1. In your opinion does a home-school partnership approach enhance student achievement?
2. Is a partnership approach with parents promoted in your school?
3. What short-term and more long-term goals for engaging parents are being aimed at in your DEIS / JCSP / HSCL planning?
4. Does a collaborative approach exist between for example JCSP teachers, resource teachers and the HSCL teacher in relation to involving parents in their child's learning, particularly in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy levels?
5. Why do some parents become involved, more so than others, in their child's learning?
6. What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience?
7. What specific types of involvement do parents choose, and what influences this choice?
8. What types / models of parental involvement have a positive influence on a child's educational outcomes?
9. How can you facilitate parents' roles, as prime educators, in improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy?
10. What is your vision and purpose for parental engagement in your school?

Appendix B - Interview question for parents

Contribution of school-parent partnership approaches in DEIS second-level schools to improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, among junior cycle students.

1. In your opinion does a home-school partnership approach enhance student achievement.

- If parent is not on board is it difficult to succeed with low achieving adolescent?
- What role should parents play?
- Should schools involve parents more in their childrens' learning?

2. Is a partnership approach with parents promoted in your school.

- Perception of partnership – home / school links
- Does school want you involved / discipline mainly
- School is “good” the more parents are involved
- Parents and Parents Associations
- Parent-Teacher meetings – views on these
- Parent involved with school but not with student learning

3. What short-term and more long-term goals for engaging parents are being aimed at in your DEIS planning.

- Parent involvement in DEIS planning in schools

4. Does a collaborative approach exist between for example JCSP teachers, resource teachers and the HSCL teacher in relation to involving parents in their child's learning, particularly in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy levels.

- Transition Tests – parental involvement on transition – difference between primary and secondary school involvement
- Standardised test results – are you aware of progress
- Involvement in JCSP school or home-based literacy and numeracy initiatives.
- Psychological reports and recommendations – parents knowledge of these
- Student progress – how are you informed – especially regarding literacy and numeracy.
- HSCL teacher and home visitation

5. Why do some parents become involved, more so than others, in their child's learning.

- Role you expect parents to play – how important is your role
- Has importance of parent's role been explained to you by your child's school.
- Child using time productively in the home and in the community
- Does your child ask for help or do you give help without being asked
- Does the school support you in assisting your child – do you think there should be more support
- What would you do if you felt your child was performing poorly in literacy or numeracy
- Invitations, demands and opportunities – what type of involvement do you have with school

6. What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience.

- Adolescents
- Invitations, demands, opportunities in your child's school
- School attitudes / perceptions, time given to parents by schools
- Parents room – are you aware of its existence and who you meet when you go to your child's school
- Communication with schools – reporting – can you give feedback
- Parents sense of efficacy especially regarding maths – what courses exist for parents in the area of mathematics
- Do you feel welcomed in schools
- Other family members who help
- What militates against your involvement in your child's learning

7. What specific types of involvement do parents choose, and what influences this choice.

- Reading habits
- Maths
- Attitude to child's ability – do parents give more attention to a child with delayed literacy and numeracy levels
- Attitude to homework
- Involvement in the classroom – volunteering, for instance 'Maths for Fun'
- Involvement in the community
- Educational home visitors
- Involvement in school policy development.

8. What types / models of parental involvement have a positive influence on a child's educational outcomes.

- Negative parental involvement – need for developmentally appropriate strategies – best fit with school
- Demands on child to use time productively – for example local libraries
- Leisure activities promoted
- Ambitions for your child
- Modeling, reinforcement, direct instruction,
- Motivation, Supervision, Encouragement
- What do you do if your child is performing poorly in literacy and numeracy – scrutiny of homework
- Progression of child to third level – ambitions for your child
- Model of empowerment – basic communication, home improvement, volunteering, advocacy – what stage are parents at.
- Community involvement

9. How can you facilitate parents' role, as prime educator, in improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy.

- JCSP Initiatives – Workshops – Learning in the home
- Materials from HSCL co-ordinator
- Would you like to be more informed by the school in relation to how you can help with literacy and numeracy.
- Student Diary – means of communication between school and home
- Holiday Time.

10. What is your vision and purpose for parental engagement in your school.

- Changes you would like to see being made for parents to engage in child's achievement

Appendix C - Interview questions for principals

Contribution of school-parent partnership approaches in DEIS second-level schools to improve student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy among junior cycle students.

