

“If I was not here I do not know where I would be”

**Perspectives on the Potential of Second-Level Schools to Positively
Affect Student Development in Urban Areas Characterised by
Socioeconomic and Educational Disadvantage in the Republic of
Ireland and State of Massachusetts**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

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July 2017

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the past and future John O'Malley's in my family. To my great-grandfather, who left Ireland in 1912 to start a life in Boston, Massachusetts and probably never imagined that his great-grandson would return to Ireland and graduate from Trinity College Dublin. To my father, whose sacrifices and love has been the bedrock of all my successes, and finally to my son, that I love so much, and for whom I truly believe that the sky is the limit.

SUMMARY OF THESIS

This study is a contribution to the field of Educational Effectiveness Research (EER). Its uniqueness lays in the use of an international comparative approach and student perspective to investigate the aspects of second-level schools to impact the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility of students in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and State of Massachusetts (MA). Considering this comparative and qualitative approach to EER research, the research question is expressed as:

From the perspective of the student, what aspects of the microsystem of second-level school can enhance the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development in urban areas, characterised by educational and socio-economic disadvantage?

Recognising the multi-faceted nature of human development, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bioecological Theory of Human Development is used as the Conceptual Framework to guide the construction, application and analysis of the dissertation. Based on the formulation of the research question, the structure of the literature and primary research became evident.

The focus of the study's literature review was framed by the research question. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the structure of the second-level education system in each of the contexts. Additionally, it offers a discussion on current policy in each of the contexts around the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of students from urban, disadvantaged communities. Chapter 3 then outlines the conceptual framework for this study, through explaining the Bioecological Theory of Human Development. Finally, Chapter 4 provides a discussion of EER literature and the aspects of second-level schools found to impact the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of student.

In relation to the primary research study, the researcher wanted to gather a wide sample of thoughts and opinions on how schools can best approach improving achievement. It was decided that differing school models and contexts would be essential. The two contexts chosen to participate in the primary research study were the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and the State of Massachusetts (MA). Using ROI and MA as the research locations, a study with the following elements was developed: A focus on six participating schools all located in urban areas characterised by socioeconomic and educational disadvantage, A research period of two-years, A focus on one student cohort over the two-years in each case study school using questionnaires

to be completed by the entire cohort at the beginning and end of the case study and three interviews to be conducted with six students from each case study school, additional data was to be collected via interviews conducted with the principal and teacher from each of the participating case study schools.

After the conclusion of the two-year longitudinal study the results were compiled and are the focus of Chapter 6. The entirety of Chapter 6 is dedicated to elucidating the findings from the primary research study. The Chapter is divided into the major areas of exploration set out in the study, which are the student's academic development, self-esteem and civic responsibility. Each of the areas investigated are divided by context and topic.

Chapter Seven explores the connection between Chapter Six (Findings) and the literature review chapters (Chapters 2 to 4). The overall contribution of the research is considered, along with a judgment on the study's ability to accomplish the goals set out in the research question.

The work found in Chapter 8 offers suggestions on how the research could be improved if further work were to be conducted in this area. In conjunction with this information a series of recommendations were offered considering the confluence of the research and findings. As a result of this research, and supported by the literature, it was concluded that the school-based elements that should be encouraged to impact the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of students are: (a) Having teachers that had well developed affective skills (support and caring), high expectations levels of their students and employed effective teaching strategies; (b) a transformative school culture; (c) providing new experiences and opportunities for students to broaden their horizon.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Accessing College Education (ROI)
BOM	Board of Management
CSP	Catholic School Partnership (ROI)
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education (ROI)
CSO	Central Statistics Office (ROI)
CPD	Continuous Professional Development (ROI)
CIP	Corporate Internship Programme
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (ROI)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (ROI)
ELA	English Language Learner
EER	Educational Effectiveness Research
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute (ROI)
ETB	Education and Training Board (ROI)
Et al.	<i>et alili</i> [Lat., ‘and others’]
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council (ROI)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (UK)
ILP	Individualised Learning Plan
INTO	Irish National Teachers’ Organisation
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
ITBS	Iowa Test of Basic Skills (USA)
ITT	Institute of Technology-Tallaght (ROI)
JCSP	Junior Certificate Schools Programme (ROI)
LC	Leaving Certificate (ROI)
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied (ROI)
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (ROI)
LEAP	Low-income Education Access Project
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development Programme
ROI	Republic of Ireland
MA	State of Massachusetts
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (USA)
MACRO	Meaningful Goals, Attention to academic focus, Coordination, Recruitment and Training and Organisation
MODE	Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants of Behaviour

NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications (ROI)
NSLP	National School Lunch Programme (USA)
NCLB	No Child Left Behind (USA)
NREL	Northwest Regional Educational Library
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers (ROI)
PME	Professional Masters in Education (ROI)
PPI	Progress and Performance Index
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QAIT	Quality, Appropriateness, Incentive and Time of Instruction
QQI	Quality and Qualification Ireland (ROI)
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (ROI)
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test (USA)
SER	School Effectiveness Research
SES	Social Economic Status
SLAN	Survey on Lifestyle and Attitude to Nutrition (ROI)
SPHE	Social, Political and Health Education
SSAC	State Student Advisory Council
TY	Transition Year
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WSE	Whole School Evaluation
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky)

1. INTRODUCTION

The origin of this dissertation is closely connected to my personal and professional experience. I am originally from the State of Massachusetts (MA) in the United States of America (USA), but have been living in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) for the last number of years. Professionally, I have taught for over fifteen years in second-level schools located in areas characterised by socio-economic and educational disadvantage in both the USA and ROI. These personal and professional experiences have had a profound impact on the development of this dissertation and can be seen as the driving force behind this work.

For ten years I was a teaching principal in an alternative school model that works with students returning to complete their Leaving Certificate. I was intrigued by the fact that these students, who were only a short time earlier exiting the formal education system, could achieve academically in our centre. Watching students succeed where they once only encountered failure sparked the desire to find out what had changed and why these students were now finding success. Additional to my teaching experience, I had also conducted a study for a Master of Education degree that highlighted schools both in the USA and ROI that were achieving excellent academic outcomes with communities that were characterised as educationally disadvantaged. I was also struck by the impact that the schools that I had studied had upon two particular aspects of their development: self-esteem and civic responsibility. In many ways the schools that I had encountered not only seemed to be engines for the personal and academic development of students but also the creation of a sense of responsibility to the other.

While I have learned and experienced the power that second-level schools can have in the lives of students, I am also sensitive to the fact that a myriad of influences impact upon the development of a person. Encountering the reality that second-level schools are only one of a number of influences upon a student led me to the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and his Bioecological Theory of Human Development. Bronfenbrenner described human development as, “The phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings both as individuals and as groups. The phenomenon extends over the life course across successive generations and through historical time, both past and present” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 3). Bronfenbrenner (2005) emphasises the fact that human development is effected by many, varying elements, which he categorises into four interrelated components: Process, Person, Context and Time.

Considering my professional and academic experience, underpinned by my understanding of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development, the theoretical framework of this study began to crystallise and is expressed in its research question.

From the perspective of the student, what aspects of the microsystem of second-level school can enhance the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development in urban areas, characterised by educational and socio-economic disadvantage?

The unique angle of this study is the focus on the perspective of second-level students from urban disadvantaged communities on their academic and holistic development, the use of a international comparative approach, while being framed by the Bioecological Theory of Human Development. The interest and importance of discovering student perspectives on these issue relates to elements of both the literature and my own personal experience that speaks to the insightfulness that students can provide, especially in regard to their own development (Smyth et. al., 2006). The use of a comparative approach arises from the desire to achieve as wide a spectrum of student perspectives as possible in-order to see if similarities or difference emerge amongst students in different contexts and to see if particular strategies find congruence. The contexts selected for the comparison are urban, disadvantaged communities in ROI and MA. The appropriateness of selecting these contexts is tied to their sociological similarities, a similar persistent gap in achievement along socio-economic lines, the varying models of second-level education in each context and my personal and professional connections to both contexts.

The need for research in this area is is well-established in the literature; as the benefits of education have been shown in earning potential, employment, health outcomes and civic engagement, also despite a range of initiatives the achievement gap in most western countries along socio-economic lines are stagnant at best and some cases becoming larger (OECD, 2011). The attempt to answer the research question and offer a contribution to the potential lessening of the achievement gap can be found in the chapters that form the remainder of this dissertation. A brief outline of each is given below together with their role in answering the research question:

- *Chapter 2*
 - The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide a thick description of the microsystem of second-level education and an explanation of the policy context with regard to

the self-esteem, civic responsibility and the academic development of students in ROI and MA. Chapter 2 also justifies the need for this study, as it will highlight the continued gap, especially in academic development, that exists between students of different socio-economic backgrounds.

- *Chapter 3*
 - Considering the contextualisation and justification for the study provided in Chapter 2, it is the goal of Chapter 3 to describe the particular prism used to understand development in this study. The chapter therefore outlines Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory along with some of the criticisms levelled at it.
- *Chapter 4:*
 - Due to this dissertation's focus on the ability of second-level schools to impact student development in the areas of self-esteem, academics and civic responsibility, Chapter 4 discusses the school as microsystem and its ability to influence development in these areas. Section 4.2 looks at the school-based strategies to enhance academic development, Section 4.3 looks at the development of civic responsibility and Section 4.4 looks at the development of self-esteem.
- *Chapter 5: Methodology*
 - Chapter 5 of this dissertation is devoted to explaining the methodology of the primary research study. Within Chapter 5 the research paradigm is described and the rationale for the selection of the case study sites and schools is explained. An in-depth description of each of the case study sites is also provided, as well as an analysis of the construction and implementation of each of the research instruments. Finally, the ethical issues that surround the primary research are considered.
- *Chapter 6: Research Findings*
 - The entirety of Chapter 6 is dedicated to reporting the findings from the primary research study. The chapter is divided into the major areas of exploration set out in the study, which are the development of students in the three areas of academics, self-confidence and civic responsibility. Each of the areas investigated provide a comparative approach between ROI and MA.
- *Chapter 7: Discussion of Findings*
 - Chapter 7 explores the connection between Chapter 6 (Findings) and the literature review chapters (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). The overall contribution of the

research is considered, along with a judgment on the study's ability to accomplish the goals set out in the research question. Finally, suggestions are given as to how the research could be improved if further work were to be conducted in this area.

- *Chapter 8: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions*
 - Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter in this dissertation. In Chapter 8 recommendations are put forward that represent the confluence of the primary research and relevant literature. The recommendations are focused on school-based initiatives to impact the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility of second-level students in urban, disadvantaged communities. Additionally, overarching recommendations are also offered to urban, second-level schools. It is important to note that all the recommendations are given with recognition of the range of influence put forward in the Bioecological Theory of Human Development. Finally Chapter 8 includes a look at the limitations of the study, as well as providing a summary of the entire work.

2. THE MICROSYSTEM OF SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOL IN ROI AND MA AND THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR THE ACADEMIC, SELF-ESTEEM AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS FROM URBAN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES.

2.1. Introduction

Considering the study's focus on the contexts of ROI and MA, an appropriate aim for Chapter 2 is to provide a thick description of each of these second-level education systems. These descriptions will focus on curriculum, funding and school models. The need for this contextual piece is to provide a base from which the comparative approach can take place. Another important aspect of Chapter 2 is a discussion of the current policy contexts in ROI and MA in relation to school-based initiatives to encourage the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of students from urban area characterised by educational and socio-economic disadvantage, which is clearly related to the aim of the study. A final goal of Chapter 2 is to provide a basic justification for the need for this study. The Chapter will therefore highlight that despite a range of initiatives, especially with regard to academic development, a persistent gap exists between second-level students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Given this persistent gap there exists a need for further investigation to help improve student outcomes.

2.2. Structure of Second-Level Education in MA

To understand the second-level education system in MA it is essential to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the Local, State and Federal Government. In the USA the layer of government with the least amount of influence is the Federal Government, whose role is limited by the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution (Thomson Reuters, 2017). Despite this, there has been increasing expansion of the role of the Federal Government in education in the last forty years. For example, the Federal Government provides approximately 8% of the annual second-level education budget. Additionally the Federal Government has played a role in the passing of legislation that has impacted on the second-level education system, including issues related to educational access and the safeguarding of rights for teachers and students (Thomson Reuters, 2017). A further aspect of Federal education policy is the allocation of funding based on a State's adherence to certain Federal guidelines and the adoption of Federal initiatives. The

best examples of these, and the ones most pertinent to this dissertation, are the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* legislation¹ and the pre-school initiative *Head Start*².

While the Federal Government in the USA therefore has an impact upon educational policy, the State Government wields a more substantial amount of influence. For example, the State is in charge of the following functions with regard to education:

- Providing funding for public education at all levels
- Licensing or chartering private schools and public and private institutions of higher education
- Providing oversight and guidance to local school boards
- Setting broad policies for school-level curricula, texts, standards, and assessments (but not higher education)
- Licensing school teachers and other educational personnel
- Overseeing the provision of educational services for persons living with disabilities, adults needing basic education services, and other special needs populations
- Setting the standards for examining and licensing persons seeking to work in any regulated professional occupation
- Electing or appointing some or all of the members of the governing boards of public higher education institutions and state boards of education (United States Department of Education, 2008, p. 1)

The final piece of the structure of the US education system is the role of the Local Government (Town or City). Approximately 50% of the total funding for Public second-level schools comes from Local Government (Center for Public Justice, 2017). A key part of the Local Government's involvement in their schools is through the work of the local School Committee, which is comprised of people directly elected by local taxpayers. The various roles of the School Committee show its importance (Education Ideas, 2012):

- Sets goals for school system in line with legal requirements

¹At its core this law had three primary goals: Assisting the educational achievements of the economically disadvantaged, increasing the pool of highly qualified teachers and increasing the literacy rate of students (Jeynes, 2007). Additionally, a test structure was implemented on a national level, with increased funding directly linked to school performance on standardised exams.

² The *Head Start* programme was started in the USA in 1964 and is considered one of the hallmark initiatives of the "Great Society" programme enacted by President Johnson. The programme is still in operation today and is the largest federally funded initiative in the US to address the needs of children growing up in disadvantaged communities in the United States (Cooper and Lanza, 2014).

- Approves the budget
- Appoints the superintendent, who is the day to day manager of the schools
- Is the employer and teaching staff of all schools in the local area
- Establishes performance standards for teachers and the superintendent
- Approves and adopts curriculum and textbooks

Considering the tripartite structure to the USA education system it is now important to look at the structure and content of the curriculum in second-level education.

2.2.1 Curriculum

The layer of government with most responsibility with regard to curriculum is the State government. Local government has some role in this area, as the School Committee approves and adopts curriculum and textbooks, but these would first need to be in-line with the guidance set down by the State. In regard to the Federal government, it has virtually no role when it comes to curriculum.

As mentioned above the State of Massachusetts directs the structure of the four-year programme and curriculum in all public high schools. The programme of studies that is intended to be followed by the Public second-level schools is called MassCore, which consists of the following requirements (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016a):

- English and maths (4 Years)
- Lab-based science (e.g. biology, chemistry and physics) and history (3 years)
- Foreign language (2 years)
- Arts programme (1 Year)
- Five additional “core” courses (e.g. business education, health, and/or technology)
- Additional learning opportunities, which should include Advanced Placement classes, dual enrolment, a senior project, online courses for high school or college credit, and service or work-based learning.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education sets the academic standards for the majority of the courses on the MassCore programme, namely, mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, English, foreign languages and the arts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016a).

With regard to statewide assessment, the most important exam is the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The MCAS is taken at different points of one's academic career but the most pivotal for high school graduation is administered at the end of the second-year of high school at approximately 15 years old). Since 2010, students have had to take three exams: English language arts (ELA), mathematics and either science or technology/ engineering. The result of each exam is placed into one of four categories: Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement and Fail. In order to receive a CD or "Competency Determination" students must receive a "Proficient" or better in ELA and mathematics, plus a "Needs Improvement" or higher in the science or technology/engineering subject. The attainment of a CD is important, as without it an individual cannot graduate from a Public second-level school in MA.

While the State of MA therefore has significant influence over curriculum and testing, there are varying degrees of adherence to these standards depending on the particular school model. Subsection 3.2.2 will look at the various school models in MA and their relationship with the State.

2.2.2 School Models

Public Second-Level Schools

The State of Massachusetts defines a high school as, "... that part of the school system which furnishes instruction in addition to that offered in the first eight grades and other than vocational instruction directly aided by the commonwealth" (State of Massachusetts, 2017). According to the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education there are 393 public second-level schools that correspond to the above definition (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015a). These public second-level schools receive funding from the State and Federal governments, but there is an expectation that a majority of schools' running costs are born by the local area. In fact, Chapter 70 of MA Education Law sets a minimum-spend on education for all municipalities (State of Massachusetts, 2015a). As outlined above, the School Committee acts as a board of director to the local school system (State of Massachusetts, 2015b).

Charter Schools

Charter Schools were first established in the State of MA in the mid-1990s. The goals of the Charter School Movement are varied but are centred on the following:

- Promoting equity and innovation in US public education (Lubienski and Weitzel, 2010)
- Creating competition in the USA public education sector (Lubienski and Weitzel, 2010)
- Advancing instructional and curricular developments

Charter Schools are publically funded and do not charge tuition. Any group or individual can apply to a State for a ‘charter’, which is usually granted by an approved sanctioning body³. If the goals of the organisation were not met the sanctioning body can revoke the charter (Sadovnik, 2011). Unlike public schools, Charter Schools have independent control over staffing, instruction, budgeting, internal organisation and their yearly calendar (Sadovnik, 2011). Additionally, in co-operation with their board of trustees and teachers, Charter Schools are given the opportunity to develop the structure and curriculum of the school. However, Charter Schools are nonetheless required by Massachusetts law to meet the same performance standards, testing and portfolio requirements set by the Board of Education for students in all other public schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

In MA there are currently 81 Charter Schools⁴, with 71 described as Commonwealth Charter Schools, and ten designated as Horace Mann Charter Schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015a). The difference in the type of Charter School is largely connected to governance of the school: Local school committees and the local teachers union approve the charter for Horace Mann Charter Schools, while the charter for Commonwealth Charter Schools is granted by the Board of Education for the State of Massachusetts (Abdulkadiroghu et al, 2009). In further regard to governance, the Board of Trustees for a Horace Mann Charter School can include a member of the local school committee but the Commonwealth Charter School must remain completely independent of the State Authorities (Abdulkadiroghu et al, 2009). A further difference between the two models is that the teachers in the Horace Mann Charter remain part of the teachers’ unions, while there is no requirement on behalf of teachers in Commonwealth Charter Schools to enter the union (Abdulkadiroghu et al, 2009).

³ In many States the body sanctioned to grant ‘charters’ is the state or local school boards, but in some jurisdictions public universities or other public entities can also grant charters.

⁴ Charter Schools represent approximately 5.8% of the public schools in the United States at elementary and secondary level (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). In the State of Massachusetts approximately 4.0% of the public elementary and secondary schools are Charter Schools (Snyder & Dillow, 2013).

Catholic Schools in the State of Massachusetts⁵

There are currently 54 Catholic secondary schools in MA. They are administered through the four dioceses of Boston, Fall River, Worcester and Springfield (High-Schools.com, 2015). Each diocese has an education office that is headed by a superintendent who liaises with the school principals in regard to the day-to-day management of the schools. Catholic Schools in MA, and nationally, are privately financed with the majority of the funds being sourced from tuition payments and contributions from religious orders, parishes and dioceses. Nationally, it has been determined that the average cost to educate a pupil at second-level is \$10,228, but the annual average tuition in Catholic school is \$8,182 (National Catholic Educational Association, 2012).

Despite being privately funded, Catholic high schools in MA are still legally obligated to meet requirements set down by the State authorities. According to MA Education Law all private schools, which includes Catholic high schools, must obtain the approval of the local school committee of the city or town in which it is located (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015b).

Due to the requirements under Massachusetts Law, all Catholic second-level institutions are structured similarly to public second-level institutions. Their curriculum is modelled after the MA curriculum framework, though there is a certain amount of latitude in shaping their educational offerings, for example, in the provision of Religious Education courses. (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2015b). Also in regards to student assessment, while private schools need to show frequent assessment of student performance, there is no requirement under Massachusetts's law for students in privately funded institutions to take the MCAS exam (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015b).

The development of the differing school models in MA is due to a mix of sociological, academic and historical reasons. One of the key instigators of all the school models has been the attainment of improved academic outcomes, especially of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In the following Subsection 2.2.3 the Achievement Gap that exists in MA will be highlighted.

⁵ 8% of the USA school going population attends a private second-level institution, and of that private school population 47.2% attend a school that is denominationally Catholic (approximately 1,205 second-level schools nationally) (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). In the State of Massachusetts there are 445 second-level institutions. Of that 11.6% are Catholic Schools. These Catholic second-level institutions have approximately 7.5% of the entire enrolled high school population in the State of Massachusetts (Snyder & Dillow, 2013; High-Schools.com, 2015)

2.2.3. Achievement Gap

Since the 1960's there has been a major focus in the USA on attempting to close Achievement Gap in the United States (Jeynes, 2007). This push to close the Gap began with the Standards Movement in the 1960's and was strengthened with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* legislation in the early 2000's (Jeynes 2007). Through a multi-agency approach and myriad of initiatives some of the statistics do point to a slight improvement in some of the key educational statistics with regard to achievement. For example Table 1 shows the 4-year graduation rates in MA between 2009 and 2013, and demonstrates a slight improvement in this period.

Table 1: Graduation Rates, MA (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016d)

Year	Graduation Rates: State of Massachusetts
2009	81.5% (# in cohort 77,038)
2010	82.1% (# in cohort 76,308)
2011	83.4% (# in cohort 74,307)
2012	84.7% (# in cohort 73,483)
2013	85.0% (# in cohort 74,537)

However, while retention in upper secondary education is increasing in MA, there still exists a substantial, persistent and in some cases widening gap in educational performance along both socioeconomic and ethnic lines. One of the key statistics that shows the divide between ethnicity, socioeconomic background and second-level achievement is the Status Event Dropout Rate.⁶ During the 1990s those identified as being White/Caucasian had a Status Event Dropout Rate of 8% while in comparison those recognised as Black and Hispanic had “status” dropout rates of 13.2% and 29.7%, respectively (Snyder and Dillow, 2013). This significant gulf continued to be persistent in the 2000s as Whites were 1.7 times less likely to drop out than Blacks (5.9% to 10.2%) and 3.8 times less likely than Hispanics (5.9% to 21.5%) (Snyder and Dillow, 2013).

⁶ “Status” dropouts are sixteen to twenty-four year olds who are not enrolled in school and who have not completed a high school programme, regardless of when they left school (Snyder and Dillow, 2013).

The socioeconomic divide in educational achievement is also seen when the Status Event Dropout Rate is analysed according to family income. The *Digest of Education Statistics 2012* shows that during the 1990s those students from the lowest quartile of family income had an average Status Event Dropout Rate of 22.75%. Positively, statistics from the 2000s demonstrate that status dropout rates amongst this cohort fell to an average of 17.2%. Nonetheless, the divide that exists is still quite substantial. For example during the same time period discussed above, the 1990s and 2000s, the Status Event Dropout Rate for the students from the highest quartile of income earners was just 3.37% and 3.1% respectively (Snyder and Dillow, 2013).

The performance and achievement gap seen along socioeconomic classes and ethnic lines is further evidenced in a series of standardised tests conducted over a number of years throughout the USA. These tests, known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have focused on three areas: reading, maths and science. The results of the reading exam⁷ for the years 2002, 2005 and 2009 shows that the average score was 293 points for whites, 267 points for Blacks and 273 for members of the Hispanic community (Snyder and Dillow, 2013). This divide was also seen in the maths exams,⁸ where it shows that over the time period of 1999, 2004 and 2008, White students had an average score of 314, Blacks scored an average of 285 and Hispanic students scored an average of 292 out of a total score of 500 marks (Snyder and Dillow, 2013). The same pattern exists between the various ethnicities in the science section of the exam. For example in 2009, the ethnic groups scored the following out of 300: Whites 159, Black 125 and Hispanic 134 (Snyder and Dillow, 2013).

Another national barometer of second-level achievement is the SAT or the Scholastic Aptitude Test⁹. The vast majority of college-bound final-year students in high school take the SAT so it is a useful tool to compare academic performance based on ethnicity and socioeconomic background (College Board, 2011). In all three parts of the SAT 1 exam there is a substantial gulf in scoring along ethnic lines, with students termed White having superior test scores to those that are identified as either Hispanic or Black. For example, from 2010-2013 there is a 22.7% difference between the four-year average score of White and Black students in critical reading, 25% in maths and 23.2% in writing (College Board, 2011-2014).

⁷ The NAEP reading scores have been evaluated at certain performance levels. Scale ranges from 0 to 500. (Snyder & Dillow, 2013).

⁸ "The NAEP math scores range from 0 to 500. (Snyder & Dillow, 2013, p. 227).

⁹ The SAT is the USA's most widely used college admission test. The SAT 1 tests the reading, writing and mathematics skills that one learns in high school. Each section of the SAT is scored out of 800 points. So in 2011 the total number of points that can be scored on the exam is 2400 points.

In addition to the clear divide in achievement on the SAT 1 along racial lines there also exists a split in achievement between the socioeconomic classes. SAT statistics from 2011-2014 show that those students whose family income is over \$200,000 scored an average of 22% better on the maths and critical reading section and 24.7% better on the writing section as compared to those students whose family income is below \$60,000. Once again, this difference in performance on the SAT 1 is significant because of the exams' role in college admissions. In light of these scores it would be difficult for students from the lower socioeconomic brackets to compete for a third-level place against those from more advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

These statistics suggest that the gap in educational performance along ethnic and socio-economic lines is still prevalent in MA. This is in spite of numerous policies that have been put in place at state and local level. In the next subsection this policy context will be considered.

2.2.4. MA Policy Context: Academic Development in Areas of Educational Disadvantage

In MA, education policy around academic development in disadvantaged communities has centred on a dual approach of school-based supports and a variety of school improvement efforts. From a structural point of view, the state's policy in this area led to the diversification of school models, as described in subsection 2.2.2. Lubienski and Weitzel (2010) identify that an important philosophy underpinning school improvement efforts in MA is the neo-liberal belief that competition and greater school autonomy will help lead to better schools and hence improved student outcomes. These authors explain that there is a tendency in popular discourse to lay the blame for poor academic achievement data in urban, disadvantaged communities at the feet of the Public Schools. This thinking has led to the endorsement of Charter Schools by some as they believe increased competition in public education will fuel better outcomes for students (Lubienski and Weitzel, 2010). This is of course refuted by those who oppose the Charter School movement and accuse them of eroding the funding base of schools in disadvantaged areas by attracting the most capable students in an area, thus leaving the local Public School with less funding to look after the most at-risk students (Lubienski and Weitzel, 2010).

From a policy, rather than structural, perspective, the most major school improvement initiative in MA exists in the form of a "carrot and stick" approach that has been influenced by the *NCLB* legislation. This legislation and other similar pieces of legislation espousing the "Standards

Movement” has faced much criticism for its reliance on standardised testing and its impact on teaching and learning. Despite these criticisms the framework for the “Massachusetts School and District Accountability System” is driven by this key piece of Federal legislation. In fulfilment of *NCLB* legislation, each of the Public second level schools is judged on an index called the Progress and Performance Index (PPI). The index combines information from seven separate indicators with the MCAS exam being the largest source of information (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015c). The calculation of a PPI score is used to place a school in one of five levels. The levelling and percentile scores that schools receive are important as they not only effect the reputation of the school but also determine the involvement and funding levels of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In 2010 the Massachusetts State Government also passed the *2010 Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, which has given the State wide-ranging powers and access to schools, most particularly those that are deemed to be low-achieving. The system of support that MA offers to each school is correlated with its Level based on its PPI score (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015d, p. 1).

- Level One: Schools granted significant independence, but given access to online tools and resources
- Level Two: Schools given some independence but must perform an annual needs assessment based on the state’s *Conditions for School Effectiveness*¹⁰
- Level Three: Schools are prioritised by the regional District and School Assistance Centre and need to complete both a needs assessment process and identify interventions in light of the *Conditions for School Effectiveness*
- Level Four: School must immediately implement all 11 *Conditions for School Effectiveness*, are assigned a liaison person from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and all aspects of the school are closely scrutinised
- Level Five: A receiver is appointed to the school to oversee its management

Beyond the implementation of school choice and improvement programmes, MA, in conjunction with the Federal Government, offers additional supports to schools with a high percentage of students from low-income backgrounds (Massachusetts Executive Office of

¹⁰ The Conditions for School Effectiveness are named as: effective district systems for school support and intervention, effective school leadership, aligned curriculum, effective instruction, student assessment, principal’s staffing authority, professional development and structures for collaboration, tiered instruction and adequate learning time, students’ social, emotional & health needs, family –school engagement and strategic use of resources & adequate budget authority (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015i, p.1).

Education, 2017a). The *Title I Part A* programme, which was reauthorized in 2015 under the *Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, gives schools the ability to create two types of school-based programmes: one referred to as ‘targeted assistance programmes’ for individual students and a second referred to as ‘school-wide programmes’ that target the school population to improve achievement (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015e). Additional to *Title I Part A*, other sections of *ESSA* provide additional grants, more per-pupil funding and specific added funding for students with English language needs (Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, 2017b). Other programmes provided to schools, not connected to *ESSA* funding, include the “Massachusetts School Breakfast and Lunch Programme”, which offers schools grants to provide free breakfasts and lunches to students that qualify (Benefits.gov, 2017). Additional to this is the Low-income Education Access Project (LEAP) the keys aims of which are: “Improving understanding of and teaching with poverty in mind; Improving resources for educators and student support teams; improving services and placements for homeless and transient students, decreasing inappropriate eligibility determinations for special education” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016c).

It is therefore clear that much effort and funding has been applied in MA in order to lower the achievement gap along ethnic and socio-economic lines. In spite of this, however, and in spite of some improvements, substantial gaps still exist. In the next subsection the policy context around the self-esteem development of students will be considered.

2.2.5. MA Policy Context: Self-Esteem Development

In MA self-esteem development is encouraged through multiple agencies that offer a wide range of programmes. Two of the most important are the “Collaborative States Initiative” and the “Centre for Disease Control”.

The key platform for the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s promotion of self-esteem development is their involvement in the “Collaborative States Initiative”. This initiative is a forum for an inter-state partnership to look at the issue of self-esteem development in schools through constructing standards, programmes and supports. Arising from this partnership MA promotes the development of five competencies within its students, namely, that of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016e).

In order to build these particular competencies a four-prong approach is suggested by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016e). The four strategies include classes on self-esteem development, the use of general teaching practices that can help enhance self-esteem, the integration of self-esteem development into other course work and the existence of a school-wide plan that infuses the promotion of self-esteem throughout the daily life of the school. In respect of the four suggested areas the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides guidance and direction for schools to follow.

The school-level practical expression of the “Collaborative States Initiative” can be seen in the creation of a bullying prevention and intervention curriculum that has been implemented in second-level schools. Additionally the state-funded “Expanded Learning Time” grant provides funding for extending class time, professional development activities and enrichment activities for students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). Appropriately, the “Expanded Learning Time” grant is focused on students from low socio-economic backgrounds and a key expectation upon receiving the grant is that there will be a priority placed on using the funding to enhance school culture through a focus on reinforcing positive behaviour and attendance. The grant also aims to create opportunities for enrichment that will bring about a greater student engagement in learning and in the school community. Other expressions of the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s commitment to self-esteem development can be found in the tiered support given to schools based on their students’ MCAS results. Part of this support focuses on the creation of a school culture that supports and develops student self-esteem (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f).

In MA at-risk students are further supported through the establishment of Individualised Learning Plans (ILP). While the ILP operates a broad road map for the academic experience of the particular student an important part of this personalised, learning-plan is a focus on their personal and social development. Supports offered to students and their families include those that attempt to impact the self-esteem growth of students, such as the “Massachusetts Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). This initiative engages families in activities that build relationships between the school and the family, and all cases the value of high expectations is communicated and then supported in its development.

At a wider policy level MA has also setup a “Safe and Supportive Schools Commission”. This Commission was established in 2014 to “Improve, update and refine the Behavioural Health and Public Schools Framework and Self-Assessment Tool for Schools” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f, p. 4). A key component in this framework is the conducting of a review and giving recommendations on how current initiatives could be improved and expanded in order to grow student self-esteem.

Finally the promotion of adolescent health in second-level education has been given to the Centre for Disease Control and their role to coordinate programmes, train personnel and provide technical assistance (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). A major aspect of the Centre for Disease Control’s remit is the development and support of programmes encouraging positive self-esteem growth for students.

As the above shows MA has enacted a variety of initiatives to enhance student self-esteem. Despite the significant investment into student self-esteem development it is evident that continued research, effort and funding needs to be directed toward the development of self-esteem in second-level students. With the Bioecological Theory in mind it is important that negative indications of the self-esteem levels across MA can be seen in a rising suicide rate amongst young people (90% increase between 2007 and 2014) and the fact that suicide represents the third-leading cause of death amongst children 10 to 17 years old (Lemoult, 2016). Research into Bullying in MA also points to behaviours that could have a serious impact on student self-esteem. For example 25% of MA teenager reported being bullied in the past year and in a national study over 40% admitted to being harassed and targeted over their physical appearance (Capeless, 2017). It is important to state that this study is not insinuating that second-level schools are responsible for the rising rates of bullying and suicide within MA. The point being made is that despite significance investment it is obvious that further investigations are needed to help address the various issues arising amongst students today, so that schools can continue to play a relevant part in address this complicated issues.

2.2.6. MA Policy Context: Civic Responsibility Development

The place of civics and the principles of civic responsibility within the MA school system can be seen in the Massachusetts’ *Educational Reform Act of 1993*. The legislation mandates that all students learn, “The major principles of the Declaration of Independence, the United States

Constitution and the Federalist papers and to understand and respect the contributions made by the diverse cultural, ethnic and racial groups to the life of the commonwealth” (State of Massachusetts, 1993, p. 172).

The curricular response to the development of students’ civic responsibility in second-level education is to include all aspects of civics within the history and social science curriculum, as opposed to creating a separate course that all students take. The curricular framework mandates that students know the following (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003, p. 2):

- The fundamental ideas central to the vision of the 18th century founders
- How democratic ideas have been turned into institutions and practices, the history of the origins and growth and adventures of democratic societies on earth, past and present
- The current condition of the world and how it got that way, and the need to act upon the challenges to democracy in our own day

In addition to these learning outcomes, in the final year of high school there is an elective course that students can choose called “US Government”. Within this class students are expected, “To understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how to exercise their rights and responsibilities in local, state and national government” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003, p. 8).

In addition to these specific learning opportunities within the curricular framework schools are also called to, “Purposely impart to their students the learning necessary for an informed, reasoned allegiance to the ideals of a free society” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003, p. 1). It is suggested that there is no evidence to believe that people are born with a, “Devotion to human dignity and freedom, equal rights, justice, the rule of law, civility and truth, tolerance of diversity, mutual assistance, personal and civic responsibility, self-restraint and self-respect” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003, p. 1), and so schools are expected to contribute to their development in students.

Beyond curricular options, MA has supported other avenues toward the civic responsibility development of its students. One of the more successful has been the creation of student councils. Since 1971 MA has mandated the creation of a “State Student Advisory Council” or

SSAC, while at a local level second-level schools across the State organise student councils (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013)¹¹.

Another focus in the promotion of civic engagement is the use of service-learning and other volunteer initiatives. While the use of this initiative is widespread, Table 2 shows that some schools have prioritised the development of civic responsibility in their students, while others have not. From Table 2, which is a survey of a national representative sample, it is evident that a majority of the students surveyed attend schools that offer some type of community engagement, but less than 20% find themselves in schools that utilise the principles of service-learning¹².

Table 2: Community Service Programmes in Schools (USA) (Bridgeland, 2008)			
Total Cohort of Students: 807	My school has a programme in which students participate in community service activities directly connected to what we learn in class	My school has a community service programme and encourages community service but does not tie it classes	My school does not have any type of community service programs or requirements
All students	16%	64%	17%
High-performing schools	19%	68%	10%
Average schools	17%	63%	16%
Low-performing schools	8%	58%	33%

More criticism of some MA schools commitment to civic responsibility development can be found in Table 3, which represents the results of a survey capturing the responses of a 119 school districts (out of 350) in MA. It shows that while 93% of MA high schools that responded offer some element of service learning, only about 40% of the surveyed teachers use service learning in their classroom. Furthermore, in more than 70% of the surveyed districts, at most only 40% of student bodies interact with service-learning programs. So while the number of surveyed districts in MA with the ability to offer service-learning opportunities is high, one can see that the actual take up by teachers and students is not as prevalent.

¹¹ The SSAC is made up of five Regional Councils and the State Council (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015k).

¹² Service-learning is when volunteer/service activities are connected to material covered in class

Table 3: Prevalence of Service-learning in Schools in MA (Community Service-Learning Advisory Council, 2006)		
Schools with Service-Learning (Percent of Schools in Reporting Districts)	Total Number of Schools in Districts	Percent of Schools with Service- Learning
High Schools	115	93.0%
Percentage of teachers who use service-learning in their classroom	Number of Districts	Percent of Districts
Total # of Districts Responding	76	
0%	2	2.3%
1-20%	53	60.9%
21-40%	17	19.5%
41-60%	5	5.7%
61-80%	4	4.6%
81-100%	6	6.9%
Percentage of students involved in student- learning as part of regular academic classes	Number of Districts	Percent of Districts
Total # of Districts Responding	88	
0%	0	2.2%
1-20%	39	43.3%
21-40%	24	25.8%
41-60%	13	14.0%
61-80%	3	3.2%
81-100%	9	9.7%

It is possible that the disconnect that seems to exist between the availability and take up of service learning can be linked to the lack of professional development for teachers in this area. Table 3 shows that only 34% of teachers in the responding districts indicated receiving professional development on service-learning in the past year, while over 22% of teachers had not received professional development on this topic in the past 5 years.

Table 4: Prevalence of Professional Development on Service-learning in MA (Community Service-Learning Advisory Council, 2006)		
Professional development on service-learning	Number of Districts Responding	Percent
Percent of districts that sponsored or provided professional development on service-learning in past 12 months	93	34.4%

Average percent of teachers that received professional development on service-learning in past 12 months	77	13.4%
Average percent of teachers that received professional development on service-learning in past 5 years	75	22.3%

The data provided in Table 4 may also help to uncover another reason behind the disconnect between the availability of service learning and its participation rates, as it shows the district support available for service learning. Particular items of note from Table 5 are that only 44% of the surveyed districts actually allocate funding/resources to service-learning, and that only 12.3% require schools to have a service-learning component as part of their graduation requirements.

Table 5: District Support for Service-learning (Community Service-Learning Advisory Council, 2006)	
District Policy Supports for Service-Learning	All Sites (Total 119 Districts)
Inclusion of service-learning in district mission statement	30.9%
Inclusion of service-learning in school improvement plans in a majority of schools	32.1%
Inclusion of service-learning in new staff orientation and/or new staff induction process	25.9%
Inclusion of service-learning in district's professional development plans	33.3%
Inclusion of service-learning in district hiring policies	11.1%
Inclusion of service-learning in criteria for teacher evaluations and/or district performance standards for teachers	12.3%
Funding/resources specifically set aside for service-learning	44.4%
Policies encouraging or requiring the integration of service-learning in course curriculum	40.7%
Graduation Requirements	
Service-learning as graduation requirement	12.3%
Community service hours as graduation requirements	18.5%

This evidence suggests that while MA has offered a variety of initiatives to encourage the development of student civic responsibility, some of the initiatives specifically around volunteering activities and service-learning have not enjoyed the same level of commitment from all schools. As the data above show the lack of institutional support from State and Local

Government with regard to the implementation of volunteering and service-learning opportunities may explain one of the contributing factors to the mixed support in some schools.

Having started by considering the funding, curriculum and school models in MA, this section went on to outline the achievement gap evident in this region, and to explain the policy context in terms of enhancing the academic development of students. This analysis indicates that despite a range of initiatives designed to break the cycle of educational disadvantage, persistent inequalities remain. This dissertation has an additional focus on the areas of self-esteem and civic responsibility development. The initiatives put in place in MA to improve students' growth in these more holistic areas of education have also been described in this chapter. This is important as the dissertation aims to use the principles of comparative education in two contexts – ROI and MA – and so an understanding of the policies in both regions is essential. Section 2.3 will now go on to consider the structure and policy context of ROI, with a special regard for the situation in MA described above.

2.3 Second-Level Education in ROI

When compared to the structure of the MA education system there is a significantly more streamlined system of control in ROI. As Section 2.2 describes, MA schools operate in a Federalised system that necessitates a tripartite relationship between the Federal, State and Local governments. In ROI there is a national approach to education with the funding, curriculum and oversight largely controlled through the Department of Education and Skills (DES), which is an arm of the national parliament.

Along with the work of the DES, there have been a number of key pieces of legislation that have helped shape and form the system into what it is today, none more so than the Intermediate Education Acts of 1878 and 1900, which did the following:

- Created a multi-denominational board to oversee second-level education (Coolahan, 2000)
- Set up three levels of examinations: Junior, Middle and Senior (Coolahan, 2000)
- Established the main subjects as: Greek, Latin, English, modern languages, mathematics, natural sciences, music, Celtic language and literature. (Coolahan, 2000)

- Moved from a performance-based grant to a capitation grant, which was based on the proportion of students on the school roll who presented for and passed the examinations (triennial average) (Coolahan, 2000)
- Employed six temporary inspectors of second-level schools
- Offered students a choice between a more 'modern' course made up of classical, modern, mathematical and scientific courses and the more traditional grammar school approach

After the Intermediate Education Amendment Act in 1900, there were only minor alterations to the second-level education system up to 1924. On January 6th, 1922, the Irish Free State was born, and an important task was the formation of the education system. In June 1924 the Department of Education was formed and the Intermediate Education Act was passed, which created the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations (Coolahan, 2000).

Another watershed moment for second-level education in Ireland was the introduction of the Education Act of 1998. This Act offers a comprehensive framework for the Irish education system explaining the roles of the education partners, as well as enshrining the right to equality in education for all people regardless of age, disability, race or socioeconomic background (Government of Ireland, 1998). Another noteworthy facet of the Act is the legal protection for all the relevant partners in a child's education. For example, the Act sets out the right to student councils (section 27), parent associations (section 26), right to student appeals (section 28) and the necessity of Boards of Management to have representatives from all the major stakeholders in education (Government of Ireland, 1998). Some of the other provisions include (Government of Ireland, 1998):

- Role of the Minister of Education
- Responsibilities of the school
- Process of recognising a new school
- Role of the Inspectorate
- Role of the principals and teachers
- Grievance procedures
- Curriculum

The Education Act (1998) also enshrines in Irish Law a definition of educational disadvantage, which is, “The impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage that prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools” (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 31). Moreover, Section 32, Subsection 1, pledges the creation of an educational disadvantage committee whose function is to inform the Minister on policies and strategies to target the elimination of educational disadvantage (Government of Ireland, 1998).

Following the introduction of the 1998 Education Act, the Education Welfare Act was passed into law in 2000. These two Acts should be seen as complementary, as the 2000 Act goes a long way to supporting the measures framed in the 1998 Act. Some of the statutes covered in this particular piece of legislation include (Government of Ireland, 2000):

- Raising of mandatory education to sixteen years old or at least three years of post-primary school
- Establishing the National Education Welfare Board
- Legally requiring schools to develop and make available a ‘Code of Behaviour’
- Detailing the expulsion and appeals procedures and the role of the Educational Welfare Officer in this process
- Setting guidelines for the enrolment of students in recognised schools and detailing the appeals procedure in a case that a student is not admitted to a school.

2.3.1. School Models

The second-level education system in ROI is based on a patron-founded school system where individuals, groups or government entities take up ownership of schools. Despite having a range of ‘owners’ the DES has maintained almost complete control of the curriculum, testing and oversight in all schools by linking funding to adherence to State standards. With this in mind three major models of second-level schools have developed in the Irish context:

- Voluntary Secondary School Model (Coolahan, 2000)
 - Consists of approximately 374 secondary schools, the vast majority of which are Catholic in character (Catholic Schools Partnership, 2014)
 - Governed by Boards of Management which consist of:
 - Four members nominated by the Trustees/Patron
 - Two parents of children currently enrolled in the school
 - Two elected teachers

- 100% of the running costs, including teachers' salaries, are borne directly by the DES. Before 1964 school sites and capital projects were fully funded by the owners (Religious orders, dioceses and private individuals), but since 1964 the DES has paid all capital costs.

- Community School Model (Coolahan, 2000)
 - Originally established to bridge the gap between secondary and vocational schools
 - Envisaged that it would be a centre where a variety of forms of youth and adult education could be based (Coolahan, 2000)
 - Managed by an eleven-member Board of Management (Hyland, 1995)
 - Three members from the Education and Training Boards (ETB)
 - Three nominees of religious orders or the Diocese in which the school is located
 - Two elected parents
 - Two elected members of the permanent teaching staff (Hyland, 1995)
 - 100% of the running costs, including teachers' salaries, are borne directly by the DES The only outside funding is a shared 10% contribution to the capital costs from the religious orders/Diocese and the local ETB

- Community Colleges (Coolahan, 2000)
 - Governed by Boards of Management consisting of:
 - Three nominees of the local bishop
 - Three members of the ETB
 - Two elected parents of children who are enrolled in the College
 - Two members of the teaching staff elected by the permanent whole-time teachers
 - A minority religious representation
 - The ultimate control of these institutions rests with the local ETBs, as they have power over funding and all other aspects of the wider management
 - 100% of the running and capital costs, including teachers' salaries, are borne directly by the DES

The school models that exist in the ROI context therefore stand in contrast to the MA second-level education system, where different school models can vary greatly with regard to their access to public funding, adherence to State curriculum and testing, and the ability of the State to provide oversight. Rather, the second-level education system in ROI is almost 100% funded by the DES. While the management of each school model is different, a prerequisite of receiving State funding is that all schools must offer the national curricular programmes. In the next subsection the second-level curriculum operating in all the school models above will be explained.

2.3.2 Second-Level Programmes and Curriculum

The structure of the curriculum and testing in ROI schools is much different than in MA. In MA the Masscore, developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, dictates the subjects that second-level schools should cover and provides learning objectives for each subject, but the adherence to this directive depends upon the school model (See Section 2.2.). In ROI the Department of Education and Skills, through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), develops national programmes that have prescriptive syllabi for each subject included in the national programme. All the second-level school models described in Subsection 2.3.1 must offer these national programmes in order to receive State funding. Ultimately, student progression onto third-level is tied to completion of these national programmes.

It is also important to point out that the testing regime in second-level schools is much different when comparing ROI and MA. Standardised, high-stake exams like the MCAS, which have an impact on funding of second-level schools do not exist in ROI. National examinations administered by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) are offered at the conclusion of the Junior Certificate (JC), Established Leaving Certificate (LC), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) but student performance has no bearing on funding levels for individual schools. Nonetheless, an individual's performance on the LC, LCA and LCVP national exams determine whether that individual completes second-level education, so they are of significant importance. The national examinations and specific features of the 'transition year' between Junior and Senior Cycle are described below:

Junior Certificate (JC)

The current configuration of the JC, which is expected to last at least through 2016, is a three-year course that is part of the compulsory period of education. Most students begin the programme at twelve years old and finish at fifteen with a terminal examination (NCCA, 2010). Pupils normally take nine to twelve subjects, with six being mandatory (Irish, English, mathematics, CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education), SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education), and physical education). Overall there are twenty-eight subjects that students can choose from, with most being examined at higher and ordinary level (NCCA, 2010).

The JC has begun a phased restructuring in September 2014 and will be fully implemented by September 2019. The new Junior Cycle programme will include a significantly changed programme to the one that currently exists. The current terminal examination will be replaced by a dual approach to assessment that will include classroom-based assessment and a terminal examination (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). The courses will also be amended, as there will be a mix of long courses and new short courses that will be developed by each of the schools based on the interests of the students (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). In total students will study a maximum of ten subjects with English, Irish and mathematics being required for all students.

Transition Year (TY)

This programme is designed to be optional, and takes place immediately after a pupil completes the JC exam and before they enter the Leaving Certificate Course. Unlike the other strands in the second-level education system, TY is not exam-focused, or centrally controlled by the Department of Education and Skills. Each school can decide whether or not to offer the programme, as well as the different aspects of the yearlong course. Generally a normal format for the year would include core subjects, sampling subjects, TY modules and calendar events (Department of Education and Skills, 2004, p. 3).

The 'Established' Leaving Certificate (LC)

The origins of the Leaving Certificate (LC) stretch back to the foundation of the State in 1922 and the Intermediate Education Act of 1924. While the curricular options and the syllabi of various courses have changed, the general structure and principles remain the same. Currently the LC is a two-year course where students have to take at least five subjects (Department of Education and Skills, 2004). All courses are examined at the end of a two year period with two

different levels offered, Ordinary and Higher Level, while maths and Irish offer a third option, Foundation Level.

The major recent developments in the LC have been at a curricular level where there has been a focus on including practical aspects to existing courses. Since the early 1960s there has been a movement in the Irish and modern languages to include an aural and oral examination (Coolahan, 2000). Also, the 1980s saw the introduction of practical, as well as written exams in subjects such as engineering, building construction, mechanics, art and music (Coolahan, 2000). Since 1999 there has been further movement in this direction through the introduction of new syllabi in history (2004), geography (2004), biology (2002) and home economics (2002) that have put practical applications at the centre of their examinations (Department of Education and Skills, 2004).

Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

One of the apparent philosophies of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has been the emphasis on creating different permutations of the existing course, as opposed to whole scale structural change to the LC. The LCA was an attempt to create a course for those that many not be willing or able to undertake the overwhelmingly academic construction of the LC. The expressed aim of the LCA is to “.... prepare students for adult and working life” (Department of Education and Skills, 2004, p. 6). Similar to the LC, the LCA is a two-year course with a series of terminal examinations. Some of the key differences are the cross-curricular approach and the different courses on offer. The courses offered originate from three different areas: vocational preparation, vocational education and general education (Department of Education and Skills, 2004).

While there is a terminal examination at the end of the LCA, one of the innovations of the course is that a large percentage of the results are based on continuous assessment. The first component of the LCA assessment is the completion of modules, which is judged by having over 90% attendance and completing key assignments (Department of Education and Skills, 2004). The second assessment of the LCA, which makes up 35% of the final grade, is student tasks (Department of Education and Skills, 2004). Each student must complete seven tasks or major projects in the following areas: general education, vocational preparation, two vocational education tasks, contemporary issue task, practical achievement task and the personal reflection task (Department of Education and Skills, 2004). The last aspect of the LCA assessment is final

examinations, which are held at the same time as the LC examination and make up 34% of the LCA credits.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

The LCVP was introduced in 1994 (NCCA, 1994, p. 6). The programme was developed to help students respond to rapidly changing educational and business contexts as Ireland looked toward the 21st century. The goal of the LCVP is "...To prepare students for a world where the ability to cope with rapid change is of increasing importance in preparation for social and economic life" (Department of Education and Skills, 2004, p. 10).