- 1. In your opinion does a home-school partnership approach enhance student achievement**
 - Student profile – programmes, levels of literacy and numeracy
 - If parents are not on board is it difficult to succeed with low achieving adolescents.
- 2. Is a partnership approach with parents promoted in your school**
 - What partnership means – perception among whole staff teachers, JCSP, HSCL, SCP, maths and english teachers, resource teachers
 - Management / Leadership – planning and policy in relation to DEIS
 - DEIS targets and review- communication to whole staff
 - Structures in place for parents – parent handbook, room, parent-teacher meetings, Parents Association
 - Parents involved with school but not with student learning
 - Present school-parent partnership – for example tutor, HSCL, JCSP co-ordinators and effectiveness in relation to student achievement.
 - Courses for parents in your school
 - Other activities to involve parents in the school
- 3. What short-term and more long-term goals for engaging parents are being aimed at in your JCSP and DEIS planning.**
 - DEIS planning and whole staff
- 4. Does a collaborative approach exist between, for example JCSP teachers (cross-curricular), resource teachers and the HSCL teacher in relation to involving parents in their child's learning, particularly in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy levels**
 - Transition tests, standardized test results,
 - Literacy and Numeracy development and school and home-based initiatives
 - Psychological reports and recommendations, student progress
 - Parents – relationship with JCSP and HSCL programmes

5. **Why do some parents become involved, more so than others, in their child's learning?**
 - Role you expect parents to play
6. **What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience**
 - What barriers to being engaged in their child's learning do parents face e.g invitations, demands, opportunities
 - Effects of low parent role construction and many schools invitations for involvement
 - adolescents
 - school attitudes / perceptions of teachers and parents, parents time
 - parents room
 - Parents' sense of efficacy – courses for parents
 - School has no time,
 - one-way communication – reports, letters, notes in diary, E-portal
 - How effective are communications with parents in terms of their stated aims in engaging parents with student learning and achievement
 - How parent friendly is your school's reporting – what does it aim to do and how well does it do this
 - What do you hope to achieve with the information you provide to parents
 - Mathematics a problem for parents not the case as much with literacy?
 - How are hard to reach parents engaged
 - What barriers do you wish to address and why
7. **What specific types of involvement do parents choose, and what influences this choice?**
 - Parents reading habits
 - Maths!
 - Attitude to child's ability – if poor ability not pushed by parent - with more effort child will succeed – role of parents
 - Attitude to homework.
 - Parental involvement in the class room – for example 'Maths for Fun',
 - School links with the community.
 - Educational home visitors.
 - Parental involvement in school policy development in literacy and numeracy
8. **What types / models of parental involvement have a positive influence on a child's educational outcomes?**
 - Positive and Negative parental involvement

9. How can you facilitate parents' role, as prime educator, in improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy.

- Literacy and numeracy initiatives,
- Materials sent home
- workshops
- Homework
- explaining how best to approach literacy and numeracy at home
- literacy and numeracy policies and parents
- Are parental involvement approaches in student learning effective.
- Parent more involved with school rather than student learning.
- What other approaches could you explore and what supports do you need.
- E-portal, communications, diary, reporting, engaging with the community.

10. What is your vision and purpose for parental engagement in your school?

- Approaches you would like to explore given the resources and co-operation of all stakeholders – how can stronger partnerships be developed
- School in the community
- Holiday time

Appendix D - Interview questions for JCSP co-ordinators

Contribution of school-parent partnership approaches in DEIS second-level schools to improve student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy among junior cycle students.

1. In your opinion does a home-school partnership approach enhance student achievement.

- Perception of all stakeholders in relation to the role of parents and student achievement
- What benefits do you observe when parents are involved

2. Is a partnership approach with parents promoted in your school.

- Meaning of partnership
- Management, teachers (for example maths, english, resource teachers)
- Role of JCSP, SCP, HSCL co-ordinators and other school personnel
- What steps are taken to advance a partnership approach with parents
- JCSP learning targets – are they discussed with parents, for example at parent-teacher meetings

3. What short-term and more long-term goals for engaging parents are being aimed at in your DEIS / JCSP / HSCL planning.

- JCSP and DEIS committee – is whole staff involved
- Are partnership with parents targets discussed with whole staff
- JCSP and parents in DEIS plan
- HSCL and briefing of staff.

4. Does a collaborative approach exist between for example JCSP teachers, resource teachers and the HSCL teacher in relation to involving parents in their child's learning, particularly in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy levels.