The LCVP combines the LC subjects with a series of modules focused on vocational preparation. As part of the LCVP, each participant must take five LC subjects, with two from the list of designated vocational subjects and a modern language (other than Irish or English). Students must also take two modules on enterprise education and preparation for the world of work. The LC subjects are examined in the usual way, while the Link Modules are assessed through a written exam (40%) and a portfolio of coursework (60%) (Department of Education and Skills, 2004, p. 10).

2.3.3. Achievement Gap in ROI

Similar to the situation in MA, the vast majority of curricular, programmatic and other reforms to the education system have often time been enacted with the goal of reducing the achievement gap amongst students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Despite these efforts studies from ROI demonstrate a growing gap in achievement along socio-economic lines. A report by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) entitled, *Who Went to College in 2004? A National Survey of New Entrants to Higher Education* goes into great detail on the economic gulf that exists in academic achievement in ROI. For example, Table 6 shows that the widest gap in LC completion rates is between the Higher Professionals and the Unknown Class in both years.

Table 6: Percentage of School Leavers Achieving LC Level by Father's Social Class (O'Connell et al., 2006, p. 57)

	1997/1998 Leaving Cert %	2002/2004 Leaving Cert %
Higher Professional	89.8% (Total Cohort 2,599)	89.8% (Total Cohort 2,500)
Lower Professional	91.3% (Total Cohort 4,505)	88.6% (Total Cohort 5,464)
Other Non-Manual	86.6% (Total Cohort 9,163)	85.5% (Total Cohort 10,097)
Skilled Manual	77.2% (Total Cohort 12,056)	79.5% (Total Cohort 6,298)
Semi- and Unskilled Manual	69.3% (Total Cohort 12,826)	77% (Total Cohort 7,289)
Unknown Class	68.4% (Total Cohort 7,539)	60.3% (Total Cohort 10,579)
Total	80.4% (Total Cohort 71,808)	81.3% (Total Cohort 61,868)

The 2009 report by the ESRI, *Hidden Disadvantage? A Study on the Low Participation in Higher Education by the Non-Manual Group*, further explores the effect of one's socioeconomic background on LC attainment. The ESRI's *2006/2007 Annual School Leaver's Survey*, records that close to 50% of those in the higher professional group achieved at least five honours in their Leaving Certificate (McCoy et al., 2009). This figure can be contrasted with those of unemployed parents where only 10% were able to attain at least five honours (McCoy et al., 2009). Other working class groups like intermediate non-manual, other non-manual, skilled manual and unskilled manual follow a similar low achievement pattern.

The achievement gap continues to manifest itself in a number of different forms, including the type of LC course chosen. This difference should be seen as important due to the avenue of progression onto third-level education. The LC course has the most historic direct link to third-level education, followed by the LCVP and then the LCA. Examining the completion of the LCA one can see that it is clearly influenced by socioeconomic background. For example, in

the ESRI's 2002/2004 survey, 11.8% of the non-employed class completed the LCA, with the number rising to 14.9% in the ESRI's 2006/2007 survey (McCoy et al., 2009). In contrast, the Professional class only had a 1.4% and 2.3% take up of the LCA exam in the ESRI's 2002/2004 and the 2006/2007 surveys (McCoy et al., 2009).

The ROI and MA contexts therefore share similar characteristics with regard with the gap in achievement between the socioeconomic classes, which has been persistent, and in some cases potentially deepening. Following on from this the next subsection will focus on of the policies in ROI that attempt to address educational disadvantage, and aim to bridge this gap.

2.3.4. ROI Policy Context: Academic Development in Areas of Educational Disadvantage

A key difference between ROI and MA with regard to the academic development of students has been that in MA there has been more focus on the improvement of achievement while in the Irish context the focus over the last thirty years has been on improving retention rates and giving educational opportunities to those that have already left the traditional system. With this as their goal the DES can claim a measure of success as statistics show that retention rates in the traditional system have increased from fifty-two percent in 1980 to 81 percent in 2005 (Department of Education and Skills, 2014). Additional to this more recent studies show that the vast majority of students in the ROI leave school with at least an upper secondary education. The DES 2014 publication, *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second-Level Schools: 2007 Entry Cohort*, for example, shows that the adjusted retention rate at second-level has remained relatively consistent, but with a steady upward growth¹³: The 2000 cohort experienced an 84.8% adjusted retention rate and the 2006 cohort recorded a 90.2% retention rate (Department of Education and Skills, 2014).

The key policy initiative that has been the bedrock of this improvement in retention rates has been the social inclusion initiative termed DEIS or Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. As part of DEIS there are nine separate schemes for second-level schools to tackle educational disadvantage and improve retention rates (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a).

¹³ The Adjusted Second-Level Retention Rate is the rate of retention in senior cycle education adjusted to factor in pupils who emigrate, died, or who left the state-aided schools to pursue their senior cycle education in private non-aided institutions. Adjustments have not been made for pupils who left the state-aided schools to pursue alternative educational pathways.

Some of the more significant DEIS initiatives include the Home, School and Community Liaison Teacher, as well as the School Completion Project. The School Completion Project uses an integrated approach that involves schools, parents and community organisations. Through this coordination the programme aims to support young people between four and eighteen by developing local strategies to encourage school retention (TUSLA, 2017). On the other hand the Home, School, and Community Liaison Teacher works with parents explaining what the school is doing, encourages involvement and offers parents developmental courses to help sustain themselves and their children in school (Department of Education and Skills, 2017b). Another initiative that post-primary schools can take part in is the eight-to-fifteen Stay in School Initiative which allows schools to take advantage of support teams that will facilitate, train and develop school wide plans to target curricular, social, learning and personal needs.

At the curricular level the response by the Department of Education and Science has focused specifically on the development of the LCA. As an alternative to the LC it gives students the option to avail of a more practical and hands on education. As an alternative to the LC it gives students the option to avail of a more practical and hands on education, which it is hoped to be more attractive for young people who are at risk of early-school leaving. Additional to these programmes is the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP). The JCSP programme specifically targets students that have been deemed at risk of early school leaving and provides them with additional supports and mentoring during their JC years (NCCA, 2010, p. 9). Finally, the DEIS initiative also offers qualified second-level schools access to planning supports, professional development services and additional funding under the school books grant scheme (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a).

In summary, it is clear that initiatives employed in ROI have had a positive impact on the retention rate of students in second-level education. Nonetheless, substantial gaps in academic achievement still exist along socio-economic lines, as they do in the MA context. There is therefore an evident need for new investigations and initiatives into what schools can do to positively influence this gap. Following on from this the next subsection will focus on of the policies in ROI dedicated to the self-esteem development.

2.3.5. ROI Policy Context: Self-Esteem Development in Areas of Educational Disadvantage

Similar to MA, the approach to the self-esteem development of students in ROI has been supported by system-wide, as well as more local and individualised initiatives. At a macro-level

the role of schools in promoting the self-esteem development of students is cemented in the Education Act of 1998. Within this Act one of the listed functions of a school is to, “Promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school” (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 13). Following this legislative direction, processes like that of Whole School Evaluation (WSE), which was outlined in the 1998 *Education Act* to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system, evaluates and offers recommendations to schools around the quality of support of students, the provision of co-curricular and extracurricular activities and the curriculum related to self-esteem development. Furthermore, in early 2013, the DES produced a set of guidelines for the development of well being in post-primary schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). The guidelines offer approaches on three levels: Whole-school, support for some students and finally a more targeted support for the most vulnerable and at-risk students.

For schools located in areas characterised as socio- and economically disadvantage there is a particular focus on schools to try to support the self-esteem development of students. For example the Home, School Community Liaison scheme promotes a strengthening of the bonds between the home and school, with an intended outcome of nurturing students marked by resilience and high levels of self-esteem as result of the supportive environment. Additionally, the School Completion Project funds extracurricular and after school activities that strengthen the connection between the school and student, while also giving opportunities for students to encounter success across spectrum of activities. The JCSP initiative also provided additional support and mentoring to students from at-risk backgrounds, supporting them through the initial years of second-level education to develop the academic and emotional resources to become successful in second-level education and beyond.

At a curricular level, the DES offers a course at JC level called Social, Political and Health Education (SPHE). The aims of the programme include: To enable the students to develop skills for self-fulfillment and living in communities, to promote self-esteem and self-confidence, to enable the students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making, to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion and to promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being (NCCA, 2000, p 4). Interestingly, however, the syllabus document for SPHE states that the aims set out by the curriculum will not be accomplished unless the school adopts a whole-school framework. A key characteristic of this suggested whole-school

approach is that of the fostering of self-esteem (NCCA, 2000, p. 5). At a practical level it is suggested that all JC students should have an SPHE class once a week and that the topics covered will focus on ten separate modules over the three years. The modules include the topics of belonging and integrating, self-management, communication skills, physical health, friendship, relationships and sexuality, emotional health, influences and decisions, substance use and personal safety.

After the completion of the JC, the senior cycle educational framework continues the work of SPHE curriculum, and sets out similar aims and objectives. For example senior cycle SPHE aims to, “Develop student self-efficacy; the confidence to think and behave independently especially in the face of social pressure” (NCCA, 2011, p. 10). It is suggested that the course be offered two periods a week with a focus on five areas of learning: Mental health, gender studies, substance use, relationships and sexuality education and physical activity and nutrition.

The policy context for the self-esteem development of therefore operates both at a macro and micro level in ROI, just as it does in MA. Similar again to MA, indicators in ROI of low self-esteem levels among young people continue to rise. For example, ROI is reported to have the fourth highest level of youth suicide in the EU and 23% of Irish student report some level of bullying within school (Edwards, 2016; Bullying4u.ie, 2017). Again as was said previously, the intention of this dissertation is not to claim that schools are solely responsible for higher suicide or bullying rates but to claim that further research is needed in order that school can continue to play a role in addressing these societal evils.

2.3.6. ROI Policy Context: Civic Responsibility Development

In broad terms, the curricular approach to promoting civic responsibility development has been different in ROI and MA. As was discussed in Section 2.2, in MA, the civics curriculum has been woven into the history and geography curriculum, whereas in ROI a separate course has been developed called Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). This course was introduced into the JC curriculum in 1997, though “Civics” has had a footprint in the second-level curriculum since its introduction in 1966 (NCCA, 2005). The current course is carried out over seventy hours during the first three years of a student’s second-level education. From 2017, schools will be able to offer a new “short course” in CSPE which will see the number of hours increase to one hundred over the three years of Junior Cycle education (NCCA, 2014).

While the structure of the CPSE course is undergoing some major changes from 2017, the reason for its place in the curriculum remains the same, which is to:

Build the skills students will need to contribute positively to a democratic society and to promote sustainable living. It gives them an understanding of social, economic and political structures at local, national and global levels and the opportunity to imagine and create ways in which they can make a difference to the lives of individuals and communities. It helps students to question, critique and evaluate what is happening in the world; provides students with an understanding of their human rights and social responsibilities; prompts students to consider how to create a more sustainable future for all; fosters an awareness of what it means to live responsibly in a democracy; and most importantly, it places active reflective citizenship at the centre of the learning process by providing students with the opportunity to take action and influence change around local, national and global issues (NCCA, 2014, p. 4).

The CSPE curriculum represents the most concerted attempt by the DES to enhance the civic development and sense of civic responsibility of the students it serves. The senior cycle curriculum does not offer a stand-alone course that specifically targets the development of a student's civic responsibility but further efforts can be found post-JC. Beginning first with TY, while there is no prescriptive curriculum there are a number of suggested strands for the programme and one of them is *Preparation for Adult and Working Life* (NCCA, 2016). Important elements of this strand are activities ranging from class visits to work experiences to research on various organisations that provide services to the local community (NCCA, 2016). Further, as part of the LCA course, students have to undertake and complete seven student tasks beyond the specific modules and one of the tasks has to be a "Contemporary Issue Task" which is described as, "Requiring the student to conduct and complete an investigation into, and to take action in relation to, a contemporary issue of social significance in the local, national and/or global community" (NCCA, 2001, p. 40). In fulfillment of the LCVP, one of the prescribed courses is called the *Link Modules* and Unit 3 of that particular course is called, "Local Voluntary Organisations/Community Enterprises". As part of this unit students are called upon to (NCCA, 1994, p. 42):

- Identify the voluntary bodies that carry out community work in the locality
- Describe the work carried out by a range of voluntary groups in the locality

- Understand and describe the different roles of adults working in voluntary community organisations
- Organise a visit to a local community enterprise and/or invite an appropriate speaker to visit the group in school
- Use learning from relevant Leaving Certificate subjects to formulate questions about aspects of a community enterprise
- Integrate information from a variety of sources to prepare a report, plan or presentation on an aspect of community development
- Link the activities in this unit to learning in relevant Leaving Certificate subjects
- Evaluate the successes achieved and problems encountered in this unit.

To summarise, the creation of an interface between school and community are important aspects of the TY, LCA and LCVP programmes, and they speak to the value and importance that ROI attaches to an active and social-minded citizenship. Despite the consistent theme of civic engagement throughout the second-level curriculum one observation in criticism of this is that the LC course that represents 38,915 students out of the 59,518 Leaving Certificate Year 1 students in 2015 does not have a required social action or community engagement component (CSO, 2016). This means that the vast majority of senior cycle, second-level students are not guaranteed to have engaged with issues of civic importance or worked to cultivate their sense of civic responsibility, which is a significant disconnect from what is presented in the initial years of second-level education.

Beyond the curricular, the DES also supports the civic development of students through the enshrinement of the right to student councils in the *1998 Education Act* (Government of Ireland, 1998). Within Section 27, Subsection 3 of the Act, the following is decreed, “Students of a post-primary may establish a student council and... a board of a post-primary school shall encourage the establishment of a student council and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to” that council. (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 26) Additional to this, most second-level schools operate volunteer opportunities (national, international and within school) and other activities often times found during Transition Year that would help promote student civic development. Despite the existence of volunteering experiences and ways to practice civic responsibility it is important to note that the service-learning programmes, which marry curriculum objectives with real-world volunteering, is not currently prevalent in ROI and could be considered another point of criticism in working to develop active citizenship among post-primary school students.

2.4. Conclusion

The aim of Chapter 2 was to provide an explanation of the second-level education system in MA and ROI. Beyond a description of the curriculum, funding, school model and structure of each of the systems, the policy context around student development in the three areas of academics, self-esteem and civic responsibility was outlined. A specific focus was placed on the policy initiatives directed at areas characterised by socio-economic and educational disadvantage.

Subsections 2.2.3 and 2.3.3 explain how in both contexts there has been a significant effort at both a macro- and micro-level to improve the academic results of students from communities that are seen as economically disadvantaged. While the policies of MA have been more focused on increasing academic achievement than in ROI, where policy has been more focused on the issue of retention, both contexts show similar results: Rises in second-level retention rates but stagnant or expanding gaps in achievement. This trend has persisted in both contexts despite a significant policy response to the issue.

Subsections 2.2.4 and 2.3.4 describe the policy context for the self-esteem development of students. In both contexts there is much congruence around the role of schools in this area. Both second-level systems promote both a macro- and micro-policies with regard to self-esteem. Each of the sections describe the system and whole school approach to self-esteem development, as well as some specific curriculum and programmes that have been enacted to support the self-esteem development of students.

Finally, Subsections 2.2.5 and 2.3.5 look at the policies in ROI and MA around the development of civic responsibility in students. Again there similarities with regard to the approach. For example, both contexts provide curricular responses, as well as formal and informal engagements with the school and wider community to help promote a sense of civic responsibility within each student. A key curricular difference between the two contexts is that in ROI there has been decision to have separate course dedicated to civic issues in the first half of second-level education, while in MA issues of civics has been blended into the history curriculum and through the offering of service-learning opportunities in other courses.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2 the structure of the second-level education systems in ROI and MA was described, along with the policy contexts with regard to the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of students. The question arising from this discussion is the extent, if any, to which second-level schools can impact on student development in these three areas. For this study, the answer to this question is framed through the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bioecological Theory of Human Development. Theories of development put forward by Piaget (1970), Erikson (1959), Brim (1975) and Gibson (1979) were initially considered, but it was concluded that the hallmarks of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) work best explain the impact second-level schools can have on a student, namely the importance of an individual's environment, the surrounding social world, the changing impact of characteristics and the element of time. Bronfenbrenner himself recognised the potential impact of school when he said, "School is in the best position of all United States (US) institutions to initiate and strengthen links that support children and adolescents" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 435). Nonetheless, the study recognises that school is only one of a myriad of influences present in the life of adolescents and while it may play a role in human development, it is certainly not the only influence.

In the following Section, the four components of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development are explained: Process, Person, Context and Time (PPCT). According to Bronfenbrenner this mix of elements exerts varying degrees of influence upon an individual's development. For this particular study, it is the third area of context that will be of particular concern, as the focus of this study is to explore the impact of the microsystem of second-level schools, through student perspective, on the self-esteem, academic and civic responsibility of students in urban disadvantaged communities in ROI and MA.

3.2. The Bioecological Theory of Human Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner has been described as the foremost theoretician of human development of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Lerner, 2004). After various stages of evolution, the

Bioecological Theory of Human Development is now commonly defined as, “An evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time. This system presupposes that the four elements of which it is formed (proximal process, person, context and time) simultaneously influence human beings’ developmental outcome...” (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p. 793).

The first element of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development is that of proximal processes, which Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) describe as the “Engines of Development” (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000, p. 118). In order to understand a proximal process Rosa and Tudge (2013) describe three propositions or principles. The first proposition is that human development takes place through the reciprocal interaction of a human being with the persons, objects and symbols in their immediate environment. The more frequent and enduring an interaction, the stronger the proximal process. The second proposition or principle suggests that the form, power, content and direction of the proximal processes are very much influenced by the characteristics of people and of the environment. A proximal process may not, therefore, have the same influence on different people who are engaged in it (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994). Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) describe the third proposition of proximal process as the fact that they have the ability to affect genotypes and phenotypes. It is important to note though that Bronfenbrenner (2005) has received some criticism for his description of proximal processes, as particular commentators remark that children are portrayed simply as objects that are influenced, as opposed to being able to influence the objects and people with whom they are interacting. (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2010).

The second “P” in the PPCT model stands for “Person” or “Person Characteristics” (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). According to Bronfenbrenner, there are three types of characteristics that influence this particular portion of the model. The first identified by Bronfenbrenner (1998) is that of “Force Characteristics”, of which there are two types. Generative Force Characteristics are described as, “Active orientations [such] as curiosity, tendency to initiate and engage in activity alone or with others, responsiveness to initiatives by others, and readiness to defer immediate gratification to pursue long-term goals” (Bronfenbrenner, 1998, p. 1009). The second set of “Force Characteristics” are known as “Disruptive Force Characteristics”, and are described as behaviours like “impulsiveness, distractibility, inability to defer gratification, or, in a more extreme form readily resort to aggression and violence” (Bronfenbrenner, 1998, p. 1009). The second set of person characteristics identified by Bronfenbrenner is that of

“Resource Characteristics”, which are seen as those that can stimulate human development. Examples include “Ability, knowledge, skill and experience” (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p. 812). The third and final of the person characteristics identified by Bronfenbrenner is that of “Demand Characteristics” (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). The importance of demand characteristics is that they have a significant influence on proximal processes and the way they are established (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) go on to describe examples of demand characteristics, both positive and negative: Agitated or calm temperament, attractive vs. unattractive appearance, and hyperactivity vs. passivity. Additional characteristics they mention include race, age and gender, all of which have an effect on the interactions known as proximal processes.

The third element of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development /PPCT model is that of context. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the various contexts around an individual as being arranged in a series of nested systems or layers that resembles Russian Matrugka Dolls. This approach by Bronfenbrenner (2005) receives some criticism, however, as Neal and Neal (2013) suggest that a more appropriate way to consider the relationship would be to see the contextual alignment as more of a network, where different systems relate to each in an overlapping way. The flexibility achieved in a networked model, as opposed to a nested model, is that human development does not need to follow a prescriptive formula. Furthermore, it leaves it open that varying influences could have an impact upon the focal point.

Despite these criticisms, Renn and Arnold’s (2003) concur with Bronfenbrenner and describe context as, “A system of nested, dynamic structures ranging from the proximal, consisting of immediate face-to-face settings, to the most distal, comprising broader social contexts such as class and culture” (Renn and Arnold, 2003, p. 4). A visual representation of the ‘Context’ element of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory of Human Development is given below:

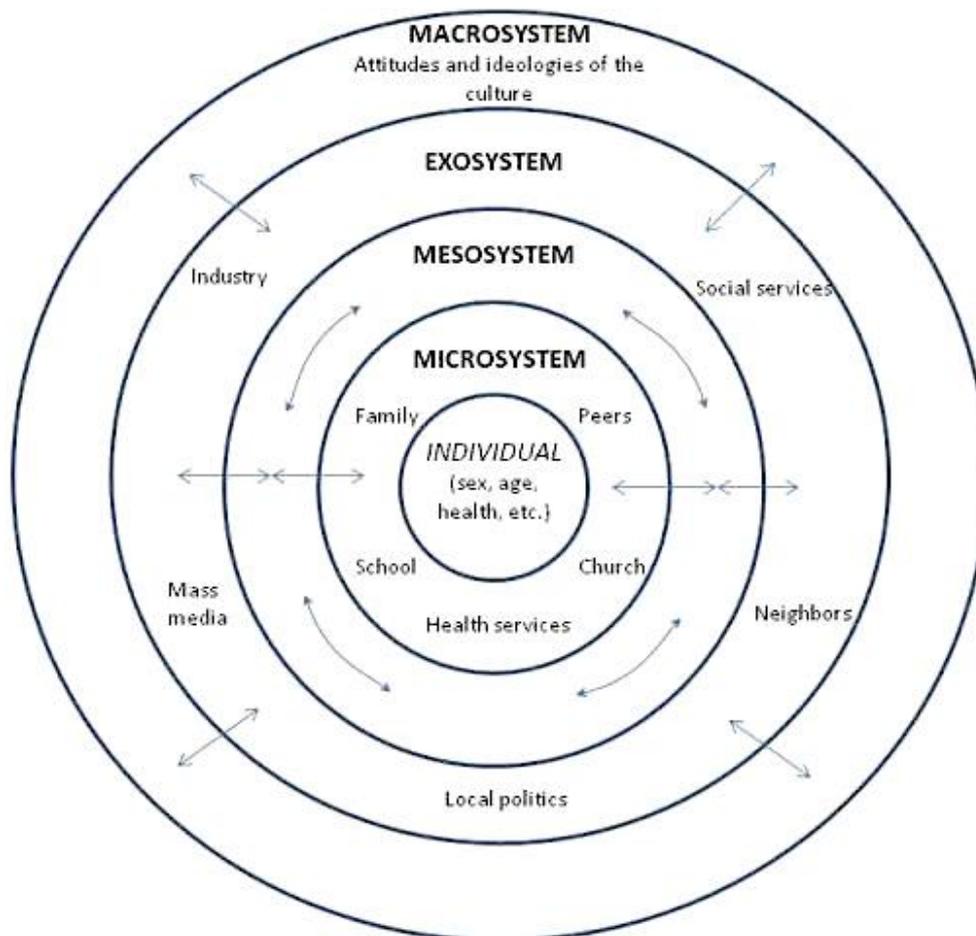


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Nested Contexts

The most immediate of the nested systems is what has been described as the Microsystem, which is the focus of this study. Bronfenbrenner has described this system as being:

A pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interactions with and activity in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. XVII).

Practically, second-level students from urban, disadvantaged communities in MA and ROI could consider their most influential microsystems to be that of home, school, neighbourhood and work. For college students this may include friendship groups, classes, roommates and jobs (Arnold, et. al. 2013).

The second of the nested systems in Bronfenbrenner's model is described as the Mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1976) describes the mesosystem as the "interrelations among the major settings containing the learner at a particular point of life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 6). Feinstein et al (2009) describe the mesosystem further as being composed of the interaction of an individual's microsystems. Rosa and Tudge (2013) concur and see the mesosystem as a system of microsystems. An example of a mesosystem is put forward by Feinstein et al (2009) who describes the relationship between a parent and teacher or a parent and friend as a mesosystem when using a teenager as the focal point. Bronfenbrenner (1976) offered the example of an American elementary school child and describes their mesosystems as including the interaction among family, school, peer group, church, camp or work place. From the perspective of second-level students in urban, disadvantaged communities in MA and ROI the connections between home and school, school and the community and school and work could be considered the most influential of their mesosystems.

The third of the nested systems is described as the Exosystem. Neal and Neal (2009) describe the exosystem as, "Settings that influence the focal individual but in which the focal individual does not directly participate" (Neal and Neal, 2009, p. 725). This definition reflects Bronfenbrenner's description of, "An extension of the mesosystem embracing... specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which the person is found, and thereby delimit, influence, or even determine what goes on there" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. XIII). Feinstein et al. (2009) give the example of a parent's workplace as an exosystem of a child. This is because while the child does not directly interact with their parent's place of work, they are impacted by the experience that their parents have at work. Further examples of exosystems from the perspective of American college students include Federal Financial Aid Policy, immigration policy, faculty curriculum committees and international policy makers. In all these cases the college students would not directly interact with the listed items but they would have a direct impact upon their experience and development. From the perspective of second-level students in MA and ROI, educational exosystems for MA could be considered to be the Federal Government and the State Government, while in ROI, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the State Examination Commission, Boards of Management and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) are examples.

The fourth of the nested contexts is described as the Macrosystem, which Rosa and Tudge (2013) describe as, “Embracing the institutional systems of a culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, education, legal and political systems” (Rosa and Tudge, 2013, p. 247). Bronfenbrenner (1976) offers a more in-depth explanation by describing the systems as, “The over-arching institutions of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems, of which local micro, meso and exo-systems are the concrete manifestations” (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 5). Examples of the Macrosystem of African Americans is put forward by Bronfenbrenner (1967), who describes slavery, poverty and discrimination as macrosystems impacting the human development of African Americans. Other examples of macrosystems are suggested by Feinstein et al and include events like economic recessions, war, media and technological advances. From the perspective of second-level students in MA the macro systems connected to education could be considered to be creating a distinctly American identity, growth and maintenance of a superpower and the importance of democratic ideals and local control. In regard to the education in ROI the macro systems of creating a distinctly Irish identity and reaction to change in the economy are good examples.

The fifth and final of the nested contexts of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory is that of the Chronosystem, which Neal and Neal (2013) describe as a system reflecting change or continuity across time that influences each of the other systems. Feinstein et al (2009) agree and suggest that the Chronosystem allows a broad picture of an individual’s life within a socio-historical perspective. Bronfenbrenner’s own definition reflects this: “A major factor influencing the course and outcome of human development is the timing of biological and social transitions as they relate to the culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring throughout the life course” (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 641). An example of segments of the chronosystem suggested by Neal and Neal (2013) include puberty and moving from primary to secondary school. Again from the perspective of education in ROI and MA and with this in mind a societal focus on equality, growing educational attainment for all, the achievement gap, and the increased recognition of the importance of education could be considered to be chronosystemic factors.

The final of the four aspects of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development to be considered is the role of “Time”. The position and importance of time found its way into Bronfenbrenner’s theory during what Rosa and Tudge (2013) describe as Phase 3 of the

development of the Bioecological Theory. Bronfenbrenner (1999) credits the work of Elder (1974) as inspiring the inclusion of time in the Bioecological Theory of Human Development, and he states, “The individual’s own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical periods through which the person lives” (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 20). Bronfenbrenner, along with Morris (2006), describes the importance of time in further detail by offering three separate levels of time, namely; microtime, mesotime and macrotime. Microtime deals with the immediate, proximal process found in the microsystems, while mesotime elapses over days, weeks and months. Finally, macrotime focuses on the long-term especially in regard to societal trends. Through the classification of these various conceptions of time, Bronfenbrenner was able to bring to light that the impact of a particular element is highly dependent on the point the individual finds himself or herself in their life course.

Despite significant acceptance of Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) work it is important to note that it is not without critics. Some suggest that the Bioecological Theory does not live up to an important tenet of a theory, which is that it is falsifiable (Popper, 1972). The inability of Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) theory to be adequately tested is because a researcher would need to investigate the impact of the complicated web of factors proposed by Bronfenbrenner across the entire life span of an individual. While not directly criticising the work of Bronfenbrenner, other authors have offered theories of human development that offer a different emphasis. For example, a contemporary of Bronfenbrenner, Gibson, constructed a theory based on the importance of perception (Tudge et. al.,2009). The key differences between Gibson and Bronfenbrenner’s theories of human development revolve around three particular areas: the interplay between the physical environment and one’s perception, the importance of the direct interaction between an individual and the environment, and the relationship an individual has with their environment.

3.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory of Human Development was discussed, and an exposition of its PPCT elements was given. The importance of Bronfenbrenner’s Theory to this study is that it provides the framework within which to study the development of second-level students in the context of ROI and MA. A particular emphasis was placed on the nested contexts of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems, with

specific examples given for students from ROI and MA. Given that second-level schools were the focus of the writer's prior academic research and professional experience, it is this microsystem that the research study under discussion will focus on. Nonetheless, it is accepted that this microsystem exists within a wider web of contexts and alongside other influential elements in the student's life.

4. THE MICROSISTEM OF SCHOOL AND ITS ABILITY TO IMPACT THE ACADEMIC, SELF-ESTEEM AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS IN SECOND-LEVEL EDUCATION

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 detailed the Biological Theory of Human Development and its role as the conceptual framework for this study. Considering the influence of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development the outlook of this study is that second-level schools in urban, disadvantaged communities can impact the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development of its students but they are only one of a myriad of factors affecting human development. What this means in practice is that while schools have an influence on second-level students, they cannot, on their own, effect significant change in a student's development.

Inspired by the study's conceptual framework the goal of Chapter 4 is to investigate what existing literature says about the aspects of second-level schools that can impact students' development. An important part of this investigation will be to look into the dual role that schools have in the creation and alleviation of educational inequalities. Section 4.2 will therefore set out how the education systems actually sustain the achievement gap in ROI and MA, while Section 4.3 will describe the school-based strategies for enhancing student development in the areas under investigation in this study: academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility.

4.2. School-Based Sources of the Achievement Gap in ROI and MA

In Chapter 2 the existence of a persistent achievement gap along socio-economic lines in the contexts of ROI and MA is highlighted. While this thesis acknowledges that a myriad of factors have influenced the development of this inequality, its focus is on the microsystem of second-level schools. Some believe, however, that schools bear little responsibility for the positive or negative outcomes of students (Thrupp, 1999). The work of Jencks et al. (1972) and Coleman et al. (1966), for example, suggest that school has little impact on achievement (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000). This view is supported by Armor (2008) who sets out that "Existing achievement gaps are not caused by schools; they are caused by powerful family risk factors that impact children well before they enter school, and they continue to operate throughout the

school year” (Armor, 2008, p. 323). Connell (1993) sharply refutes this suggestion, however, and refuses to leave schools blameless in the achievement gap scenario that many students face in areas characterised by educational disadvantage. Connell (1993) describes schools as producers of social hierarchies and justifies this remark by saying, “They select and exclude their own clients, they expand credentialed labour markets and they produce and disseminate particular kinds of knowledge to particular users” (Connell, 1993, 25). Ghosh et al. (2007) go even further by proposing that schools actually legitimise inequalities as they act as the primary means by which students are sorted and selected. Lynch and Baker (2005) agree and describe schools as entities that have their own priorities and values.

If this is the case, it is important to ascertain where schools actually do derive their priorities and values. According to Walkerdine et al (2001) and Lynch and Baker (2005), schools are essentially middle class institutions. Ball et al (1995) describe how the processes and procedures that exist in schools are more likely to reflect the resources that middle and upper class households are liable to possess. Bourdieu (1986) describes these processes as social capital and Morgan (1988, p. 50) gives some concrete examples:

Upper and middle class families have a variety of forms of cultural capital that they are able to hand on to their children. These can range from ‘social skills’ or a ‘good’ accent to the ready access to an elite or middle-class books, word processors and sporting or leisure facilities.

The elements of an individual’s social capital is thought to be one of the key factors in influencing the achievement gap as the inability of certain socioeconomic groups to succeed could be due to the structure of the education system not reflecting their cultural or social experience (Bourdieu, 1986). Demaine (2003) concurs with this by suggesting that the character of any education system is reflective of the goals of the individuals that have constructed it, namely the middle- and upper classes. Drudy and Lynch (1993) describe the reality facing most students due to the composition of educational institutions: “Social class, gender, disability and race are major determinants of the level and/or kind of educational credentials any given individual is likely to attain” (Drudy & Lynch, 1993, p. 60). In their research, the authors have shown that academic success is connected to socioeconomic background because those in middle and upper socioeconomic classes have the resources, both monetarily and in terms of social capital, to give them a significant advantage over lower socioeconomic groups. Drudy and Lynch’s view is supported by Clancy (1982), Rottman et al. (1982), Hannan et al. (1983)

and Whelan and Whelan (1984) all of whom agree that the meritocratic belief that effort and intelligence equal success is too simplistic.

At a structural level, it is suggested that the educational philosophies underpinning the second-level education systems in both ROI and MA have been influential in creating the level of social inequality that currently exists. Neo-liberalism (a modified form of liberalism tending to favour free-market capitalism) has had a major impact on educational policy in both contexts, where there has been a reliance on the virtues of the market and the expansion of opportunities (Lynch, 1999). This dependence on the market has created a system in both contexts where middle and upper class parents, who often have the cultural, social and economic capital, can investigate and purchase added advantages for their children, such as extra tuition or private education (Whitty & Power, 2000).

Other impacts of neo-liberal policies in schools have been felt in the overall approach to dealing with those students from disadvantaged background. Valencia (1997) describes neo-liberal proponents as being “Deficit Thinkers”, who blame the victim for the structural ills in society. Garcia and Guerra (2004) have also identified the perspective of “Deficit Thinking” as having a direct impact on the failure of education policy to address the needs of the excluded classes. In their opinion, “School reform efforts stall or fail because deficit beliefs become a filter that blocks educators’ abilities to examine their assumptions and to look beyond traditional solutions for real and meaningful change” (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 151). According to Lynch (2001) the neo-liberal approach to disadvantage has been to focus on equalising opportunities rather than altering the underlying conditions that lead to inequality in the first place. The former superintendent of the Boston Public School system, Prof. Paul Reville, critiques the approach of neo-liberalism to educational disadvantage when he remarks:

Is it just coincidence that all the inadequacy in education is aggregated around poor kids or is there something about poverty, which on average is just too strong for school to overcome? That’s one of the problems with our current delivery system: It dismisses or marginalizes or avoids coping with the impact of poverty on the lives of children (Wong, 2016).

The impact of the neo-liberal approach to dealing with educational disadvantage can be seen both in the range of DEIS policies in ROI (detailed Subsections 2.3.3 - 2.3.5) and the current policy approach to alleviating educational inequality in MA, led by the implementation of the

NCLB and *ESSA* legislation (detailed in Subsections 2.2.3 -2.2.5). In each of these contexts, the approach has been to tinker with the expansion of opportunities through alternative coursework or to provide additional supports to help bridge perceived gaps as opposed to implementing radical change.

The impact of school policies on the continuation of social inequalities and educational disadvantage within ROI and MA can also be seen practically in schools through the creation of selective admission policies (Lynch & Baker, 2005). In ROI a new school admissions bill has been published called the Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill 2016, and while its provisions have largely been welcomed there are elements that have been identified as playing a key role in perpetuating inequalities (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2016). For example the Admissions to School Bill 2016 as it currently stands will allow schools to select students based on religious background and previous connection to the school (e.g. parent of a past pupil of the school) (Government of Ireland, 2016). The proposed continuation of admission preferences to the children of past pupils is a clear example of a policy supporting inequality, as it would restrict students' admission to some schools (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2016).

In contrast, the admission policies for Public second-level schools and Charter Schools in MA could be considered to be quite progressive and not selective. For Public Schools, all students living in a district are guaranteed a place in school, while Charter Schools also have a district residency preference and operate a lottery when oversubscribed (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016g). While this policy may have the appearance of being non-selective, the issue that does breed selectivity is the residency preference and requirement, as it can ghettoise communities along ethnic and socioeconomic lines. For example, the city of Boston is more diverse ethnically, has more families below the poverty line for each ethnic group, lower rates of home ownership, higher rates of one parent families and higher crime rates when compared to MA as whole (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a, U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b, US Census Bureau, 2014c, US Census Bureau, 2014d). This reality means that Boston schools will have higher rates of minority students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Attempts to address this issue have been made but they could be considered inadequate and may even be instituting their own barriers. For example the "Inter-District School Choice Programme" allows students to enrol in schools outside their district but parents/guardians have to make an application to the superintendent's office of the school

district that they would like to attend in the winter prior to the commencement of the next school year (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). This places a barrier in the way of those who might otherwise avail of the opportunity. Compounding the difficulty with this initiative is that places are limited and transportation to a student's new school is not provided (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). Another initiative designed to break down the socioeconomic and ethnic apartheid of the MA Public School System is an initiative called the Metco Programme, which is aimed at placing minority students from Boston and Springfield in surrounding suburban communities (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014). The Metco Programme selects 3,000 students to participate \ but there is a five-year waiting list at present (Birmingham & Robinson, 2016). The issue of oversubscription can also be felt for particular schools is also discernible within districts, as there are over 34,000 students on Charter School waiting list in MA (Birmingham & Robinson, 2016).

The issue of admission selectivity in MA is also evident in the private elementary and secondary education system. In the State of Massachusetts over 12% of the school age population attends a private school (Nelson, 2017). As these private educational institutions do not receive any financial support from the State, there is little regulation reflected in their admission policies. Common procedures for admission to these private institutions include interviews, academic tests, application forms (including essays) and past teacher recommendations. Policies such as these could be interpreted as reflecting the desire of schools to attract students from more middle and upper class backgrounds and to discourage those from lower socio-economic classes. Such a policy may lift the educational outcomes and in turn the profile of the school (Carroll & Walford, 1996).

Another key educational aspect that has helped to create the conditions for the current achievement gap in ROI and MA has been the school curriculum. Demaine (2003) concurs and believes that curriculum is socially constructed, and by its very nature is drawn from the perspective of those that have created it. Young (1971) continues this thinking by stating that, "Formal education is based on the assumption that the thought systems organised in curricula are in some sense superior to the thought systems of those who are to be (or have not been) educated" (Young, 1971, p. 13). Zinn (2003) reinforces this viewpoint by taking a non-traditional look at the history of the United States. Zinn (2003) posits that such a history should emphasise the common person's experience as well as the historical events and leaders. This

view is supported by Connell (1993) who points to research in the USA, Britain, Canada and Australia that have found a close link between school knowledge and social inequality. Connell (1992) points to the school curriculum's role in legitimising the role of the powerful, for example, in the area of physical education. The author notes that in most of these curricula there is a substantial focus on competitive sport, which are stereotypically male-dominated pursuits. Lynch and Baker (2005) see the school curriculum in western societies reflecting the knowledge valued by the occupations that are privileged in society, which is why in their estimation the skills focused on in most curriculum are that of linguistic and mathematical ability. This is seen in ROI through the insistence that for most third-level courses, LC students need to have passed the Irish language, English and mathematics exams (NCCA, 2017). Similarly looking at the MA MassCore curriculum, the only courses mandated over the four-years of high school are English and Mathematics (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016a).

A final school-operated practice that has been found to impact profoundly on the reproduction of social inequalities is that of streaming (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Lynch and Lodge (2002), Cooper and Dunne (1999) and Rees et al. (1996) have shown that in classes streamed by ability, lower strands are disproportionately represented by students from lower socioeconomic classes and ethnic minorities. The impact of streamed classes upon one's career is almost immediate, as being enrolled in lower level classes closes educational and occupational doors (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). Smyth et al (2006, 2007) and Byrne and Smyth (2010) have also shown that students in lower stream classes are more disengaged, more likely to dropout and achieve lower grades in state examinations even after controlling for their initial ability levels. In ROI, for example, streaming is very much a part of the second-level educational experience for students. In the LC and LCVP, which the majority of second-level students participate in, there are over 34 different subject offered with the vast majority offering a higher and ordinary level options (NCCA, 2017). Furthermore, two out of the three mandatory subjects, Irish and Mathematics, operate three streams Foundation, Ordinary and Higher (NCCA, 2017). In MA, the streaming or ability grouping of students starts around the age of 9 and continues throughout second-level education. Even the current Boston Public School superintendent Dr Tommy Chang has remarked on the widespread use of streaming in their system, "In Boston Public Schools we start segregating kids at a very young age, we have to figure out how we stop doing that at such an early grade level. We are literally tracking kids still" (Wong, 2016).

This section has demonstrated that schools play a major role in perpetuating the achievement gap in ROI and MA at both a systemic and practical level. Evidence from the literature also indicates, however, that schools simultaneously initiate programmes and strategies that help to enhance the academic development of students, as well as impacting on their self-esteem and sense of civic responsibility. These are detailed in Subsection 4.3, below.

4.3. School-Based Strategies for Enhancing the Academic, Self-Esteem and Civic Responsibility Development of Second-Level Students in ROI and MA

4.3.1. Introduction

While Section 4.2. focused on the negative impact of second-level schools in ROI and MA on the achievement gap, the goal for Section 4.3 is to look at the potential positive impact that schools can have on student development. Acknowledging the work of Bronfenbrenner (1986) and accepting the assertion of Thrupp (2001, 2010) and Angus (1993, 2012) that schools can, at best, only play a minor role in impacting child development, this study will be supporting the viewpoint of Teddlie and Reynolds (2001) that while schools cannot solve all problems, they can make some difference. With this in mind the section to follow will investigate the various processes and programmes that could play some role in positively impacting the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of students. Each of these areas will now be considered in Subsections 4.3.2-4.3.4.

4.3.2. Academic Development

Through the six decades of Educational Effectiveness Research (EER) there have been countless studies that have identified characteristics of effective educational environments. A common thread through most of these studies is the key role played by teachers, principals and the culture of the school (Brookover, 1978; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Reynolds et. al. 2014). Each of these will now be discussed in detail.

Effective Teachers

Five of the most prevalent characteristics of effective teachers evident in the literature will be discussed in this section. Chief among these is a teacher having a high expectation level for

their students (Scheerens & Blomeke, 2016). The classic study on this topic is by Brookover (1979), who, though criticised for his lack of multi-level modeling and broad unit of analysis, helped to demonstrate a link between student achievement and teacher expectation level of their students (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Further evidence of the impact of teacher expectation levels upon student achievement can be found in the work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). While their research did endure methodological, conceptual and statistical criticisms, especially after frequent attempts to recreate their findings were not successful, their work is still considered important as it describes the “Positive Expectancy Effect” (Stipek, 2010). Despite the difficulty of replicating this study initially, the results of a later meta-analysis of over 345 similar studies showed that “Positive Expectancy” did exist (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978). Rosenthal and Rubin (1978) in fact suggest that the expectation level of teachers changes the way they interact with students, and to what level they challenged them. They further propose that levels of expectation dictate everything from teachers’ facial expression, manner and posture to their degree of friendliness and encouragement.

The influence of the expectation level of teachers is also evidenced in the work of Tizard et al. (1988). In this study of infant schools in inner city London, the researchers were able to establish concrete connections between the expectation level of the teacher and the level of difficulty in the content of their classes. Teachers with high expectation levels of their students therefore used more challenging material than those teachers that had a low expectation level. The level of expectation also had an impact on the level of difficulty connected to homework assignments and other required work. In ROI, Smyth et. al. (2006) concur and describe how expectation level causes teachers to vary the amount of homework based on the ability level of students, which played a factor in the student conception of themselves as learners. Mortimore et al.’s (1988) research showed similar results as they found that the teachers with higher levels of expectation were more apt to use higher order questioning techniques, as well as being more likely to offer encouragement to their students.

A second important characteristic of effective teachers is the quality of instruction they provide. In ROI, Smyth et. al. (2011), supported by the work of Noguera (2007) and Osler (2010), identify that LC students believe quality instruction to be characterised by preparation, clear explanation and active learning approaches. When looking specifically at students from disadvantaged communities in ROI, the importance of active learning approaches was particularly emphasised (Smyth et. al., 2011). Agreement can be found in the work of Sammons

et al. (1995), which suggests the following as key practices of effective teachers: assigning of homework, holding closely to the topic, creating intellectually challenging lessons, efficient organisation, using adaptive practice, and active engagement with students. Bang (2009) also identifies the importance of homework completion on academic results, especially amongst urban disadvantaged communities. In their meta-analysis of over twenty years of US research in science education, Schroeder et. al. (2007) adds open-ended questioning as a key teaching strategy. Finally, Tsay and Brady (2010) offer that cooperative learning should be considered another technique that is an essential part of purposeful teaching.

A third quality of effective teaching is the creation of a positive classroom culture (Sammons et al., 1995). Smyth et. al. (2006, 2011) link a positive classroom culture with a teachers' attitude toward teaching, as they describe that students from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds discussed the importance of teachers liking their job and having a sense of humor. Freire (1972) outlined how good teachers are characterised by a love for their profession, but more importantly a love for their students that sees them deeply committed to their development. A positive outlook on teaching has also been linked with using positive reinforcement and other teaching strategies that have been deemed effective (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Mortimore et al. (1988) agree, as they witnessed that the most effective teachers were also those that showed the highest levels of praise and encouragement. The importance of teachers being willing to offer encouragement and praise has also been found in ROI, especially in disadvantaged schools (Smyth, et. al. 2006). The use of positive reinforcement has also been found to communicate respect and care to students and these values have routinely been named as characteristics of good teachers (Smyth et. al. 2011; Hallinan, 2008; Gorard & See, 2010).

A further characteristic of a positive classroom culture is the existence of a clear, fair discipline policy (Sammons et. al., 1995). While the classic study on this topic, carried out by Rutter et al. (1979), faces criticisms by Cuttance et. al. (1992) for using a small sample of 12 schools and not employing a theoretical framework, the study's outcomes mirrors Sammons et al's conclusions, and further points to the negative impact that extremely punitive and unfair punishments can have upon the atmosphere of the school and classroom. Mortimore et al., 1988 agrees, suggest that the use of formal punishment has a negative impact on student outcomes. While the practicality of this maybe questionable, Rutter et al. (1979) and Coleman et al. (1981)

do suggest that teachers should focus on a clear organisation strategy for their classrooms, the presence of fair rules and the very infrequent use of actual punishment.

A final characteristic of effective teachers is what Sammons et al. (1995) refers to as monitoring pupil performance. The positive outcomes from this practice include attaining a better understanding of whether or not classroom goals and learning objectives have been met (Sammons et al., 1995). This knowledge will then help to inform the configuration of lesson plans and best to reach students. Lastly, Sammons et al. (1995) suggest that students often equate the monitoring of their work by teachers as a barometer of how much a teacher cares, which can also act as powerful form of positive reinforcement.

School Leadership

Reynolds et al. (2014) describe how the elements of an effective school are linked closely together, so much so that if one of the links is not performing correctly, it will damage the whole institution. A key cog in this chain is the leadership of the school. According to Bryk et al.'s (2010) work, there are particular activities that a principal needs to focus on and they include; encouraging new relations with parents and local communities, enhancing the faculty's professional capabilities, creating an environment where students feel safe and supported, and engineering the curriculum and instruction needed to ensure the improved achievement of every student (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 46).

Gray (1990), in his review of principal leadership, found no EER study that equated weak leadership with effective schools, which is further supported by an investigation of more contemporary studies in Marzano (2007). Similar to the research on effective teachers, there does not seem to be an agreed set of characteristics of an effective principal but there are similarities. For example, Ozmusul (2015) describes the characteristics of an effective principal to be: to oversee the educational programmes prepared by teachers, to establish good relationships with stakeholders, to provide discipline and order among students, to act as a role model for teachers and students, to provide adequate technological resources for teachers and students, to help students in making choices and form goals with teachers, to promote teacher learning, establish trust and to seek support from their staff. This is supported by Reynolds et al. (2014), who further suggest that what is intrinsically important for an effective principal is their style of management, vision, values and goals for the school, and their approach to change.

Despite the recognition that each principal needs to find their own unique voice and style of leadership, there are large strands of EER that name certain characteristics as essential. One of the characteristics seen in the literature is that of the principal as an instructional leader. According to Brookover (1979), the principals in the most effective schools did not solely focus on administrative duties, but were instructional leaders spending time in the classroom, working closely with the teachers to improve practice. In Sammons et. al.'s (1995) research in Great Britain, ten separate characteristics of effective principals was identified. At the top of their list was the existence of what they termed "professional leadership". At the heart of this approach was the realization that it is incumbent upon school leaders to be part of all aspects of the school community, but most especially instruction. This leadership could take the form of curriculum creation, as well as the support of the professional needs of the teaching staff. Rutter et al. (1979), Levine and Stark (1981) and Murphy (1989) use the term "Professional Leader" when referring to his/her role regarding instruction. Mortimore et al. (1988) describe the principal as a "Leading Professional", which means that they have knowledge about the curriculum, teaching strategies and how to monitor student progress. Nelson and Sassi (2005) also agree with the importance of the principal as an instructional leader, and they prize practices such as frequent movements throughout the school, visiting classrooms and informal conversations with staff.

Another identified characteristic of an effective principal is that they are firm and purposeful (Blasé and Kirby, 2009; United States Department of Education, 1987). Levine and Lezotte (1990) felt that the most important area where firm, purposeful leadership was needed was in the selection of staff, due to their influence on every aspect of the school. A further manifestation is the need for the principal to keep harmful change agents away from the school community (Branch et. al., 2013). Levine and Lezotte (1990) agree that the principal needs to act as buffer to those that might damage the school community, which could come from community influences, teachers and staff, or even poor government policy. A range of other authors from Louis and Miles (1992), Stoll and Fink (1994) and others also see the importance of firm, purposeful leadership in the initiation of change agendas within the school community.

An additional characteristic of an effective principal identified by Mortimore et. al. (1988) is the participatory approach, which is described as including both the teachers and senior management in all necessary decisions. There are a myriad of benefits from this approach as it

reduces the workload of the principal, leads to a more motivated staff and allows different ideas to influence the direction of the school. Smith and Tomlinson (1989) agree, and in their work with second-level schools they suggest that the development of subject departments with heads of department are crucial to the effective management of a second-level institution. Caul (1994) follows on from Smith and Tomlinson (1989), and in the Northern Irish context suggests that the presence and correct use of middle management within the school is an essential characteristic of an effective leader. Similarly, Chang (2011) showed that distributive leadership by the principal has an impact on teacher job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Hopkins (2012) goes even further than the other authors to suggest that the model of participatory leadership suggested by Mortimore (1988) and Smith and Tomlinson (1989) needs to be extended beyond the walls of the school. While accepting the importance of delegation within the school, there also needs to be an equal focus on working together with the other layers of the education system, according to Hopkins (2012). The author describes this focus on participatory leadership throughout all levels of the education system as a form of “Systems Leadership”. In practice this would mean that at a national level there would be a clear understanding of the goals for the education system and a blueprint for collaboration. This blueprint would then filter down to the regional level where the leaders of the various schools would be able to adapt the national plan to suit the needs of the region, while at a school level there would be an equal concern from a principal about the development of the plan within their own school and those in the local and national area.

Effective School Culture

When discussing the characteristics of an effective educational environment, Reynolds et al. (2014) stresses its interrelated nature. So far in this section the characteristics of an effective teacher and principal have been discussed. The final aspect that will be considered is that of an effective school culture or atmosphere. Reynolds et al. (2014) maintain that the creation of an effective school culture has a lot to do with the principal and teachers. Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion, it can be understood that the discussion of what makes an effective school culture is arising out of the material previously discussed.