- Transition tests, standardized test results, student progress – parents given information
- Cross-curricular approach between JCSP teachers for literacy / numeracy
- Initiatives (literacy / numeracy) involving JCSP & HSCL and parents – collaboration
- Development of materials to be used at home

- 5. Why do some parents become involved, more so than others, in their child's learning.**
- 6. What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience.**
 - Invitations, demands, opportunities
 - Adolescents
 - School attitudes
 - Time – school and parents
- 7. What specific types of involvement do parents choose, and what influences this choice.**
 - Are some parents more involved with the school than with student learning
- 8. What types / models of parental involvement have a positive influence on a child's educational outcome.**
- 9. How can you facilitate parents' role, as prime educator, in improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy.**
 - Initiatives
 - Material home
 - Workshops
 - Homework
 - Explaining how to parents – literacy and numeracy
 - Literacy and Numeracy Policy – and parents
 - Are parental involvement approaches effective
 - What other approaches could you explore and what supports are needed
 - E-portal and other forms of communication
- 10. What is your vision and purpose for parental engagement in your school.**

Appendix E - Interview questions for HSCL co-ordinators

Contribution of school-parent partnership approaches in DEIS second-level schools to improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, among junior cycle students.

- 1. In your opinion does a home-school partnership approach enhance student achievement.**
- 2. Is a partnership approach with parents promoted in your school.**
 - perception of partnership
 - parent room – use of room
 - policy development and parental involvement
 - HSCL and integration of all services for example school care team and programmes -collaboration to improve parental involvement
- 3. What short-term and more long-term goals for engaging parents are being aimed at in your DEIS planning.**
 - Your role in partnership with parents
- 4. Does a collaborative approach exist between for example JCSP teachers, resource teachers and the HSCL teacher in relation to involving parents in their child's learning, particularly in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy levels.**
 - Does a whole school approach exist in relation to partnership with parents
- 5. Why do some parents become involved, more so than others, in their child's learning.**
 - Adolescents – is this a barrier
 - Child's ability
 - Parental responsibility
- 6. What barriers to engaging with schools do parents experience.**
 - How can you help to break down barriers for parent-teacher contact
 - What major difficulties do you encounter from within the school or outside school
- 7. What specific types of involvement do parents choose, and what influences this choice.**
 - Four levels of involvement – leisure, curricular activities, personal development, including courses, and parents as a resource for others. What is your experience in relation to these four areas.
 - What level of home-school involvement do you most witness – basic communication, home improvement, volunteering, advocacy.

- 8. What types / models of parental involvement have a positive influence on a child's educational outcomes.**
- 9. How can you facilitate parents' role, as prime educator, in improving student achievement, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy.**
- How you see your role as HSCL co-ordinator - linking with community to support literacy and numeracy,
 - provide parents with resources to support child, ways to support and encourage parents,
 - home visitation- $\frac{1}{3}$ of HCSL co-ordinator time – affirms parents as prime educator.
 - Continuous Professional Development for you in relation to literacy and numeracy and parental involvement
 - Models of best practice in other schools from cluster meetings – difficulties in implementation in own school
- 10. What is your vision and purpose for parental engagement in your school.**
- Success of your endeavours
 - Do you consider that current parental involvement practices lead to student achievement.
 - E-Portal and other types of communication with parents
 - National Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

Appendix F - Plain Language Statement

Professional Doctoral Programme

1. Introduction to the Research Study

My name is Teresa Murphy and I am Deputy Principal of a CDVEC college. I am in the third year of a four year Professional Doctoral Programme in the School of Education in Dublin City University. For my doctoral thesis I aim to evaluate current practices in DEIS schools to promote a partnership relationship with parents aimed at supporting students' learning and achievement in school.

11. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require.

Participants, who are willing to be involved in this research, will be asked to take part in semi-structured interviews which should take about 45 minutes to complete and will be taped, with the permission of each participant. Interviews will take place at a time and place determined by each participant. A broad outline of interview questions, a plain language statement and an informed consent form will be sent to each participant prior to their involvement in the interview process to allow time for reflection and decision making. The researcher will be available to answer any questions to clarify the purpose of the research, the research design and methodology. After the interview a transcript of the interview will be sent to each participant to check for accuracy and to add clarifications; the returned transcript will then become the data source for analysis. It will also be requested that some participants take part in a focus group discussion, which will also be taped.

111. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life).