It is generally agreed that the school environment a student encounters can have a significant impact on their learning and overall development (Sammons et al., 1995). While there is some debate over the correct “ingredients” in an effective school culture, elements of the literature hit on areas of congruence. First and foremost, Scheerens and Blomeke (2016) describe the importance of the following elements to the classroom climate: classroom composition, a positive ethos, disciplinary rules, class size and the match of teacher and students. Sammons et al. (1995) further identify the importance of a shared vision and goals amongst the staff, students, parents and the wider community. The importance of a unified approach in regard to the vision and goals of a school is supported by Rutter et al. (1979). These authors commented that the atmosphere of a school, “Will be greatly influenced by the degree to which it functions as a coherent whole” (Rutter et al., 1979 in Sammons et al., 1995, 11). Caul (1994) agrees, and shows that the most effective schools have an atmosphere characterised by a commitment to quality in all areas and an agreed set of priorities. McKinsey (2010) continues this line of thinking by stating that the development of excellence in one’s practice can only be achieved through increasing clarity across the system on standards and goals that have been set. Additional support comes from Edmonds (1979) who, despite enduring criticism for ignoring school context effects and using relatively small-scale samples, highlights the importance of the expression of a shared vision and goals in school policies (Wimpelberg et al., 1989). Some of the key components of these school policies include a positive attitude towards the students, especially around their ability to learn, and an overall focus on a commitment to quality in all aspects of school life.

Another important element of an effective educational atmosphere is the existence of collegiality and collaboration amongst staff. This characteristic is supported well in the research, as it states the importance of principals delegating some of their responsibilities. For example, Rutter et al. (1979) investigated the effect of teacher involvement in the decision-making process and discovered that the more involved teachers were, the more student achievement rates improved. Mortimore et al. (1988) also focused on the role of teacher involvement in the school community and reported positive results on pupil achievement. Graham (2007) believed that this growth in achievement was connected to greater teacher involvement because it helped to create a tighter-knit community amongst the teachers and students based on mutual respect and support.

An additional element identified as part of an effective educational atmosphere is that of a positive “Learning Environment” (Sammons et al., 1995). The first aspect of the “Learning Environment” is often described as an orderly atmosphere. Weber (1971), Brookover et al. (1979) and Coleman et al. (1982) describe this as being task-oriented, self-controlled and one where disruption is actively discouraged. Kane et al (2010) concur with the above and describe how an orderly environment and a focus on learning and achievement are highly correlated. As Rutter et al’s (1979) research elucidated, one of the key components of the most effective schools were that they had the strongest emphasis on academics, most especially around homework. This attitude extended into all cultural aspects of the school, ranging from a larger emphasis on group planning amongst teachers to the expectation levels that were placed on the students. Other studies focused on the importance of offering rewards and incentives, as opposed to creating a school environment that revolves around punishment. Purkey and Smith (1983) acknowledged that at the heart of a school culture should be the celebration of individual and communal success. In their estimation all schools should, “Publicly honour academic achievement and by stressing its importance it encourages students to adopt similar norms and values” (Purkey & Smith, 1983, p. 183). Hallinger and Murphy (1986) agree with Purkey and Smith (1983), especially in educational environments that are located in disadvantaged areas, because of the added hurdle of lower societal expectation.

A further common element among effective schools is the creation of an atmosphere that is dedicated to the rights of the pupil and is concurrently focused on positively influencing the student’s self-esteem. Bandura (1992) describes how a student’s level of self-esteem is a major determinant of achievement. If, as Bandura (1992) suggests, self-esteem is affected by our engagement with other people, the importance of the environment and atmosphere that students encounter at school is paramount. Sammons et al. (1995) recognise the influential role that schools can have upon student self-esteem and looks specifically at the impact of the teacher. In their research, Sammons et al. (1995) outline what teachers must consider when communicating with students, and focuses specifically on the transmission of respect and the need to respond to the personal needs of individual students. Smyth et. al. (2011) agree and propose that relationships between teachers and students built on care and respect are highly predictive of engagement in learning, school completion and educational performance. Mortimore et al. (1988) also discovered a close link between the communication of praise to students, self-esteem and achievement levels. This follows in the line of Trisman et al. (1976), who discuss the same topic and are supported by the studies of Rutter et al. (1979) and Lipsitz

(1984) show the link between a positive pupil–teacher relationship, high pupil self-esteem and achievement. Smith and Tomlinson (1990) also contribute to this discourse, showing that the ability for pupils to rely on a teacher for help with their personal problems also had a positive impact on achievement.

Another important support in developing a school atmosphere that promotes achievement is maintaining a strong link between the school, family and the local community. Levine and Lezotte (1990) agree and suggest that a productive school climate is linked heavily to staff relationships, as well as a close association with students and their family members. Bryk et al. (2010) see the development of strong ties, both informally and formally, between school professionals, parents and the local community as essential to creating the necessary atmosphere to promote achievement (Bryk et al., 2010). Sammons, et. al. (1995) also outline the need for frequent and meaningful engagement between the school and parents. The impact of parental involvement can be seen in the work of Tizard et al. (1992), which demonstrates that parental involvement had the same effect on reading proficiency as an extra teacher (Mortimore, 1998). The impact of parental involvement in school in Bryk et al.'s (2010) work in elementary schools in the Chicago Public School System, where over 40% of schools that exhibited close working relationships with parents and the local community had large gains in reading, while over 42% experienced large gains in maths.

A final characteristic of an effective school culture is small class sizes, and this plays a role in supporting the aspects listed above. While the data both nationally and internationally is mixed on the impact that small class sizes themselves have upon academic achievement, one area that seems to gain some widespread acceptance is that small class sizes have a positive impact on the student–teacher relationship, and hence the culture of the school (Pedder, 2006). For example, Pedder (2006) points to several studies where teachers report that a major benefit of small class sizes is the increased time and attention that they can give to each pupil. Blatchford et. al. (2003) concur with the above and report that teachers who have small class sizes are able to gain a deeper knowledge of their students, which has a large impact on their chosen teaching strategies. Gilstrap (2002) lists a number of studies that recorded the voice of teachers who routinely comment that a reduction in class size led to both positive student–teacher and peer relationships within the school. Finn et. al. (2003) also highlights how the imposition of large class sizes has a particular effect on the disaffected student, as teachers with large class sizes were more apt to allow disaffected students to practice avoidance strategies that had a negative

impact on the quantity and quality of learning opportunities. Cook effectively sums up the benefit of small class sizes on school culture:

Students – teachers too – the research said, need a sense of community. They need to feel connected with peers and with colleagues. Small schools/classes seemed in a better position to create that sense of community and to shape it to create an intellectual culture. As one student noted, ‘School must be personal before it can be educational (Hodgetts, 1997, p. 6).

4.3.3. Development of Civic Responsibility in Second-Level Students

In Chapter 1 the justification for looking at areas of development outside of the academic is given and is supported by Stoll and Fink (1996), who suggest that effective schools should enhance “all aspects” of a student. The need for schools to develop all aspects of a person is also seen in the definition of an effective teacher put forward by Goe et al. (2008), who suggest that the development of civic-mindedness, the valuing of diversity, and promotion of positive self-esteem should all be targeted in the work schools conduct with their pupils. With this in mind an area of development that this thesis has focused on, and will look at further in Subsection 4.3.3, is that of civic responsibility.

Schools in both MA and ROI have routinely focused on the development of the civic responsibility of their students (See Subsections 2.2.5 and 2.3.5). A critique of both approaches made in this dissertation is a lack of consistency across second-level education, whether it be the lack of State support for service-learning projects in MA or the reality that civic responsibility forms no official part of the most popular senior cycle course in ROI, the LC. Despite this critique it is important to note that the Bioecological Theory of Human Development holds true and the wider literature supports the fact that school is only one of a myriad of influential factors upon the development of an individual’s civic responsibility. For example, Harris (1998) describes the influence of peers, while Amna (2012) outlines the impact of an individual’s parents. According to Amna (2012) a key factor for predicting the level of a student’s civic responsibility is the degree that the parents themselves are civically engaged. McIntosh et. al. (2007) further outline that one of the most accurate indicators of the likelihood of someone voting is if their parents did. Flanagan et al (2007) and Watts et al. (2003) also describe the impact of the local community on civic responsibility development. Kahne and Sporte (2008) concur and point to research that describes how, when people are living in localities where community service is at its heart, these individuals are much more likely to

show a higher commitment to civic responsibility. Altman and Low (1992) describe a phenomenon called “Place Attachment”, which is an emotional bond that develops with a community after numerous positive experiences. Flanagan et al (2007) recognizes the impact of “Place Attachment” and explains that the more present it is, the more individuals are civically engaged. Amna (2012) also highlights the impact of an individual’s associational life, which is the peripheral institutions and activities that they are involved in, on their level of civic responsibility. According to Youniss (2009) the extracurricular activities that an individual takes part in has a powerful impact on the level of civic engagement. This proposal is again consistent with the Bioecological Theory of Human Development.

It is therefore clear that the formation of an individual’s civic responsibility can be tied to a myriad of factors. One of the factors highlighted in the literature are the schools that an individual attends. As the focus of this thesis is on the microsystem of second-level schools the remainder of this section will focus on what the second-level school community can do to help promote civic responsibility development amongst its student.

One of the key areas in which schools have been found to impact the civic responsibility of students is through creating a democratic culture in the school and classroom. This is done by focusing on democratic values like trust, perspective taking, critical thinking and commitment to collective goals (Sahin, 2008). Lenzi et al. (2014) believes two key ingredients in creating a democratic classroom are having discussions on civic issues and promoting classrooms characterised by “fairness”. An example of a particular strategy to help foster the investigation and discussion around civic issues is called “Exploding the Issue” (Silver & Harris, 2009). This method is described as a student-led, five-step brainstorming process on local and national issues that culminate in the development of an initiative to address one of the root causes.

Constructing an environment characterised by fairness needs to have at its core a sense of security and ease in expressing one’s opinion (Lenzi et. al. 2014). Further research from Lenzi et al. (2014) elucidate teaching strategies like equal grading and a “perceived” fair discipline strategy as essential aspects of a “fair” environment. In contrast, Arsenio and Gold (2006) present research showcasing what can happen when students experience what they deem to be an “unfair” environment. Nation et al. (2008) agree and posit that the experience of “unfairness” causes students to forsake communal goals for the sake of the individual. In the end both sets of research support the findings of Bandura (1986) and his “Theory of Observational Learning”,

which attaches significance to the social interactions that one has in the creation of attitudes and behaviours.

A second strategy intended to increase student civic engagement is experiential education. Moore (2000) suggests that experiential learning encompasses a range of different pedagogies, namely, simulations, role-playing and internships. Colby et al. (2003) detail that the experiential educational endeavours presently receiving the most attention is that of service learning, also known as community-based learning. Boyd and Brackman (2012) concur and describe service learning as the key institutional strategy to promote moral and civic development in many second- and third-level institutions. The role of service-learning, particularly within the US education system, is highlighted by Cetindamar and Hopkins (2008) who give a statistic that 33% of all primary and secondary schools and 50% of all public high schools have some degree of service-learning initiatives. Silver and Harris (2009) describe service learning as:

A teaching and learning strategy that promotes connections in academic learning, instruction and reflection with meaningful community service. Connections are made with community partners who have a need that directly relates to the learning objectives in the classroom (Silver and Harris, 2009, p. 67).

Silver and Harris (2009) continue their description of service-learning by outlining two core concepts: first, connecting academic content and standards to active participation in service-oriented activities, and second, providing a venue for students to use skills and knowledge gained within the classroom in real-life situations.

The benefit of experiential learning to both the individual and society is further explored in the work of Levinson (2005). In Levinson (2005), the importance of the role of class discussion is acknowledged, but what emerges is the understanding that simply discussing societal issues is not enough to encourage future civic engagement in adolescents. Levinson (2005) believes that it is only through real world engagement, supported by academic content, that students will eventually develop a commitment to civic engagement. According to Levinson (2005), the benefits of providing high quality experiential education include the development of civic skills and knowledge, and a commitment to civic practices. The increased motivation to be involved more substantially in the community is also enhanced by the adults and peers students meet. These people act as role models, which further engender the commitment to civic engagement.

Additional benefits from civic engagement have also been linked to academic achievement and career success. Kanter and Schneider (2013) studied students who took part in service-learning activities and found that it had an impact on their critical thinking skills, their academic achievement levels, high school graduation rates and enrollment rates into college. With regard to its impact on career and job opportunities, Flanagan and Levine (2010) have detailed that involvement in civic activities like volunteering gives students the chance to sample a range of employment and begin the thought process of what vocation they would be interested in pursuing. Additional research from Flanagan and Levine (2010) also describes how the participation in service-learning opportunities is key to helping adolescents understand the issues facing the most vulnerable. Silver and Harris (2009) concur and explain how adolescents who are exposed to the needs of a community develop a more acute sense of responsibility.

4.3.4. Development of Self-Esteem in Students in Second-Level Education

The third area of development focused on in this study is that of self-esteem, which Coopersmith (1981) describes as an evaluative attitude towards the self. Subsections 2.2.4 and 2.3.4 describe the policy context in MA and ROI with regard to the promotion of self-esteem development within second-level schools. This analysis shows that, in both MA and ROI, schools are believed to have an important role in the development of student self-esteem. It is important again to begin this discussion on the role of the microsystem of second-level school by reiterating that the wider literature in self-esteem development supports the tenets of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development: that school is only one of a number of factors influencing growth in this area.

Within self-esteem literature there are various positions on the source of self-esteem. James (1892) suggests that the largest impact upon one's self-esteem is the internal evaluation of how one's accomplishments measured up to one's aspirations. Coopersmith (1981) agrees and describes the four major variables of self-esteem as success, values, aspirations and defenses, which are evaluated in a process of self-judgment and weighted by their importance to the individual. Lawrence (2006) is another author who suggests that the construction of one's self-esteem is largely an internal process and not determined by external factors.

While James (1892), Coopersmith (1981), Lawrence (2006) and others put a large emphasis on the creation of self-esteem being a largely internal process of self-judgment, there are others

that focus on the influence of significant others. According to Harter (1999) an individual's self-esteem is clearly rooted in interactions with other people. In Harter's (1987) research it was determined that, for adolescents, peer support was more influential on their self-esteem than parental support. According to Harter and Whitesell (2003), the growing influence of peers on adolescent self-esteem is directly connected to the increased importance that young people attach to the opinions of their peers. Beyond the role of peers, Coopersmith (1967) was able to link high self-esteem in children with homes associated with the following: expressions of affection; concern; harmony in the home; participation in joint family activities; availability to give competent, organised help; setting clear and fair rules; and allowing freedom with well-prescribed limits (Minton, 2012, p. 57). Horney's (1945, 1950) seminal work also identifies the importance of the environment that a child encounters within the home, and links children with low self-esteem to experiences in the home that are categorised by domination, indifference, lack of respect, lack of warmth and isolation. Other significant individuals named in research as having an impact on the self-esteem of children and adolescents include teachers, coaches and extended family members (Harter, 1999).

As outlined above, the formation of an individual's self-esteem can be tied to a myriad of factors. One of the factors highlighted in the literature are the schools that an individual attends. As the focus of this thesis is on the microsystem of second-level school the remainder of this section will be on what the second-level school community can do to help promote self-esteem development amongst its students.

When investigating key school-based strategies designed to impact achievement there are numerous studies expounding the impact of individual programmes on student self-esteem, but there are questions about the influence of any one strategy (Zimmerman et. al., 1997). Rather, there is recognition from many sources that the most appropriate way to impact self-esteem is through broader initiatives aimed at the culture and structure of the school (Cushman and Cowan, 2010). An emphasis on these broader elements of the school has shown to impact every aspect of the school day, which can influence self-esteem development in varied and multi-faceted ways.

An area that much of the literature focuses on in regard to self-esteem development is the role of the teacher. McGee and Fraser (2008) speak of the essential role that teachers play in creating a classroom environment where the emotional and psychological well being of the child is

nurtured, which leads to self-esteem enhancement. Supporting the work of McGee and Fraser (2008), Cushman and Cowan (2010) underline the importance of the student-teacher relationship in the creation of a positive environment. Some of the key activities of teachers who help generate this positive environment are named as: Treating students as individuals, showing a personal interest in students, praising appropriately, using nicknames, being encouraging, provide opportunity for leadership and giving students responsibilities (Cushman and Cowan, 2010). McGee and Fraser (2008) add to the list that teachers should also be encouraging the creation of “class goals”, as the process of striving to reach one’s goals has been seen as an aide to increasing self-esteem. Further qualities of teachers mentioned by Cushman and Cowan (2010) that could have a positive impact on the class environment, and then by connection on student self-esteem, are consistency in practice and confidentiality. Classroom management skills have also been found to impact student self-esteem (INTO, 1995). Finally, the creation of a discipline system that emphasises rewards, as opposed to punitively punishing negative behaviour, has also been shown to have a positive effect on self-esteem (Smyth et al. 2011). Furthermore, the expectation of student responsibility within a discipline system has also been shown to be effective.

Beyond the role of the teacher, other elements of school culture identified as having an acute effect on student self-esteem development include: Establishing an agreed code of behaviour, clear system of rewards, parental involvement, inclusive enrolment, strong anti-bullying policy and good communication between all stakeholders (INTO, 1995). Additional to the above, and central to the creation of an atmosphere that attempts to enhance student self-esteem, is the role-played by the principal. It is only through their leadership that this area will become central to the mission of the school. A further approach to school culture that has shown to be influential in self-esteem development is that of a democratic school culture, which is detailed in Subsection 4.3.3. This is because encouraging student responsibility and voice is powerful factors that can engender self-esteem growth.

Programmatically, significant attention has been paid to health-focused education programmes and their impact upon self-esteem development. King et al (2002) detail that interactive, student-oriented and cooperative learning activities connected to areas of health and well being has shown to have a particular effect on self-esteem development. Other programmes linked to self-esteem enhancement include mentoring programmes that are characterised by peer engagement, connections to families and a focus on academic achievement. With regard to

mentoring programmes, King et al (2002) offer characteristics of these initiatives in light of self-esteem enhancement:

- Obtain and maintain administrative support.
- Employ a project coordinator.
- Include components on relationship building, self-esteem enhancement, goal setting, and academic assistance
- Recruit mentors from the community around the school.
- Provide ongoing training sessions
- Obtain parental and community support.
- Keep parents informed about programme events and progress.

4.4. Conclusion

The goal of Chapter 4 was to investigate ways that the microsystem of second-level school could influence the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development of students from urban, disadvantaged communities in ROI and MA. The Bioecological Theory of Human Development framed the entirety of Chapter 4 as it was important to be continually mindful that schools are only one of a multiplicity of factors influencing the development of students in these areas. Moving from this base, the viewpoint underpinning this Chapter was that while schools cannot make all the difference in student development, they can make some difference and, because of that, it is important to learn what can be done.

Moving from this point, it was important to discuss the negative role that schools have played in the perpetuation and deepening of the achievement gap along socio-economic lines. This analysis (Section 4.2), singled out school admission policies, and streaming as examples of the ways in which schools can negatively impact the achievement gap within ROI and MA. Following this, Section 4.3 looked at some of the school-based strategies that have been found to have a positive impact on the achievement gap. Section 4.3.2 describes the school-based strategies explicated by the literature with regard to the academic development of students. The focus here was on the characteristics of effective teachers, the role of school leaders and the culture of the school. In Section 4.3.3, the development of civic responsibility in second-level education students was dealt with. In particular the following strategies were advocated: The creation of a democratic school culture, the use of specific teaching techniques and the role of experiential learning in developing a more civically responsible student cohort. The final

section of the Chapter, Section 4.3.4, looked at the development of self-esteem in students with an emphasis on the role of school culture, the role of the teacher and the programmatic elements that have been shown to make a difference.

It is within the context of this literature that this dissertation lies. What it hopes to add to the current body of knowledge is the student perspective about what the microsystem of school can do with regard to their development in these three areas. These views come from two different but comparable contexts, which have never previously been considered together. The study will include students who are in first-chance education as well as those returning to school. It is therefore unique in its choice of schools, and will hopefully add to the existing body of research.

5. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

5.1. Introduction

Chapters 1-4 set out the research question for this dissertation, described the conceptual framework of the study and provided an investigation into the literature underpinning the areas highlighted in the research question. Following on from this work the objective of Chapter 5 is to describe the methodology applied in the creation of the primary research study of this dissertation.

The chapter begins by outlining the history of comparative research in education and the reason behind selecting this framework (Section 5.2.). The remaining sections of Chapter Five follow a structure set down by Burton and Bartlett (2009) to explain the origin and development of the primary research project connected to this dissertation. The choice of Burton and Bartlett (2009) was driven by the need for a concrete and clear roadmap for the development of the methodology supporting the study.

A diagram of the methodology of the primary research study is as follows:

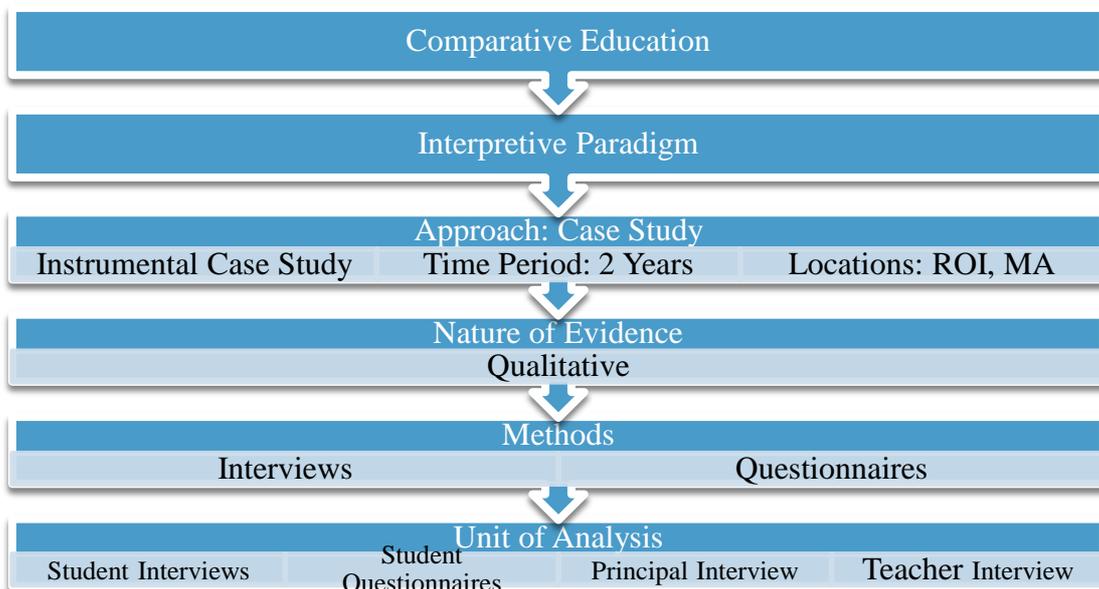


Figure 2: Outline of Primary Research Study

5.2. Comparative Research in Education: State of Massachusetts and Republic of Ireland

Many viewpoints have been offered in defining comparative research in education. A sample include:

The chief value of a comparative approach to educational problems lies in an analysis of the causes that have produced them, in comparison of the differences between the various systems and the reasons underlying them, and finally in a study of the solutions attempted. (Kandel, 1933, p. 922).

Comparative Education seeks to make sense out of the similarities and differences among education systems. (Bereday, 1964, p. 5).

Comparative Education is not only to compare existing systems but to envisage reform best suited to new social and economic conditions (Hans, 1959, p. 56).

These definitions show that there is a level of congruence in the field about the importance of focusing on the similarities and differences between contexts, with an emphasis on crystallising lessons to enhance policy and practice. Nonetheless, attempts to clearly label comparative research in education have led to much debate and criticism for the lack of consensus in the area (Kelly, 1992). Kelly (1992) therefore describes comparative research in education as:

An ill-defined field whose parameters are fuzzy. No simple theory or method guides scholars and the importance of culture and historical specificity continues to be debated. The field has no centre, rather it is an amalgam of multidisciplinary studies informed by a number of different theoretical frameworks (Kelly, 1992, p. 21).

The lack of a defined methodological blueprint for comparative studies has been widely accepted by many of the key figures in the field. For example Holmes (1965) states that no single research methodology has ever once defined comparative research in education (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2006). This point echoes the work of Kandel (1959), who described the methodology of comparative research in education as being determined by the needs of the study (Rust et al., 1999). Broadfoot (1998) agrees and describes comparative research in education as a context rather than a discipline that needs to connect with the methodologies of broader social science perspectives (Broadfoot, 2000).

The decision to use a comparative approach for this study is closely connected to my professional experience and the desire to extend knowledge, broaden perspectives and inform policy. As explained in Chapter 1 my professional experience has offered evidence that schools can make a difference in the lives of students. Encountering this in my own professional context has driven the desire to hear the perspective of other students, from within Ireland and outside, to learn if there are common aspects of second-level schools across contexts that are having an impact on the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development of their students.

The ultimate goal for gathering these student perspectives was that particular lessons might emerge that could influence practice both within ROI and further afield. The justification for the use of the comparative approach in education as a tool to extend knowledge, broaden perspectives and inform policy is well supported in the literature. For example Hantrais (2009) puts forward that these justifications are among the most common given for the use of the comparative approach. This view echoes Sadler's (1900) description of the practical value of studying other contexts, namely the ability to learn more about one's own context. Phillips and Schweisfurth (2006) continue by describing an appropriate defence for the use of a comparative approach as the desire to, "Provide a body of descriptive and explanatory data which allows us to see various practices and procedures in a very wide context that helps to throw light upon them" (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2006, p. 440).

5.3. Research Paradigm: Interpretivism / Anti-Positivism

Considering the personal and professional experiences that have influenced this dissertation, along with the support in the literature for its connection to comparative research in education, the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this work are that of the interpretive paradigm (Douglas, 1973; Rust et al. 1999; Broadfoot, 2000; Khakpour, 2012). Evidence of the interpretive philosophy can be found in the conceptual framework of this study. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development highlights the importance of context, time, processes and persons in human development. The 'uniqueness' of each individual's development shows that, similar to the construction of knowledge, development is an individual process determined by an interaction with the four named elements above. Additionally, the viewpoint of interpretivism has also been arrived at after a number of years as a teacher and school leader. Over the years it has become apparent that perception matters,

and that students and staff can often encounter similar events but the meanings derived and prescribed can be very different. These experiences connect well with the interpretivist position and the belief that knowledge is personal, subjective and unique (Crotty, 1998).

While the role of the researcher in the positivist tradition is to uncover the universal laws of human truth, interpretivism or anti-positivism directs that the researcher needs to become involved in the lives of their research subjects (Burrell and Morgan, 2005). This involvement is essential as the unique knowledge of another individual can only be gleaned by a learning of the persons' perspective of the world in which they live. According to Douglas (1973) the central role of the researcher is an attempt to know more fully the subjective world of their research participants. Douglas (1973) puts forward that a complete understanding of the subjective world can be uncovered through walking with the research subject, directly experiencing their lives, which will lead to a more conclusive understanding of their experience.

Despite this study's connection to the interpretive perspective it is also important to be mindful of the criticisms of this belief about knowledge. For example, those moving from a critical theory background have denounced the anti-positivist tradition for not challenging the status quo of society (Morrison, 1995). Habermas (1972) has gone so far to suggest that the anti-positivist tradition has helped keep the powerful in power as it does not go far enough to support radical change in the social framework. The positivist tradition also offers criticism of the anti-positivist philosophy but from a very different point of view than the critical theorists. Mead (1934) says that a major flaw of the anti-positivist position has been its complete abandoning of the scientific procedures, which he believes has damaged the ability of studies to be able to claim generalisability. Bernstein (1974) has gone onto attack the subjectivity of findings related to studies in the anti-positivist tradition. He claims that the outcome of studies where the results are wholly dependent on the interpretation of the researcher is suspect because of the influence that time and place could have on the overall results. Finally, Layder (1994) includes a further critique of the anti-positivist tradition by suggesting that a flaw in its point of view is the lack of credence given to external-structural forces to impact behaviour.

The defence of the anti-positivist point of view has come from many quarters. Blaikie (2010) describes how the positivist tradition relies heavily on statistical patterns which he suggests lack meaning on their own. Cohen et al (2007) note that another criticism of the positivist viewpoint is that it applies a reductionist approach to viewing nature, where life is measurable

and experience is ignored. In Blaikie's (2010) estimation the interpretivist/anti-positivist paradigm gives meaning to the statistical patterns as it leads to an investigation of the motives of people's actions. This focus on the meanings, interpretations and motives of individuals is what sets interpretivism apart from critical rationalism and positivism, and creates the depth of knowledge and experience that uncovers the knowledge of perspective (Blaikie, 2010). Additionally, this viewpoint gives weight to everyday beliefs, practices and actions, as it is in these mundane activities that the true knowledge of social reality can be understood.

5.4. Approach

5.4.1. Case Study (Definition, Support and Criticism)

The approach of this particular study is that of a case study, which sit well within the interpretive philosophical tradition and comparative research in education (Crotty, 1998; Khakpour, 2012). Many definitions and tenets abound for the term case study. Stake (1995) describes it as when:

A researcher explores in depth a programme, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995, p. 49).

Blaikie (2010) describes a case study as a way of organising the social data of a unit of analysis, which may be a person a family, or other social group. A case study does not restrict itself to the use of certain methods. It speaks to the investigation of a single or multiple subjects, settings or documents.

The support for the case study research approach can be found in many quarters. Nisbet and Watt (1984) discuss the ability of case studies to generate a powerful voice as they are drawn from in-depth of examinations of the case or case(s) in question. Due to the fact that data emerges from the participants themselves, Nisbet and Watt (1984) intimate that the orientation of a case study means that they are valuable displays of reality, while simultaneously giving a detailed window into the particular case or cases. Another benefit of the case study approach is that it can be completed by one individual, which means that the practicalities needed to complete a case study can be realistically accessed and carried out by a researcher (Blaxter et al, 1996). The need for only one researcher to complete a case study also speaks to the flexibility

that is needed as part of a case study and Cohen et al (2007) suggests that this is one of the strengths of the approach, as it is able to adjust to unanticipated events.

Criticisms of the case study approach can also be found on a number of different levels, however. Nisbet and Watt (1984) focus on the subjective nature of case studies. For example, they describe how the case study approach could fall victim to bias and sloppy research (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). The authors further suggest that the flexibility of case studies could lead to problems on both ends of the spectrum as they run the risk of either not producing enough actionable data, or yielding a large amount of data, making it difficult to decipher findings. Yin (1989), along with Nisbett and Watt (1984), also describes generalisability as a difficulty with the case study approach. Shaughnessy et al (2003) concur and further comments on the inability of the case study approach to cross check results, which could lead to biased findings.

5.4.2. Type of Case Study

A number of authors detail the existence of a range of case studies. Eckstein (1975) describes a choice of five different styles of case study, namely: the Configurative, Disciplined, Heuristic, Plausibility and the Crucial, while Yin (1989) suggests others - Exploratory, Descriptive and the Explanatory. Stake (1995) on the other hand emphasises that the number and type of case studies depends upon the purpose of the inquiry, for example;

- Instrumental Case Study is used to provide insight into an issue;
- Intrinsic Case Study is undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the case;
- Collective Case Study is the study of a number of cases in order to inquire into a particular phenomenon.

The particular case study used for this study is the Instrumental Case Study as described by Stake (1995). The focus of the Instrumental Case Study is the examination of a case or cases with the expressed desire to gain an insight into a theory or issue. For this case study the theory or issue that is being investigated is the potential impact of the micro-system of second-level schools in ROI and MA on the academic, civic and self-esteem development of students from urban areas characterised by socioeconomic and educational disadvantage. The particular vantage point the issue will be investigated is of that of the student perspective. Research has documented the importance of 'student voice' and its potential contribution to school

improvement and policy development (Sammons et al., 1995; Macbeath et al., 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). Rudduck and Flutter (2004) support this viewpoint:

Student involvement can facilitate schools taking account of the perspective of young people and can improve our understanding of students' experiences of teaching and learning: 'it is important to know what pupils think will make a difference to their commitment to learning and, in turn, to their progress and achievement' (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004, p. 2).

5.4.3. Time Period

Given the nature of the research question underpinning this study, it was believed it would be best investigated through a case study conducted over a two-year period. The choice of the two-year period was motivated by the support of the literature. For example, Cohen et al. (2007) suggest case studies of an extended duration can unearth the influence, or lack thereof, of interventions. Other strengths identified by Cohen et al. (2007) include the ability of extended case studies to establish causal relationships, chart growth and development, and allow for the in-depth coverage of a wide range of different variables. Another motivating factor was the desire to work with a cohort during a significant aspect of their second-level education, while also cognisant of the time constraints of the Ph.D. In ROI, the LC and LCVP are conducted over two years, while in MA this time would allow an investigation of students during their first two years of high school.

5.4.4. Locations for Case Study

In Subsection 5.2.2 the justification for the use of a comparative approach was outlined. It centred on the desire of the research to extend knowledge, broaden perspectives and to inform practice. Additionally the personal and professional origins of this study centred on investigating student perspectives from a range of schools to see if there were common characteristics identified as influencing development or if there would be a variance based on context. After much consideration MA was chosen as the international context for this study. The rationale for this decision stems from several factors:

1. Sociological similarities between the ROI and the MA as both contain areas regarded as educationally and socioeconomically disadvantaged.¹⁴
2. A similar persistent gap in achievement along socio-economic lines has been well-documented in both contexts, justify the need for further research into the potential alleviation of this issue.
3. Both areas are predominantly English speaking.¹⁵
4. MA has a thirty-year history with second-level alternative school models.
5. I am originally from the State of Massachusetts.¹⁶

After deciding on a comparative international case study, the next task was to choose what institutions and how many of them would take part in the study. A key to completing the case study, especially one that includes an international component, is the choice of a manageable amount of schools. With this in mind it was decided to use three second-level institutions in each context. Two of the participating institutions, in both the national and international context, would be alternative school models¹⁷ and a third would be a traditional second-level school. The inclusion of alternative school models in both contexts was due to several reasons. Firstly, the study was aiming to get a wide variety of student perspectives across the education sector to help unearth advice and lessons that may influence policy and practice. Also as I was working in an alternative second-level school that was one of the case study sites, I wanted to ensure that similar institutions were represented in the study. The inclusion of a traditional second-level school in each context was a recognition that the majority of schools in each context would fall under this structure and it was important that the perspective of students from this context were also included.

5.4.5. School Choice

In order to ensure that schools with similar student populations, curriculum options and progression opportunities were participating in the study, the criterion in Table 7 was applied in the selection of schools.

¹⁴ This was important, as the focus of the study was on the development of students in urban, disadvantaged communities.

¹⁵ This is essential as I am only fluent in English and so it guarantees that issues around translation will not be a factor.

¹⁶ This means the necessary personally and professional contacts were in place that would enable the research to be successful conducted and completed.

¹⁷ These institutions have structural or pedagogical differences to the traditional configuration of a second-level school.

Table 7: Criteria for Case Study Schools

1. Schools had to be urban second-level schools serving in areas designated as socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged
 - a) Selected schools in ROI had to be from designated RAPID areas¹⁸
 - b) Selected schools in MA had to be places where the majority of students were availing of the Federal Government's Free and Reduced Lunch Programme¹⁹
2. All case study schools had to be college preparatory
 - a) Selected schools in ROI had to offer either the LC or LCVP
 - b) Selected schools in MA had to offer a high school curriculum that is focused on college preparation
3. Case study schools had to be located in relative proximity so that they would be serving similar populations (age and location), which would increase comparability
4. Two of the schools in each context needed to be considered alternative school models and a third needed to be a traditional school model.

When it came to the selection of schools in ROI one interesting caveat was that the first-chance,²⁰ second-level education sector in the ROI is largely constructed on the same model, with no discernible alternative school models. Considering this reality and the case study's requirement for the inclusion of both traditional and alternative school models, the scope for potential case study sites needed to be extended to second-chance education centres.²¹ After a thorough investigation, three possible alternative, second-chance school models fitting the broad criteria were suggested. Upon closer investigation one was immediately removed, as it completes the LC programme in one year, which would not allow the students to be studied over a two-year period. After the decision to remove the third alternative school model the two remaining schools were contacted. In one of the institutions a submission detailing the research aims, methods and procedures had to be given to the Board of Management (BOM) for approval

¹⁸ RAPID is a focused Government initiative to target the fifty-one most disadvantaged urban areas and provincial towns in the country. The implementation of the RAPID programme is led by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Pobal coordinates programme implementation on behalf of the Department. (www.pobal.ie)

¹⁹ The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal programme operating in public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children who fall within certain income guidelines.

²⁰ Second-level institutions that students access directly out of the primary education system.

²¹ Second-level institutions that cater to the needs of students who are returning to complete their second-level education, having left the formal education system.

before research could commence. In this particular school as I was the principal, it was made clear that a third party would conduct all elements of the research in order to counteract any potential bias. The third-party selected to carry out the different elements of the case study was an undergraduate student at the University of Notre Dame who was studying in Ireland for the duration of the case study and was receiving funding through a competitive fellowship. In the second school the centre manager and regional director were contacted, and a similar document outlining the research aims, goals and objectives was submitted. By the end of May 2011 both centres had responded to the proposal and had decided to participate in the study. These schools were labelled “ROI: Alternative School Model #1” and “ROI: Alternative School Model #2” for the purposes of data collection and organisation, and to maintain anonymity in the research.

The search for a traditional second-level institution in ROI to include in the case study began with an exploration of the schools in the communities where the alternative school models were located. The principal of a traditional school local to one of the alternative schools was contacted and again it was suggested that a research proposal be submitted to the BOM. After the next meeting of the school’s BOM they responded positively to the proposal and, in May 2011, they granted permission for research to be conducted. This school was labelled and will be referred to as “ROI: Traditional School Model”.

A similar set of criteria was applied when it came to identifying schools in MA for the case study. After much research and investigation it was decided that Suffolk County, and more particularly the city of Boston, would be chosen as the urban centre within which to begin the search for the three participating case study institutions. The reason for the choice of Suffolk County is that it is a large urban area with several communities meeting the criteria for “disadvantaged” status, and it has a mix of both traditional and alternative schools models.

The search for the alternative school models in Suffolk County began by accessing the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. On the website was a list of schools from the three major school model categories of private, public and charter schools, and it was hoped to have a school from each category represented in the case study. Initially over thirty charter schools were investigated but only three met the case study criteria. In each case the schools were contacted the schools via email and then a phone conversation was arranged. During the conversations one of the schools declined the request to be part of the case study as they had reached their quota of research projects for the year and one of the other

schools were going through the process of replacing their principal, which made them unwilling to commit. Considering these various factors an offer was extended to the remaining charter school to participate in the study, and it was accepted. This school was labelled “MA: Alternative School Model #1” for the purposes of data collection and organisation, and to maintain anonymity in the research.

In MA a large private education sector has developed, with the largest contributor being religious-run institutions. In an attempt to secure a private, alternative school model to take part in the study a number of schools in Suffolk County that would fit the criteria of the case study were examined. After a thorough search one school was identified and the principal was contacted via email to arrange a phone conversation. Once the principal was satisfied with the different aspects of the case study he had to refer the matter to the school president. A few weeks later, a conference call was arranged with the president and the principal to discuss the case study further. The school confirmed their intention to be involved in the case study in May 2011. This school was labelled “MA: Alternative School Model #2” for the purposes of data collection and organisation, and to maintain anonymity in the research.

With regard to locating a traditional second-level school the first option was to look again at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. There was a comprehensive list of schools and the hope was to locate one that was close to the two alternative school models. In autumn 2010 one school was contacted via email to enquire about the possibility of becoming a case study site. After several phone calls and emails that were not returned, a phone conversation was arranged with the school principal. During this conversation the principal declined the offer to be part of the case study, and advised that any application for research needed to be centrally submitted to the Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation. However, this could only be done once a school agreed in principle to participate in the study. The next avenue of access was to consult with several colleagues who are working in MA. Through this network a school that fit the criteria for a participating school was located and the principal was contacted. The principal emailed back accepting the premise of the study but again directed me to the Boston Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation. Following this advice, an application was submitted to the Boston Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation in May 2011 and a revised edition in August 2011, which lead to the proposal being accepted and the school secured in September 2011. This school was labelled “MA: Traditional School”.

5.4.6. Requirements from Case Study Schools

One of the important structural aspects of the case study was to use a panel approach, meaning that identical research instruments would be used at several points of the study with the same individuals. In both ROI and MA, data from the participating schools was gathered through the use of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires carried out during the same period. The particular requirements for case study schools included:

1. To allow the administration of a survey to the entire cohort of students beginning the LC, LCVP or high school (September 2011 and June 2013)
2. To facilitate semi-structured interviews with six students who were beginning LC, LCVP or high school on three occasions (September 2011, May 2012 and June 2013)
3. To allow an interview with school principal for contextual purposes (July 2011)
4. To allow an interview with a teacher from each school for contextual purposes (July 2011)

A detailed description of each of the participating schools can be found in Appendix 1.

5.5. Nature of Evidence - Qualitative Research

Section 5.3 describes the impact of an interpretive philosophy upon this dissertation, while Section 5.4 details the choice of a case study approach. A further decision was to use qualitative research in order to gain an insight into the cases. Creswell (2003) agrees with the choice of qualitative research when working in the interpretive tradition, as he believes it offers the instruments to match the search for knowledge.

The place of qualitative research within comparative studies in education is also well supported. Bray et al. (2006) describe that the use of qualitative research as essential in comparative studies in education as it recognised that the cultural, political and social contexts and position of education could not be decontextualised from its local culture. Kay and Watson (1982) also support the use of qualitative research as they believe that it matches what they consider the goal of comparative research in education, “We must get inside the skin of other people as nearly as we can. We must learn the language of life as far as possible. We must ‘make sense’

of their conditioning and concerns in their idiom...” (Kay and Watson, 1982, 133). Similarly, Rust (1991) endorses the use of qualitative research in comparative studies in education and connects the interpretive paradigm with the use of qualitative research.

The characteristics of qualitative research have been described by a number of authors but the central agreed characteristic has been put forward by Blaikie (2010) who describes qualitative research as being the investigation of the social world from the viewpoints of the research subjects. Other characteristics suggested by Blaikie (2010) include the importance of the production of rich descriptions of the social world and having the viewpoint that the world is constantly in a state of process and not in a static position (Blaikie, 2010). Thomas (2003) concurs and describes further attributes of qualitative research, namely, that it describes characteristics of people and events, makes a connection at a deeper level and continually attempts to interpret or explain the situation at hand. Additionally, Rossman and Rallis (1998) offer the following characteristics of qualitative research:

- It takes place in the natural setting.
- It uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic.
- It is emergent rather than tightly prefigured.
- It is fundamentally interpretive.
- It views social phenomena holistically.
- The researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study.
- It uses complex reasoning that is multi-faceted, iterative and simultaneous.
- It adopts and uses one or more strategies of inquiry as a guide for the procedures in the qualitative study.

While the benefits of qualitative research can be established from the characteristics above, it has also found much criticism. The majority of these have been centred on the subjectivity of its findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Due to the relationship between the findings and researcher inferencing, problems of replication and generalisability have been a further criticism of qualitative research. Blaikie (2010) elaborates on this point and suggests because the researcher is the measuring instrument in qualitative research, it makes it impossible to replicate the study.

In the tradition of comparative studies in education there also exists many critics of the use of qualitative research. For example Anderson (1961), Bereday (1964, 1967) and Noah and Eckstein (1969) criticised the reliance on qualitative research that was found in many of the early studies in comparative education, as they believe they lacked the scientific rigour to draw links between schools and societies. Phillips and Schweisfurth (2009) concur that the issue with qualitative research in comparative studies in education is that they have failed to predict outcomes and hence become unhelpful when considering and implementing policy.

Both the critiques and advantages of the qualitative approach were considered in the design phase of this research study. Following Hycner's (1999, p.156) assertion that "... the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa)", qualitative research was finally chosen in order to match the study's interpretive approach.

5.6. Methods

Following on from the decision to use qualitative research, the data collection methods that were chosen for this study were interviews and questionnaires. Conscious of the research question underpinning the study, the focus of the data collection was on the responses of the student interviewees and those participating in the student questionnaires. The principal and teacher interviews at each of the case study schools is to only provide contextual information on the school, most especially that of their history and current efforts to address the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development of their students.

5.6.1. Interviews

Following the suggestions of Kvale (1996), the planning for the interviews began by reflecting on the overall aim of the research. In the case of all three-interview schedules it was decided that standardised open-ended interviews would be used. According to Kerlinger (1970) this particular type of interview schedule has its exact wording and sequence of questions determined ahead of time. Another characteristic is that the same questions are asked in the exact order to different interview participants. Kerlinger (1970) asserts that the strength of conducting an interview in this fashion is that it increases the comparability of responses. Another strength is that interviewer bias is reduced significantly because the same questions are used. Lastly,

Kerlinger (1970) points to the standardised open-ended interview as lending itself to being easier to organise and analyse.

While the use of interviews constructed in the standardised open-ended format offers many benefits for this case study there are also weaknesses. The biggest criticism of this type of interview is that it offers little flexibility in regard to trying to relate to an individual during an interview. In order to overcome this difficulty the tenets of semi-structured interviews have also been used. This interview type uses prompts and probes to encourage the interviewee to expand on their thoughts (Cohen et al., 2007). The use of prompts and probes were considered essential to the interview because on some occasions clarifications are necessary. Given these benefits, the interviewer constructed three separate interview schedules for students, teachers and principals using the tenets of the standardised open-ended interview, but was also prepared to use prompts and probes as instructed in the use of semi-structured interviews.²²

In each of the three interview groups another important consideration was the question of format and response mode. Following the advice of Tuckman (1972), indirect questions were used in the main. Tuckman (1972) believes that the use of indirect questions allows people to be less guarded and more likely to express themselves truthfully. The danger in using indirect questions is that the interviewee may veer off topic, but that is where thoughtfully composed questions and the use of prompts and probes can keep the interviewee on point. Tuckman (1972) also suggests the use of an unstructured response mode. The use of this method will give the interviewee freedom in how they answer questions, which will allow them to feel less restricted.

When considering the method of analysis for the interviews it was decided that the process of content analysis would be best suited for this particular study. The reason for the selection of content analysis is because it matches well with the expressed objectives of the research study. For example, Cohen et al (2007) advocate the use of Content Analysis when dealing with large quantities of text, which is important to note as this research study produced over one hundred interviews. Krippendorp (2004) continues and focuses on the unobtrusive nature of Content Analysis, which allows the data to emerge from the text. Additional benefits identified include its focus on language and linguistic features and the transparency of the findings due to the structured approach and generation of text, which allows independent verification (Mayring,

²² See Appendices 2 (Student Interview 2011), 3 (Student Interview 2013), 9 (Principal Interview) and 12 (Teacher Interview Schedule)

2004). Furthermore, Cohen et al (2007) point to the benefits of using a systematic and rule-governed approach in the crystallisation of research findings. This is seen in content analysis as the researcher arrives to the material with pre-existing categories, which reduces bias due to the need for less inferencing.

Considering the benefits of content analysis the particular iteration of it that was applied is the eleven-step process suggested by Anderson and Arsenault (1998) and Cohen, et al. (2007), which is as follows:

- Define the research question
- Define the population from which the units of text are to be sampled
- Define the sample
- Define the context of the generation of the document
- Define the unit of analysis
- Decide the codes to be used in the analysis
- Construct the categories for analysis
- Conduct the coding and categorising of the data
- Conduct the data analysis
- Summarise
- Make Speculative Inferences

The rationale for choosing this particular version of content analysis is connected to the benefit of having defined steps to follow. The need for defined steps is especially important as with a large number of interviews it ensures that each interview is approached in the same manner guaranteeing validity, reliability and an unbiased approach to the analysis. A further explanation for the choice of this process lies in its ability to succinctly and effectively carry out the main duties of content analysis which Cohen et al (2007) describe as, “Breaking down text into units of analysis, undertaking statistical analysis of the units and presenting the units in as economical a form as possible” (Cohen et al., 2007, 476). Additionally this particular method allows the researcher to explore the interconnectedness of categories and aids in the generation of theory (Cohen et al, 2007).

5.6.1.A. Student Interviews

Twenty-eight student interviewees participated in the research study and three interviews were conducted with each participant over the two-year period²³. The objective and rationale for the use of three rounds of interviews with each interviewee was to each time gain further insight into their perspective about the potential of the micro-system of second-level schools to enhance their academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development after having more time to experience different aspects of their second-level institution.

Three categories of questions were necessary to meet the objectives of the student interviews: Academics, self-esteem and civic responsibility. Considering these categories, and directed by both the research question and the decision to use standardised, open interviews, the questions were constructed to allow the students to speak freely about the impact of their second-level schools. In the end two different student interview schedules were created; one that would be used in October/November 2011²⁴ and the other that would be used in June 2012 / 2013.²⁵ As a draft of the interview schedules were completed, piloting commenced to ensure the suitability of the questions in light of the objectives of the case study.

Piloting of Student Interview Schedule

In May 2011 two students from one of the ROI case study sites that were not part of the case study were asked to participate in the piloting of the interview questions. One week before the scheduled meeting the students were given a copy of the interview questions so that they could look them over and note any ideas that they might have in advance of the meeting. During the piloting feedback session the students were given the opportunity to offer suggestions and to ask questions in relation to the interview schedule. Arising out of this session was a number of observations and potential actions to improve the interview schedule.²⁶

²³ The study originally began with 36 student interviewees, six from each case study site. Eight students, two from ROI and six from MA, left the case study schools at various points during the two-year period. In all cases the students transferred to different schools for a range of reasons. The decision to only include the students that completed all three interviews was made as it was deemed important to gather the perspective of the students over the entire two years of the case study.

²⁴ See Appendix 2

²⁵ See Appendix 3

²⁶ See Appendix 4 (See Table 12).

Due to the geographic distance it was difficult to conduct a piloting session with students in MA. In order to ensure the appropriateness and accuracy of the interview schedule, the teacher liaison at each site, which the school had nominated as the person with whom the teacher interview would be conducted, was relied upon. In advance of conducting the student interviews the interview schedule was shared with the teacher liaison and a Skype call was arranged to garner any advice or changes that might be suggested²⁷.

Student Sampling and Recruitment

The criteria for student involvement in the interviews included:

- Being a member of the Freshman Class (Year 1) in MA or beginning the LC or LCVP in ROI
- Gender mix of participants (if possible)

The principal and the teacher interviewee at each case study site chose the students that were interviewed as part of the case study. This was deemed appropriate as the principal and teacher interviewee at each site would have the necessary knowledge to approach the students most appropriate to take part in such a project. Also because of the focus on student perspective it was not expected that the perspective of one student was to be generalisable of the entire student population at the case study site.

Access and Ethics

Practically, each of the case study sites agreed to organise permission from the students to take part in the study, and to organise the collection and storage of the parental/guardian permission slips. The parental permission form was developed, and it explained who was conducting the research and its objectives²⁸. The permission form guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of the student participants as it was promised that neither the school nor the name of the student would be used at any point of the study. Additional to these guarantees it was made clear in the parental permission and to the students that if at any time during the two-

²⁷ There were no alterations to the interview schedule suggested by the teacher liaisons at any of the MA schools.