This research is guided by the ethical principal of safeguarding the welfare and privacy of all participants. Information provided by participants will be treated as strictly confidential and will in no way reveal their identity. Schools will also not be identified. The anonymity of participants will be protected in interview and focus group transcripts. Interview transcripts will be returned to participants who will be free to make amendments if they so wish. The participant may withdraw consent to be interviewed, or the usage of recorded material, at any stage of the research process. All recorded material will be stored in a secure place and the storage of electronic data will be password protected.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the research study

DEIS schools must develop action plans aimed at developing a partnership relationship with parents to support student learning. Involvement in the research will help schools become more aware of current thinking on partnership with parents, and also help to promote school self-evaluation in this area. A summary of the findings from the research

will be shared with schools, at DEIS meetings and JCSP teacher professional network workshops and conferences if requested. The research hopefully will lead to improved approaches and bring about change in the long run in the effectiveness of school parent collaboration.

VI. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period

All transcripts of interviews and tapes will be destroyed following confirmation from Dublin City University that the researcher's thesis has passed the examination process which should be concluded in the next two years.

VII. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and should participants wish to withdraw from the research process at any time they are free to do so.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o. Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01 7008000

Appendix G - Informed Consent Form

Professional Doctoral Programme

(Educational Leadership)

The researcher's provisional title for her study is:

'School-Parent Partnership to Promote Student Learning and Achievement '

The University Department involved is the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University, Collins Avenue, Dublin 9.

The principal investigator in this research is
Teresa Murphy, B.A, H.D.E, MSc.in Education Management

Partnership between schools and parents has become increasingly important and is now enshrined in legislation. All schools have parents associations, parent representation on Boards of Management, parents receive school reports and attend parent-teacher meetings. Parents of students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in the life of schools yet where they do the benefits to students are evident. Since the Education Act 1998 subsequent legislation such as the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004, as well as Whole School Evaluation, make it necessary for schools to renew efforts to develop a more meaningful relationship with parents aimed at enhancing student progress, (particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy), and retention in school.

The purpose of the research is to conduct an in-depth study of the effectiveness of measures in place in DEIS second-level schools in order to develop a partnership relationship with parents of students in junior cycle, particularly in relation to the development of literacy and numeracy.

The procedures involved in conducting the research will include a request that some participants will agree to be members of a tape-recorded focus group discussion lasting for approximately one hour. Where individual participants agree to be interviewed, for a period of approximately 45 minutes, at a time and place specified by them, these discussions will also be taped recorded. Prior to all interviews each participant will have an opportunity to ask questions in relation to the research and will receive a broad outline of interview questions, a plain language statement and an informed consent form. The researcher will return a verbatim transcript of interviews to each participant who can verify statements made and can make amendments to the transcript if they wish.

Participants will be asked to complete the following questions:

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement?	Yes/No
Do you understand the information provided?	Yes/No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes/No
Are you aware that your interview will be audio-taped?	Yes/No

Involvement in the research is voluntary and the researcher will provide participants with enough information to make an informed decision on whether to participate or not in the research process. Should a participant wish to withdraw from the research at any stage they are free to do.

The researcher aims to conduct a total of approximately twenty interviews in five DEIS second level schools in Dublin city. All data collected will be treated as strictly confidential and the anonymity of participants will be protected. Data collected will be used only for the purpose of this study. Participants should be aware that the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

This research is independent of workplace relations.

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H - Review Instruments for DEIS schools

Initial Review: Parent and Community Partnership

Parent Partnership	Strength	Concern	Evidence
Effectiveness of communication between home and school			
Engagement of parents with children's education			
Structures for involvement of parents in school			
Consultation with parents and parent input in organisational/curricular planning			

Community Partnership	Strength	Concern	Evidence
Communication between schools in the community			
Co-operation between schools in the community			
Effective structures for liaising with voluntary and statutory agencies			
Effective community links developed through Local Committee			

Parental Involvement: Evaluation of Current Practice

	Strength	Concern	Evidence
Communication			
<i>Informal Parent/Teacher meetings are facilitated</i>			
<i>Formal Parent/Teacher meetings are held</i>			
<i>Parents are informed of school events: Newsletter/Notice Board/email/text</i>			
<i>Letters/Notes to parents are parent friendly</i>			
<i>Pre-entry/Transfer/Information meetings are held</i>			
<i>School policies and plans are effectively communicated to parents</i>			
<i>Provision is made for parents to respond to communication from school</i>			
<i>Provision is made for parents whose first language is not English</i>			
<i>Other...</i>			

Engagement of Parents with Child's Education: Evaluation of Current Practice

	Strength	Concern	Evidence
Parents are made welcome in the school by all school personnel			
The HSCL scheme engages parents through Home Visitation			
The HSCL scheme provides a variety of supports to promote active cooperation between home and school			
Parent development is facilitated through courses for parents:			