²⁸ See Appendix 5 (Consent forms for student questionnaires/interviews)

year case study either the parent, student or both no longer wanted the student to participate, then they would be free to withdraw themselves from the study.

The first student interviews were carried out in October 2011 in ROI and during the first week of November 2011 in MA²⁹. The aim was to interview the students as close to the beginning of their LC and high school experiences as possible. Despite this goal it was suggested that it would be appropriate to allow the students and schools to begin the academic year and give the students at least the month of September to experience their new settings. Another factor influencing this decision was the reality that the earliest date that travel to the United States was an option was 31 October 2011. Initially there was some consideration given to conducting interviews through Skype but it was believed that in order to build a rapport with the schools and selected student interviewees it was essential to conduct the initial interviews in person.³⁰

Before the commencement of the initial interview, it was reiterated to the student interviewee that their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed and they had the ability to withdraw themselves from the study at any point. Also the student was told that a typed transcript would be made of the interview and that before the next interview the student would be able to offer any suggested changes. At the conclusion of the first interview an independent third party transcribed the student interviews.

The second and third round of student interviews were conducted at the ROI/MA case study sites in May/June 2012 and April/May 2013³¹. The rationale and objective for both was to gain a further insight into the student's experience of second-level education and what aspects or none were making an impact on their academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development. Before conducting both rounds of interviews it was again made clear to the student participants that if they wanted to withdraw themselves from the study at any point they were free to do so. Also, before the second and third interview the student participants were shown the transcripts from the previous interview and were given an opportunity to suggest any changes. Once the second and third interviews were completed the independent third party transcribed the interviews.

²⁹ See Appendix 6 (Notes from Student Interviews)

³⁰ See Appendix 6 (Notes from Student Interviews)

³¹ See Appendix 6 (Notes from Student Interviews)

Data Analysis of Student Interviews

As stated in Subsection 5.6.1.A. the method of data analysis applied to the student interviews was that of Content Analysis following the steps laid out by Anderson and Arsenault (1998) and Cohen et. al. (2007).

Step 1: Research Question	From the perspective of the student, what aspects of the microsystem of second-level school can enhance the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development in urban areas, characterised by educational and socio-economic disadvantage?
Step 2: Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 students in total • ROI (16 Students) / MA (12 Students)
Step 3: Define Sample	84 Interviews (3 with each student)
Step 4: Document Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 student interviewees in total from ROI and MA • 84 one-on-one interviews (3 with each student) • Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed
Step 5: Unit of Analysis	84 interviews with 28 students over 2 years
Step 6: Codes	See Appendix 7
Step 7: Categories for Analysis	See Appendix 7
Step 8: Conduct Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted over an academic year • Research assistant conducted the initial coding and categorisation of data
Step 9: Conduct Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tallying responses connected to categories and codes • Used a spreadsheet programme to record responses
Step 10: Summarise	See Chapter 6
Step 11: Make speculative Inferences	See Chapter 7 and 8

5.6.1.B. Principal Interview

The objective of the principal interviews was to gain a deeper contextual knowledge into the case study institutions by specifically focusing on the history and structure of the school. Practically the principal interviews, along with the teacher interviews and website research contributed to the school profiles including in Appendix 1.

The principal interviews were organised under four headings that corresponded to the objectives for the interview:

- Section 1: Values and Philosophy of the School
- Section 2: Academics
- Section 3: Civic and Self-Esteem Development
- Section 4: The Future

Piloting of the Principal Interview

The piloting for the principals' interview questions was conducted during the months of April and May 2011. Two individuals were selected to give their feedback on the interview schedule. One was a senior teacher in one of the case study schools and had taught in schools designated as disadvantaged for over twenty years. The other individual chosen to pilot the study was a senior teacher with over forty years of teaching experience, with ten of those as a principal of a secondary school in ROI. Both individuals were given two weeks to comment on the interview schedules and times were arranged to meet to discuss their thoughts and suggestions.³²

Access and Ethics

In all of the case study sites the principal was the key point person with regard to gaining permission to conduct research at each of the sites and was the first person that was contacted in the process. From the initial stages of contact the principals were made aware of the desire to interview them as part of the case study process. Both anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed as neither the principal's name or school would be used at any time in the study. It was also made clear to the principals that at any point in time they could withdraw from the case study and have the interview omitted. Finally the principals were also extended the offer of viewing the transcripts of their interview, with the ability to suggest any changes.

The principal interviews were conducted between June 2011 and October 2011.³³ The completed interview schedules were sent two weeks in advance to give the interviewees time to consider their responses. At the conclusion of each of the interviews it was explained that

³² See Appendix 8 (Feedback from piloting of principal interviews).

³³ See Appendix 9 (Principal Interview Schedule)

the interview would be transcribed and that interviewees would have an opportunity to review the draft and to make any necessary changes.³⁴

Data Analysis

As mentioned in Subsection 5.6.1.A. the method of data analysis applied to the principal interviews was that of Content Analysis following the steps laid out by Anderson and Arsenault (1998) and Cohen et. al. (2007).

Step 1: Research Question	To gain a deeper contextual knowledge into the case study institutions by specifically focusing on the history and structure of the school.
Step 2: Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 interviews in total • 6 principals from each of the case study sites and the regional coordinator from one of the case study schools³⁵
Step 3: Define Sample	7 interviews in total
Step 4: Document Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 one-on-one interviews • Conducted at the beginning of the two-year case study • Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed as the name of the principal or school was used not use in the dissertation
Step 5: Unit of Analysis	7 interviews
Step 6: Codes	See Appendix 11
Step 7: Categories for Analysis	See Appendix 11
Step 8: Conduct Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted over an academic year • Research assistant conducted the initial coding and categorisation of data
Step 9: Conduct Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tallying responses connected to categories and codes • Used a spreadsheet programme to record responses
Step 10: Summarise	See Chapter 6
Step 11: Make speculative Inferences	See Chapter 7 and 8

³⁴ See Appendix 10 (Notes from Principal Interviews)

³⁵ The principal from one of the schools asked that the regional coordinator also be interviewed, to give and full and complete history of the institution.

5.6.1.C. Teacher Interviews

The teacher interviews that formed part of the case study had similar aims to that of the principal interviews: To help gain a deeper insight into the history and structure of the participating case study institutions.

The teacher interview schedule was structured under the following headings, which corresponded to the aims of the teacher interviews and the overall objectives of the case study³⁶:

1. Introduction
2. School Philosophy and Practical Expression
3. Achievements and Improvements
4. Student–Teacher Relationship
5. Civic and Self-Esteem Development
6. The Future

Piloting

The teacher interview questions were piloted with two teachers from one of the participating case study schools. One of the teachers had over ten years teaching experience, with the last four working in designated areas of educational disadvantage. The other participating teacher had over five years' experience in schools that serve both advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Both individuals participating in the piloting exercise had two weeks to review the interview schedules and then a meeting was arranged to hear the feedback from both people. At the conclusion of the meeting a list of suggested actions to improve the interview schedule was compiled.³⁷

³⁶ See Appendix 12 (Teacher Interview Schedule)

³⁷ See Appendix 13 (Feedback from the Piloting of the Teacher Interview Schedule)

Teacher Selection and Ethics

The criteria for the selection of the teacher interviewees were as follows:

1. The teacher had to be classroom-based.
2. The teacher had to be working with the cohort that is the subject of the case study.

The principals of the case study institutions identified the teachers to interview, as it was felt they were best placed to determine who would fit the selection criteria. The process of confirming the participation of a teacher included the principal sharing the research proposal given to each of the case study sites. This included an outline of the objectives and methods to be employed in the study. At this time the teachers were also made aware that they could withdraw from the interview at any point in time, that their name and the name of the school would not be used in the report and they would also be given a written transcript of the interview in order to allow the clarification of points and the amendment or removal of statements. After being given time to ask any questions about the research, the teachers contacted the principal to give their consent to participate. Upon receiving confirmation of a teacher's participation, the principal passed on the teacher's email address and initial contact was made to arrange an interview date. The teachers were sent the interview schedule in advance so that they could familiarise themselves with the questions or raise any concerns in advance of the interview.³⁸

The first of the ROI teacher interviews was held during the summer of 2011.³⁹ In ROI: Alternative School Model #1, a third-party interviewer carried out the teacher interview in August 2011, because I was the principal of the case study site in question. For ethical reasons it was felt that the use of a third party would create the environment for a more open and honest interview. In MA the teacher interviews were carried out in July 2011 and November 2011.⁴⁰ After conducting the teacher interviews the completed transcriptions were emailed to the teachers and they were given a number of weeks to review the transcripts and communicate any changes⁴¹.

³⁸ None of the teacher interviewees offered any queries with regard to the interview content or the structure of the interview schedule.

³⁹ All of the teacher interviews were recorded using a digital recording device.

⁴⁰ The reason for the delay in interviewing at Massachusetts: Traditional School Model was such that approval was needed from the Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation before research could commence.

⁴¹ None of the teacher interviewees suggested any changes to their transcripts

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the deadline to amend the transcript, the process of analysing them commenced. Similar to the work completed for the student and principal interviews the process of content analysis put forward by Anderson and Arsenault (1998) and Cohen et al. (2007) was selected to help elucidate key findings from the teacher interviews.

Step 1: Research Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gain a deeper contextual knowledge into the case study institutions by specifically focusing on the history and structure of the school.
Step 2: Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 teachers, one from each case study site. A teacher was not interviewed in one of the ROI Case Study sites as the regional coordinator and principal were previously interviewed and provided sufficient information.
Step 3: Define Sample	5 interviews in total
Step 4: Document Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5, one-on-one interview Conducted at the beginning of the two-year case study Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed as the name of the teacher or school was used not use in the dissertation
Step 5: Unit of Analysis	5 interviews
Step 6: Codes	See Appendix 14
Step 7: Categories for Analysis	See Appendix 14
Step 8: Conduct Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted over an academic year Research assistant conducted the initial coding and categorisation of data
Step 9: Conduct Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tallying responses connected to categories and codes Used a spreadsheet programme to record responses
Step 10: Summarise	See Chapter 6
Step 11: Make speculative Inferences	See Chapter 7 and 8

5.6.2. Questionnaires

While the emphasis of this study is on the student interviews, the student questionnaires administered in September 2011 and again in June 2013 are an important part of the case study. The purpose of these questionnaires was to look at the entire cohort of students at the case study sites. Recording the views of these individuals allow the data from the interviews to be placed in a wider context, to see if they were reflective of the total cohort. Additionally, the use of two data collection points with each cohort allowed comparisons to be made between the two points in time. This facilitated an examination of the direction of change or lack thereof, by the cohort within which the interviewees were situated.

Development of Student Questionnaire

With the overall purpose of the questionnaires understood, the planning phase began with the intention of having the content of the questionnaire mirror that of the student interview schedules. Considering this goal, the objective of the questionnaires was: To uncover student perspectives on their experience of second-level education, with regard to academics, self-esteem and civic responsibility development

Reflecting on this objective the questionnaires were developed with the following sections:

- Academics
- Career and Educational Aspirations
- Self-Esteem
- Civic Responsibility

As the emphasis of the questionnaires was to ascertain the opinion of the wider cohort of the student interviewees, the two question types used in the questionnaires were rating scales and open-ended questions. The majority of the rating scale questions can be described as Likert Scales, which ask respondents to indicate strength of agreement.⁴² The benefit of using this question format is described in Cohen et al. (2007):

Rating scales are widely used in research, and rightly so, for they combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative

⁴² See Appendix 16 (Student Questionnaire 2011/2013)

analysis. They afford the researcher the freedom to fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 327).

Open-ended questions were also considered imperative, as these would allow students to share their perspective on what impact their second-level school had upon their academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem. Cohen et al. (2007) support this approach as they describe open-ended questions as an appropriate instrument for gaining the thoughts of questionnaire respondents as they contend that: “An open-ended question can catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour which are the hallmarks of qualitative data” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 330).

Piloting of the Student Questionnaire

The process of piloting the questionnaire began in April 2011. Students from one of the participating ROI case study sites, who were not involved in the study, were presented with the questionnaires. The participating students were told that their answers to the questions were not important, but that what was of interest was their thoughts on the questions. Ten students participated in the piloting exercise, with three separate sessions being held, which in the end unearthed a number of suggestions.⁴³

Similar to the interview schedules, due to the geographic distance it was difficult to conduct a piloting session with students in MA. In order to ensure the appropriateness and accuracy of the questionnaires, the teacher liaison that was appointed by the principal at each of the MA schools was worked with closely. In advance of conducting the student interviews the questionnaires were shared with the teacher liaison and a Skype call was arranged to garner any advice or changes that might be suggested.

Access and Ethics

In both ROI and MA the first round of surveys were conducted from September to November 2011.⁴⁴ Similar to the procedure for the interviews, all students under the age of eighteen were required to receive parent or guardian permission, which was mandated both by the Trinity College Ethics Committee and the Boston Public Schools’ Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation.⁴⁵ In the permission form the objectives of the questionnaire were outlined along

⁴³ See Appendix 15 (Feedback and actions from the piloting of the student questionnaires).

⁴⁴ See Appendix 16 (Student Questionnaire 2011/2013)

⁴⁵ See Appendix 5 (Consent form for student questionnaires/interviews)

with the ethical guarantee that the students participating in the questionnaire would not be asked for their names and that at no time in the study would the school or students' names be mentioned. Additionally the permission forms also indicated that the students, or their parents, could withdraw them from the study at any point in time. In each of the case study sites the school agreed to disseminate and collect the permission forms.

The second round of surveys was conducted during the months of April and May 2013.⁴⁶ A second round of permission forms were sent out to the parents/guardians of the participating cohort in advance of the survey being completed and the same guarantees around anonymity, and ability of students to remove themselves from the study were given. Similar to the first round of surveys, the case study sites agreed to organise all the particulars in regard to the permission forms and in some of the sites they agreed to administer the surveys.⁴⁷

Data Analysis

Analysing the results of the questionnaires from the case study began with the processing of the questionnaire data. Moser and Kalton (1977) suggest observing three aspects when questionnaires are received: completeness, accuracy and uniformity.⁴⁸ While the three tasks suggested by Moser and Kalton (1977) were carried out, the reality is that due to the anonymity guaranteed to both the research participants and their parents/guardians, it would be impossible to rectify any problems as the identity of the student respondents was not known. This difficulty was recognised prior to the dissemination of the questionnaires which made the piloting process described in Subsection 5.6.2.B extremely important.

The next step in the process of analysing questionnaires is what Cohen et al. (2007) describe as "Data Reduction". The major tool for data reduction is that of coding (Cohen et al., 2007). To begin, the questionnaire conducted in 2011, and then the one administered in 2013, were dealt with separately in order to provide a point of comparison. While the questionnaires were anonymous, they were conducted with the same cohort in order to gain an insight into whether or not the cohort's opinions had changed over the two years of the case study. In the case of both questionnaires the majority of the questions were devised using Likert Scales, so responses

⁴⁶ See Appendix 16 (Student Questionnaires 2011/2013)

⁴⁷ See Appendix 17 (Notes on the Administration of Student Questionnaires)

⁴⁸ Completeness refers to the quantity of the questionnaire that the research subject undertook, while accuracy is connected to whether or not the research participants answered the questions correctly. Finally, uniformity deals with the degree to which the participants understood and interpreted directions correctly.

were tabulated for each question. Once the results from all the case study schools were compiled the computer programme Microsoft Excel was used to record the results. A file was created for each of the case study schools that contained the results of the 2011 and 2013 questionnaires. The purpose of the multiple files and configuration of the dates was to compare the different survey results. These comparisons eventually formed the heart of the Findings Chapter (Chapter 6).

In addition to the Likert Scale questions the 2011 and 2013 questionnaires both had a number of open-ended questions. This was the perfect vehicle to expose individual and group thoughts, patterns and trends within the data. As suggested by Weber (1990), a process of content analysis was used to generate the results. Following the process of Content Analysis as set out by Cohen et al (2007) and Anderson and Arsenault (1998) the various steps of analysis were followed:

Table 11: Content Analysis of Student Questionnaires	
Step 1: Research Question	See Subsection 5.6.2. To uncover student perspectives on their experience of second-level education, with regard to academics, self-esteem and civic responsibility.
Step 2: Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2011 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ROI: 47 students ○ MA: 165 students • 2013 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ROI: 45 students ○ MA: 115 students
Step 3: Define Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2011 (212 student questionnaires) • 2013 (160 student questionnaires)
Step 4: Document Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires were administered on two occasions at each of the case study sites, one in 2011 and another in 2013 to the populations described in Step 2. • The students were assured complete anonymity.
Step 5: Unit of Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 212 questionnaires in 2011 • 160 questionnaires in 2013⁴⁹
Step 6: Codes	See Appendix 18
Step 7: Categories for Analysis	See Appendix 18

⁴⁹ An explanation for the reduction in student participants can be linked to a small number of students returning permission slips to participate in the study, as well as student absences on the day for issues unrelated to the study. A complete explanation of the administration of the student questionnaires can be found in Appendix 17.

Step 8: Conduct Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted over an academic year • Research assistant conducted the initial coding and categorisation of data
Step 9: Conduct Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tallying responses connected to categories and codes • Used a spreadsheet programme to record responses and create graphic representations
Step 10: Summarising	See Chapter 6
Step 11: Make speculative Inferences	See Chapter 7 and 8

5.7 Trustworthiness of the Study and Ethical Concerns

The research instruments for the study were subjected to a rigorous ethical approval processes in both MA and ROI. In ROI an application for ethical approval had to be made to Trinity College Dublin's Ethics Committee, following the guidelines set out in the *Policy on Good Research Practice* (Trinity College Dublin, 2009). The approval from Trinity College Dublin's Ethics Committee was gained in May 2011 following several conditions that are set out in Appendix 19. In addition, the approval of the Boston Public Schools' Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation was also required. Following this office's 2009 guidelines, a submission was made and full approval to conduct research in the Boston Public School system was granted in August 2011. Following ethical approval from both of these bodies, sanction also had to be given from each of the six case study schools.

A number of overlapping requirements were listed in the ethical guidelines received from Trinity College Dublin's Ethics Committee and the Boston Public Schools' Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation. Firstly, in both documents the principles of anonymity and confidentiality are described as essential.⁵⁰ The guidelines demand that these principles must be strictly adhered to and that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that this is followed. Another condition of any research contract under the above guidelines is the informed consent (namely by written consent) of the research participants or the parents/guardians of those individuals that are taking part in the study who may be under eighteen years of age (Trinity College Dublin, 2009). Both guidelines are quite prescriptive about what the

⁵⁰ See Subsection 5.6.1.B. (Student Interviews) and 5.6.2. (Conducting of Student Questionnaires) for the exploration of the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality in this study. Also see Appendix 5 (Consent for Student Interview/Questionnaire.

participants and the parents/guardians of those less than eighteen years of age should be told before the research begins. They are:

- The purposes, procedures and content of the research.
- The type of activities the research subject will be involved in.
- The amount of participation time.
- The start and end date.
- The data elements that will be collected from each person involved in the research.
- The right of all participants to withdraw from the study at any particular time.
- The need to securely store data
- The necessity to renegotiate access to student participants

Additional to the requirements put forward by the respective ethics committees it is essential that every study should consider the reliability, validity and generalisability of its findings and research instruments (Burton and Bartlett, 2009). It is also essential to discuss how these may be satisfied depending on the nature of the research (Cohen et. al., 2007). For the purposes of this study the work of Lincoln and Guba (2000) will frame this discussion with a focus on the terms ‘credibility’, ‘comparability’, ‘cultural validity’ with regard to validity and the term ‘dependability’ for reliability. Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest that these terms relate best to the interpretive perspective.

5.7.1. Validity in Qualitative Research

Cohen et al. (2007) describes validity as, “A demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 133). Throughout the literature there is much discussion about the relevancy of the term “validity” for qualitative research. Within this discussion Maxwell (1992), Lincoln and Guba (2000) and others have argued for the use of other terms to replace the more positivist notion of validity. For example Maxwell (1992) suggests the use of the terms descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, evaluative validity and generalisability. Alternatively, Lincoln and Guba (2000) offer words like credibility, comparability and dependability, which they believe better describes the nature of qualitative research. Each of these terms will now be discussed.

5.7.1.A. Creditability

The term creditability is closely related to that of internal validity, which is used more frequently in the positivist tradition. At the heart of the explanation of internal validity is the question of whether or not the findings accurately describe what is being researched. Lincoln and Guba (2000) use the word creditability and suggest that it is more appropriate than internal validity. They offer a number of ways that this requirement could be satisfied by qualitative studies:

- Prolonged engagement in the field
- Persistent observation
- Triangulation
- Peer debriefing
- Negative case analysis
- Member checking

For the primary research study that was conducted as part of this dissertation a number of measures were adopted to ensure that the requirement of creditability was satisfied. One example is that the study was conducted over a two-year period, which could be considered a prolonged engagement in the field. Each interviewee was interviewed three times during the two-years and the wider cohort of the interviewees completed questionnaires on two occasions at the beginning and end of the case study. These frequent engagements, along with interviews of the principal and a teacher at each participating school, allowed a rich knowledge and perspectives of the schools, interviewees and their wider cohort to be built.

A second example of how the creditability of the primary research study was assured was through a modified regime of member checking. Firstly, the principal and teacher interviewee at each site were given the transcripts of their interview and were asked to suggest changes or clarifications to elements of the interviews. Secondly, the student interviews were digitally voice recorded and the transcriptions were typed by an independent third person, which helped to reduce bias and provided an outside validation to the content of the interviews. Furthermore, when students were interviewed a second time, the previous engagement was summarised at the beginning of the interview, and students were given an opportunity to respond or correct any aspect of the interpretation. Finally as I was the principal of one of the ROI case study

participants, an independent third party, different from the person who completed the transcriptions, carried out all of the research instruments.

A further element that was undertaken in the primary research study to enhance its credibility was the use of triangulation. Triangulation is often described as using two or more methods in the study of some aspect of human behaviour (Cohen et al, 2007). Denizen and Lincoln (1994) suggest that there are number of different “types” of triangulation, namely time, space, investigator, methodological and indefinite. Each of these strategies were utilised as follows in this research:

- Time Triangulation: Throughout the two-year period a panel approach was utilised where identical research instruments were used with different students at different points of the study. This helped to reduce bias and ensure the accuracy of the findings as there were multiple data collection points across the two-year period.
- Space triangulation: As the case study included sites in ROI and MA it allowed an international comparison, where identical objectives and research instruments were utilised.
- Methodological triangulation: The use of questionnaires with the wider cohort of the interviewees meant it was possible to place the comments of the interviewees in a wider context and to show that the responses of the interviewees were representative of the wider cohort of students in the school.
- Indefinite Triangulation: Using a digital voice recorder and an independent third party to conduct the transcriptions satisfied the need for indefinite triangulation.

5.7.1.B. Comparability

A common way of discussing the comparability of a study would be to consider its generalisability or its external validity. According to Cohen et al. (2007) the idea of generalisability refers to the ability of results to be generalised to a wider population. There has been a lot of debate around how applicable a conversation of generalisation is with regard to qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Schofield, 2002). Blaikie (2010) concurs but offers a number of different suggestions to enhance the comparability of a study (Blaikie, 2010, p.255):

In Section 5.6.1.B. it was stated that the ability to generalise the results of this study was not the main priority, as it was more focused on gaining the perspective of the student interviewees as individual cases. Despite this, in reality a number of actions were taken to help improve the generalisability of the study, so that further studies could be undertaken with similar aims:

- Blaikie (2010) suggests that the comparability of a study can be enhanced by the presence of rich, thick descriptions across all aspects of the research study. This strategy is also advocated by Schofield (1990), who suggests providing a clear, detailed description of the way in which data was gathered “...so that others can decide the extent to which findings from one piece of research are generalisable to another situation” (Schofield, 1990, p. 209). This Chapter therefore offers thick descriptions of context selection, criteria for school choice, criteria for student choice, school description, research paradigm, approach, methodology and methods employed in the study.
- Blaikie (2010) further suggests that generalisability is enhanced by the ability to prove that the elements being studied are typical or a good representations of the average in a cohort. Again the criteria for context, school and student selection given in Section 5.4 helps demonstrate that the typical school and student are represented in the primary research study.
- Finally, Blaikie (2010) advocates studying the same issue in a number of different research sites, using similar methods of data collection and analysis. This element of comparability is highlighted in Sections 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 using two separate contexts, six separate schools, structured open-ended interviews and the panel approach in the construction of the research instruments.

5.7.1.C. Cultural Validity

Due to the international nature of the primary research study an important element of validity that needs to be considered is what Morgan (1999) has coined “Cultural Validity”. Joy (2003) concurs and describes cultural validity as, “The degree to which a study is appropriate to the cultural setting where the research is to be carried out” (Joy, 2003, p. 1).

A high level of cultural validity was achieved through a number of avenues. Firstly, I have substantial experience in both ROI and MA, as a student and a teacher. Additionally the questionnaires and interview schedules in ROI were piloted, while in MA the research

instruments were constructed in consultation with the teacher liaisons in each school.⁵¹ Another major boost to the cultural validity is that all aspects of the primary research study had to undergo a rigorous ethical approval processes from Trinity College Dublin in ROI and the Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation in MA. A further aspect of the ethical approval process was that all six case study sites had internal research approval teams that evaluated every aspect of the primary research study before sanctioning the start of the case study, which again helped to ensure that the research instruments were sensitive to cultural differences that existed between each context.