<i>Leisure courses</i>			
<i>Curricular Courses</i>			
<i>Personal Development/Parenting Courses</i>			

Involvement of Parent in Child's Education: Evaluation of Current Practice

	Strength	Concern	Evidence
Parents receive advice and support in relation to supporting their children's learning in the home			
Parents receive information in relation to school subjects, programmes, examinations and careers			
Parents are involved in programmes in school			
<i>Shared Reading/Novel</i>			
<i>Maths for Fun</i>			
<i>Science for Fun</i>			
<i>ICT</i>			
<i>Faith development</i>			
<i>Mini-company</i>			
<i>Work experience</i>			
<i>Parent as visiting speaker</i>			
<i>Craft</i>			
<i>Gardening projects</i>			
<i>Cookery</i>			
<i>Other...</i>			

Involvement of Parents in School Policies and Planning: Evaluation of Current Practice

	Strength	Concern	Evidence
The school has a policy for home/school liaison			
Parents are involved in drawing up school policies			
Parents are involved in organisational planning			
Parents are involved in curricular planning in programmes such as JCSP, LCA, Transition Year, LCVF			
Parents are involved in putting together a school plan			
Parents are involved in drawing up IEPs for own child			
<i>Other...</i>			

Partnership between School and Statutory/Voluntary Agencies: Evaluation of Current Practice

	Strength	Concern	Evidence
The school works in partnership with other schools in the community - pre-schools, primary and second-level schools and third-level			
The school building is available to the community			
The school has a Parents' Room			
The school is part of an effective Local Committee			
The Principal, teachers, parents, pupils regularly attend Local Committee meetings			
The school has effective links with:			
<i>Visiting Teacher Services</i>			
<i>SCP</i>			
<i>NEWB</i>			
<i>NEPS</i>			

<i>HSE</i>			
<i>Gardai/JLO</i>			
<i>VEC</i>			
<i>NALA</i>			
<i>Fás</i>			
<i>Area Partnership</i>			
<i>Enterprise Boards</i>			
<i>School Business links</i>			
<i>Local Employers</i>			
<i>Other....</i>			

Parental Involvement in Pupil Learning

A Possible Sample Structure for Part of Three Year Plan

Review	Review of structures for parent involvement in the school
Priority	Development of parents' skills in helping their children with numeracy
Target	Set up Maths for Fun at four class levels per year
Action Plan	<p>Establish Action Plan to involve parents in the Maths for Fun:</p> <p><i>Meet relevant teachers and parents to plan work.</i></p> <p><i>Decide Maths strands/strand units to be addressed.</i></p> <p><i>Identify suitable Maths games and place where games can be played.</i></p> <p><i>Purchase Maths games.</i></p> <p><i>Letter to parents inviting participation.</i></p> <p><i>Targeting of marginalised parents by HSCL.</i></p> <p><i>Arrange timetable of participating parents.</i></p> <p><i>Organise classroom layout.</i></p> <p><i>Organise refreshments</i></p>
Who	<i>HSCL coordinator, parents, Principal, relevant teachers, pupils</i>
When	<i>Four-week period, ,two per term, first and second term</i>
Resources	<i>Appropriate Maths Games, refreshments</i>
Monitoring	<p>Record attendance of parents</p> <p>Record parents' views on the impact of their involvement</p> <p>Record teachers' views on the impact of parents' involvement</p> <p>Record parent and teacher observation of impact on pupils' attitude to Maths</p> <p><i>(Hard-back copy-book placed in classroom could be used)</i></p>
Evaluation	<p>Are parents' skills being developed?</p> <p>Are collaborative ways of working being developed?</p> <p>What might be done differently on next occasion?</p> <p>Are Maths skills being developed? Assessment through teacher designed tests/Standardised Maths tests</p>

Appendix I - Dublin City University Ethics Approval

Dublin City University
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath



Dr. Gerry McNamara
School of Education Studies

7th February 2011

REC Reference: DCUREC/2010/104

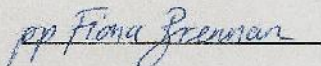
Proposal Title: School-Parent Partnership to Promote Student Learning and Achievement

Applicants: Dr. Gerry McNamara, Ms. Teresa Murphy

Dear Geny,

Further to review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'pp Fiona Brennan', is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna
Chair
DCU Research Ethics Committee



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