5.7.2. Reliability in Qualitative Research

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe the concept of reliability as, “A fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992, p. 48; Kvale, 1996; Cohen et al. 2007;). Similar to validity there is much discussion of the suitability of reliability for qualitative research (Winter, 2000). Again researchers like Lincoln and Guba (1985) are convinced that some version of reliability being considered in qualitative research will only strengthen research in the qualitative tradition. So it is suggested that reliability should be replaced by words like dependability, consistency and applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In order to ensure dependability in qualitative research Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a range of measures including: Member checks, debriefing by peers, triangulation, reflexive journals, independent audits and observations in the field. Looking more specifically at dependability with regard to interviews Silverman (1993), outlines the importance of highly structured interviews with the same format and sequence of questions. Kvale (1996) agrees and equally puts weight on the importance of a well-structured interview schedule to aid in increasing the reliability of the findings. As for the use of questionnaires, the important issues with regard to reliability revolve around sampling and ensuring an appropriate response rate.

In the primary research study a number of measures were taken to ensure the reliability of the responses. Firstly, the interview schedules and questionnaires in ROI and MA underwent extensive piloting and ethics approval processes to reduce bias and to guarantee that the research participants could adequately understanding the questioning. This ensured that their

⁵¹ See Sub-section 5.6.

responses would be accurate to their lived reality. Furthermore, the structured open-ended interviews and the use of rating scale and open-ended questions on the questionnaire meant that each research participant underwent the same research instrument through the two-year study. Another boost to the reliability of both research instruments was the guarantee of anonymity, confidentiality and the option to withdraw from participating in the study at any time offered to each of the participants, which helped to create the space for the interviewees to reply honestly and without prejudice. Finally, the member checking described in Subsection 5.7.2.B. was also undertaken to help verify responses and to enhance the reliability of the data.

5.8. Conclusion

The preceding sections of Chapter 5 detail the construction of the case study that was the primary research project of this study. Firstly, the rationale for the use of comparative research in education was explicated in Section 5.2. The research paradigm underpinning the study was then explained (Section 5.3), with an in-depth explanation of the interpretive research paradigm in which the primary research study is rooted. The case study approach is highlighted in Section 5.4, and attention is given to the type of case study used and the research questions that guided the study, as well as the period of the study and the rationale for the location of the study. Section 5.4 also explains the choice of schools including a description of the criteria used to assess each school's suitability for the study, and the requirements for each participating school.

After presenting the participants in the study, the Nature of Evidence and the Methods used in the case study were discussed in Sections 5.5 and 5.6. Details of the interviews that were conducted as part of the case study are found in Section 5.6. In the case of all three-stakeholder interviews (students, teachers and principal), a subsection described the planning phase, piloting, conducting and analysis of the results of the interview schedules over the duration of the case study. Particulars relating to the other major research instrument of this study, the questionnaires, are found in Subsection 5.6.2. Again the focus in this subsection was on the planning, piloting, conducting and analysis of the results of the questionnaires.

In the final section of this chapter, the ethical concerns arising from conducting this study were focused on. A particular focus was placed on the process of gaining ethical approval from Trinity College Dublin and the Boston Public Schools' Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation. Other elements focused on in this section include the reliability, validity and

generalisability of the findings and research instruments. Each of these discussion underline the rigorous approach implemented in this research study.

Having looked at the methodologies utilized in the study, the findings will now be presented.

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1. Introduction

The findings of the two-year case study are presented in Chapter 6. The design of the study was constructed in order to specifically investigate the research question outlined in Chapter 1, which was to learn from the perspective of students about the aspects of the microsystem of second-level school that could enhance their academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development. This investigation was conducted with the acknowledgement that the microsystem of school is just one of the nested contexts within which the second-level student lives.

The case study sites were six second-level institutions located in areas characterised by socioeconomic and educational disadvantage.⁵² Three of the schools are in the State of Massachusetts (MA) and the remaining are in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). A cohort at each of the institutions was studied for two years. A questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the case study and at its conclusion.⁵³ Additionally, six students from each cohort were chosen to be interviewed three times over the period of the case study.⁵⁴ At the case study's conclusion, 28 students (16 ROI/12MA) had completed the three interviews, 212 (165 MA/47 ROI) students finished the 2011 survey and 160 (115 MA/45 ROI) did the 2013 survey.

Finding from these second-level institutions with regard to the development of the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility of students will be offered in Chapter 6. The academic development of students and what second-level schools can use to help develop students in this area will be focused on in Section 6.2. The thoughts of the case study participants around their own self-esteem and what elements within schools can help engender more self-esteem within students will be explicated in Section 6.3. Finally the civic responsibility of the case study

⁵² See Subsection 5.4.5. for the criteria used in the selection of the case study schools.

⁵³ See Subsection 5.6.2 for an in-depth explanation of the questionnaires used with the case study participants.

⁵⁴ See Subsection 5.6.1.B for an in-depth explanation of the student interviews conducted as part of this longitudinal case study.

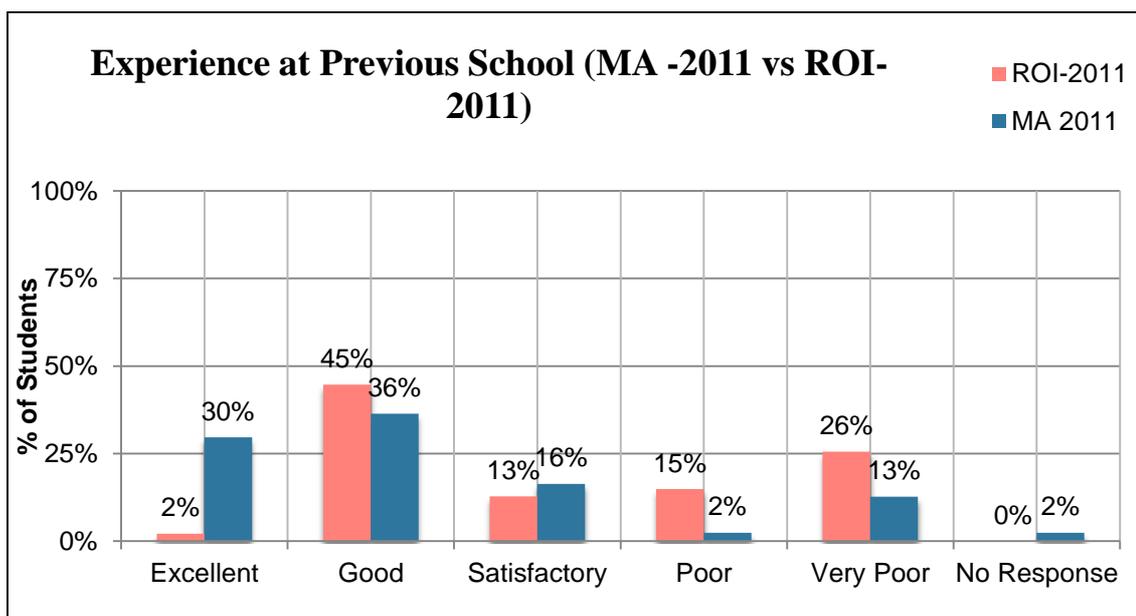
participants and what they believe has helped develop or not develop a sense of civic responsibility in them is given in Section 6.4.

6.2. Academic Development

The following section will look at the results of the student surveys and interviews with ROI and MA case study participants on the role microsystem of second-level schools can play in impacting their academic development. Subsection 6.2.1 will deliver the results of the surveys with regard to the quality and overall experience of second-level education for the students. Subsection 6.2.2 will then outline the results from the analysis of the student interviews, focusing on the characteristics of teachers, both positive and negative, that impact the academic development of students. Finally, Subsection 6.2.3 will focus on the broader role that a positive school environment can have in improving the academic performance of the case study participants. This data is drawn from student interviews.

6.2.1. Experience of Education and the Student/Teacher Relationship – ROI and MA

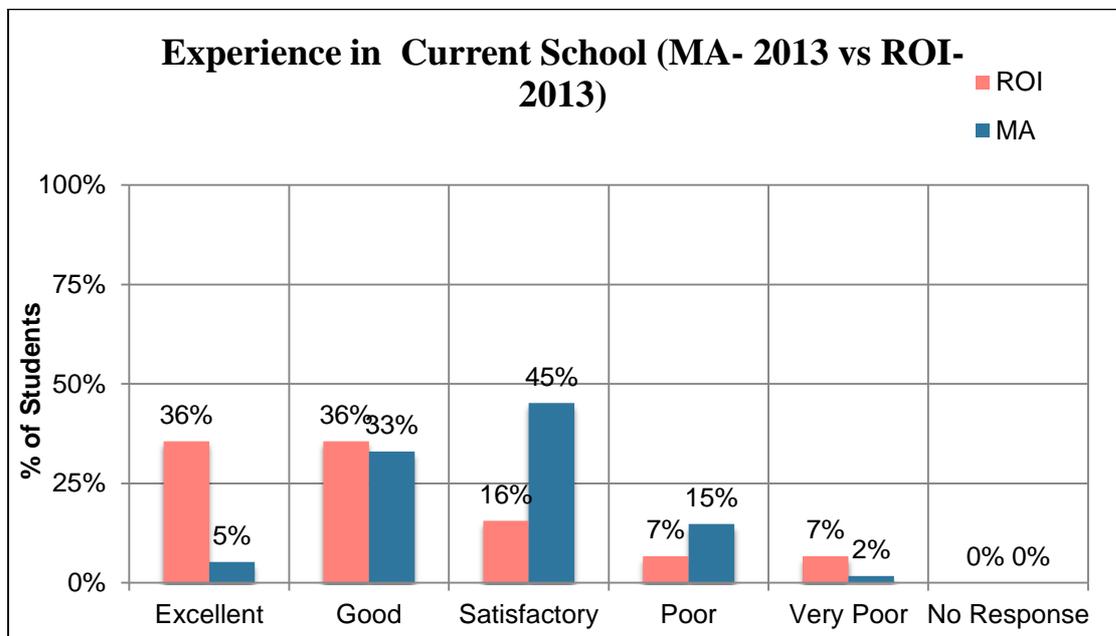
To gain a sense of the second-level educational experience of the case study survey participants it was imperative to learn how they felt about their previous experience to form a point of comparison. Figure 3 shows that 66% of the students from the MA and 47% of the students from ROI had at least a “good” experience during their JC (Junior Certificate) and junior high school education.



	Total	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very Poor	No Response
ROI-2011	47 (100%)	1 (2%)	21 (45%)	6 (13%)	7 (15%)	12 (26%)	0 (0%)
MA-2011	165 (100%)	49 (30%)	60 (36%)	27 (16%)	4 (13%)	21 (13%)	4 (2%)

Figure 3: Overall Experience at Previous School (MA-2011 vs. ROI-2011)

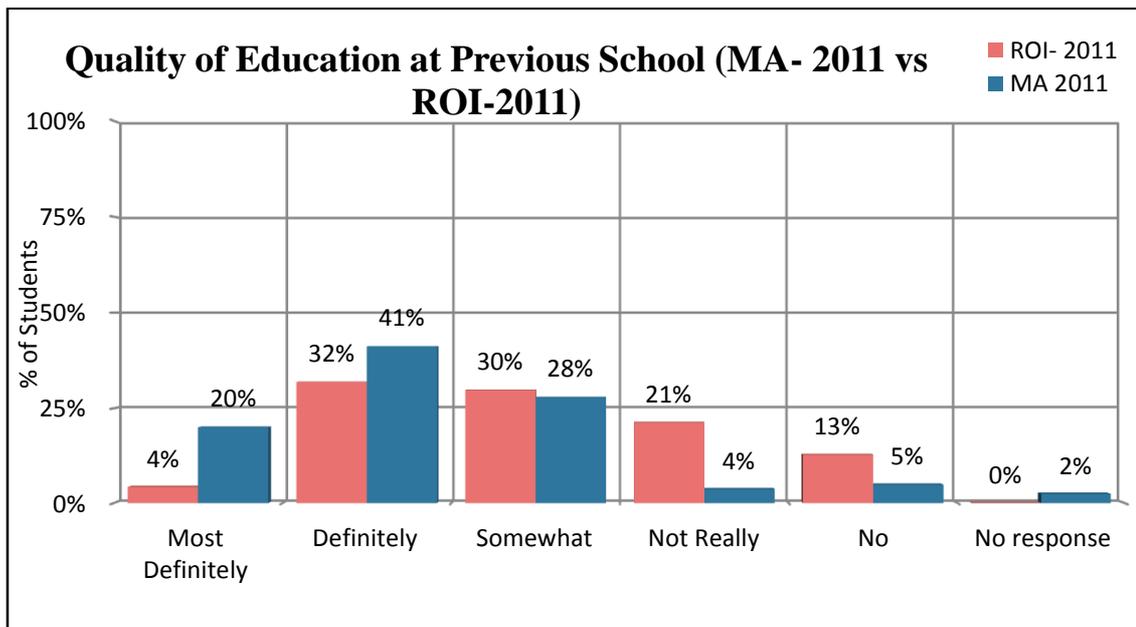
Two years later the case study students were asked about their overall experience of their first two years of high school and the LC programme. What is clear from the findings is that the ROI students are more positive about their LC experience than the MA students are about high school. This is shown in Figure 4.



	Total	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very Poor	No Response
ROI-2013	45 (100%)	16 (36%)	16 (36%)	7 (16%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)
MA-2013	115(100%)	6 (5%)	38 (33%)	52 (45%)	17 (15%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)

Figure 4: Experience in Current School (MA-2013 vs. ROI-2013)

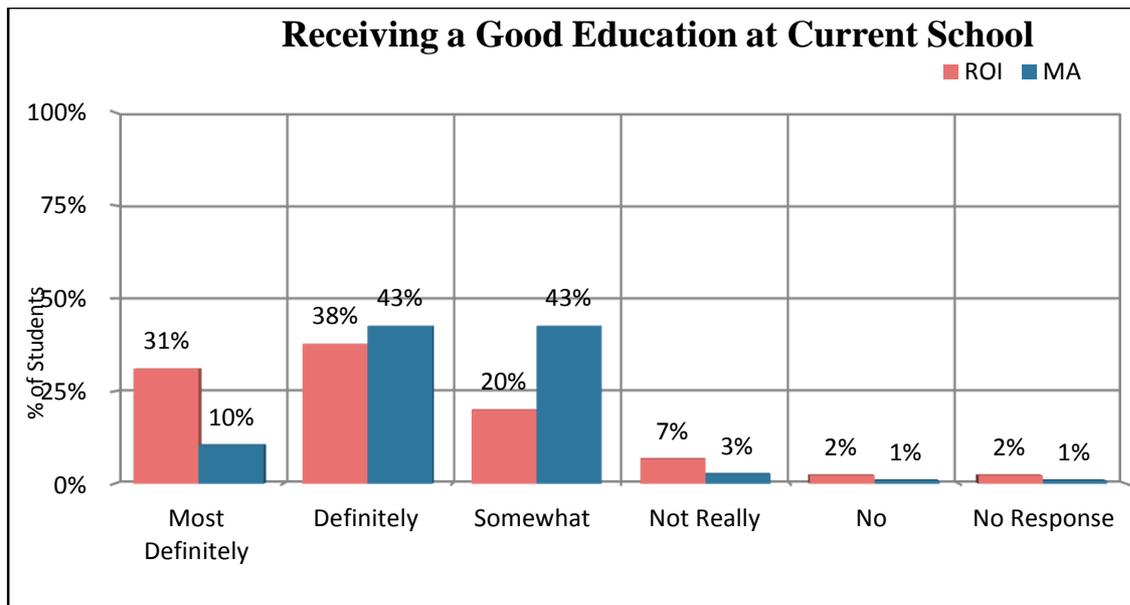
This data shows that 38% of the students in MA indicated having at least a “good” experience of school, while 72% of the ROI case study students answered the same. These figures show a 25% increase in the number of the ROI case study participants indicating they had at least a “good” experience during their LC years when compared with their JC experience, while the MA case study participants indicate a 28% decline in the number of students who feel they are receiving at least a “good” overall experience in high school as opposed to their junior high school experience.



	Total	Most Definitely	Definitely	Somewhat	Not Really	No	No Response
ROI-2011	45 (100%)	16 (36%)	16 (36%)	7 (16%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)
MA-2011	165(100%)	68 (41%)	46 (28%)	6 (4%)	8 (5%)	8 (2%)	0 (0%)

Figure 5: Quality of education at previous school (MA-2011 vs. ROI-2011)

Moving from overall experience to their opinion on the quality of education, Figure 5 illustrates that in 2011 61% of the students from MA believed that they received a good education in junior high school, while 36% of the ROI students believed the same.



	Total	Most Definitely	Definitely	Somewhat	Not Really	No	No Response
ROI- 2013	45 (100%)	14 (31%)	17 (38%)	9 (16%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
MA- 2013	115(100%)	12 (10%)	49 (43%)	49 (43%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)

Figure 6: Receiving a Good Education at Current School (MA-2013 vs. ROI- 2013)

Figure 6 looks two years later in 2013 at the response of the case study students to the question around the quality of education they are receiving in high school in MA and during the LC in ROI. Again the ROI students are much more positive than the students in MA. 8% less students from MA believe they are “definitely” receiving a good education when compared to their junior high school years. On the other hand, Figure 6 show that the students in ROI show a 33% increase in the number of students indicating they believe they are receiving a “good” education during their LC as compared to their JC years.

Beyond the quality and experience of education the student survey participants were also asked to comment on the student/teacher relationship over the two years of the case study. In both surveys three questions were asked in order to gain insight into this important relationship:

1. Did/Do you think your teacher care/d about you?
2. Were/Are you treated fairly by your teachers?
3. If you had/have a problem with your schoolwork would you approach your teacher for help?

When comparing the results between surveys and contexts we find that in 2011, 57% (94/165)⁵⁵ of the MA students reported that they at least “definitely” felt that their teachers during their junior high years cared about them, while two years later only 40% (46/115) of the same students believe the same. The remaining questions paint a similar picture for the MA students, as 58% (96/165) believed that their junior high school teachers at least “definitely” treated them fairly, while in 2013 the same assessment of their high school teachers only returned 45% (51/115). This negativity towards their high school teachers is also seen in their reticence to ask for help. In 2011, 54% (89/165) of the students from MA would have at least “definitely” asked their junior high school teachers for help, while only 48% (55/115) felt the same way about their high school teachers.

Students in the ROI case study schools show an opposite trend in the relationship with their teachers than is evident in MA. In 2011, 26% (12/47) of the cohort believed that their JC teachers at least “definitely” cared about them, while in 2013 this number rose to 65% (29/45) when asked about their LC teachers. The substantial increases in regard to the ROI students’ positive experience with their LC teachers continued in 2013 as 38% more of the ROI students believed that their LC teachers were at least “definitely” fair, when compared to their JC teachers. This growth in the positive relationship between teacher and student is also seen in the students’ feelings about asking a teacher for academic help. In 2011, 27% (13/47) of the students felt at least “definitely” able to approach a teacher for academic help, while in 2013 that number rose to 44% (20/45).

Considering the results from Figures 3 to 6 and the results of the student/teacher relationship survey questions an interesting finding from the data is the overlap between student–teacher relationship and a students’ overall experience of education. That is, the ROI students’ overall experience of education connected with their positive attitude to their student-teacher relationship, whereas there was a negative correlation between these two pieces of data from the US context. With this finding in mind the next Subsection will attempt to learn from the student interviewees about the aspects of teachers that had the most impact on their academic development.

⁵⁵ This fraction relates to the number of students responding to the question out of the total number of students responding.

6.2.2. Characteristics of Teachers Impacting Student Academic Development

The student interviewees from MA (12 in total) and ROI (16 in total) identify a number of characteristics of teachers that they believe are essential for their academic development. For three of these characteristics, there was absolute congruence between MA and ROI.

The teacher characteristic most desired in both contexts is that of affective skills, like being caring and supportive (ROI 11/16:MA 12/12). This is evidenced in the following contributions from interviewees:

It's the fact that ever since the beginning, they're always open. They're not judging anything, or us so it's, like, if you have a problem, you can just go to them. (MA-Alt-II-S2)

You can actually talk to them, there is no higher authority, they actually show respect to you and they get it back. (ROI-Alt-I-S4)

Interviewees from both MA and ROI also found consensus in identifying hard working as a second essential characteristic for their academic development, with 14/16 of the ROI referencing this attribute together with 10/12 of their MA counterparts doing the same. Their contributions are exemplified in the following transcript extracts:

The teachers are committed, before I used to think they were just annoying me. But when I saw that she did take the time to correct my assignments, it kind of, I feel bad now for thinking that she was trying to annoy me, but it just shows that she does care. (ROI-Trad-S3)

I like the dedication of the teachers. They put everything into helping you. That's all I need to succeed: teachers who are willing to help. They help more than my other teachers. (MA-Alt-II-S2)

A third characteristic of teachers jointly identified by both sets of interviewees as having a positive impact upon their academic development is that of utilising “effective teaching strategies” (ROI 6/16; MA 8/12). Examples of these teaching strategies jointly identified by the ROI and MA interviewees is both having an academic emphasis and using purposeful teaching methods, as evidence in the comments below:

My eighth-grade teacher actually taught us how to take notes... and how to actually break down long essays for high school... So I really believe that I can do all the work here. (MA-Trad-S4)

The students' recognition of the importance of purposeful teaching was most often seen in their explanation of experiences with teachers that in the students' estimation showed the opposite.

Then we have these teachers like my art history teacher – she never writes notes, she just reads the book and expects us to learn, the book is this big, and no it just does not work... (ROI-Trad-S2)

They say just, write it down. They give no notes, no detail or anything like that. (ROI-Trad-S6)

Another effective teaching strategy mentioned in the study is that of creative, intelligent lesson activities:

She was one of my favourite teachers. She taught ELA (English, language, arts) and she made us do this thing called word generation. She would read a statement from the book and we would have to stand on a certain side of the room depending what our opinion was, and then we would have to argue our side. (MA-Alt-2-S5)

Another important teaching skill identified by students is the ability to adapt material to fit the context and learning needs:

In our religion class at the moment he asks us what we want to learn about and that's what we are learning about. (ROI-Trad-S4)

There was this one teacher, Mr. Galliano, and he is a famous math teacher in Boston. He has his own show. I liked the way he taught. It will relate to you. Like he would bring in weights to demonstrate things, or relate the math to football or other sports. (MA-Alt-II-S3)

While there exists much congruence between the contexts around the characteristics of teachers that enhance academic development, there were also areas of divergence. For example eight of the ROI interviewees described a relaxed approach by teachers as being important to their academic development, while this did not factor at all in the MA responses. Additionally the characteristic of high standards was singled out by eight of the MA interviewees as being an important for their academic development, but this only featured in the answers of one of the sixteen ROI interviewees.

The student interviewees from both contexts also offered their thoughts on the negative qualities of teachers that hindered their academic development. The two most frequent responses from

MA participants are that teachers lack effort (7/12 interviewees) and exhibit poor teaching strategies (MA: 8/12 interviewees). For the interviewees the term, lack of effort, seems to apply to everything from teachers' approach to teaching, forming relationships or their general involvement in the school. MA students give examples of this as follows:

Sometimes I feel like she [the principal] is just doing her job and that is it. It doesn't seem like she is here because she wants to be, but because she has to be. (MA-Trad-S2)

I did not have one-on-one time with them, or see them after school. Their day is full and they would not be able to sit down with me after school and talk to me. (MA-Alt-II-S5)

The second most identified characteristic, poor teaching strategies, could often be connected, in the data analysis, to a lack of effort on behalf of the teacher. For example, one of the students remarked:

Some teachers had your back, and then this one teacher did not. I felt like he should not have been a teacher because he taught us nothing. The movies taught us everything, and half of the movies we watched weren't even based on history. (MA-Trad-S3)

Others offered similar comments:

They used to shout, like, 'I am not your friend. I am not going to sit here after school and help you with work you should have done at the beginning of class.' (MA-Alt-II-S2)

Four negative qualities experienced by students in ROI were categorised as "poor attitude" (10/16 interviewees), "lack of effort" (9/16 interviewees), "poor teaching strategies" (5/16 interviewees) and being "strict/uptight" (2/16 interviewees). Once again, these largely mirror the responses from the MA student interviewees.

An example of what the ROI students describe as a poor attitude can be seen in the following:

I would change how the teachers, you know, help us with questions, for instance like in maths we have a teacher, no-one is allowed, like we are all afraid of her, when you ask a question she gives you that look like 'are you stupid?' and we just can't ask. (ROI-Trad-S5)

The second most frequent response, “lack of effort”, is displayed in the following sample of answers:

They [the teachers] didn’t care like, it was just a job. They just come in, do what they have to do and get it over with. (ROI-Alt-I-S3)

I never talked to them [the teachers] and they didn’t talk to me. I didn’t like anything about them. It would have been better if they looked interested. (ROI-Alt-II-S4)

The interview data therefore indicates that supportive, hard-working teachers who employ effective teaching strategies are key to enhancing students’ academic development. Other, broader factors also play a role in this area, however. These whole-school factors are discussed in Subsection 6.2.3.

6.2.3. Characteristics of Second-Level Schools Impacting Student Academic Development

In addition to gaining insight into the role teachers play in the academic development of student, aspects of the interview schedule for case study participants also focused on the impact they believe the overall culture of the microsystem of school has on their achievement in this area.

In MA, 11 out of 12 student interviewees indicate the importance of a school-wide approach to high academic standards on their academic development. Examples of their comments are as follows:

I like that they push me, I mean when I was at Boston public schools I would easily get honour roll and, like, it was so much easier for me to pass it, now that I am here, it is like that I have to really try harder. (MA-Alt-II-S5)

Well they do challenge me, show me that I am not just getting grades because I give in the work, they actually look over the work and actually evaluate how the work is. (MA-Alt-II-S4)

Another frequently remarked characteristic is the existence of a supportive atmosphere within the school, with 9 out of the 12 MA students indicating as such. An example of their comments include:

They made us feel at home, it wasn’t like, ‘Okay you are a freshman now, now you are like king of the world’, they take baby steps with us, they helped us mature and turn you into different people. (MA-Trad-S2)

Everybody here wants good grades, everybody here wants to go to college, so I feel with that being our goal, everybody here works together so they can help their friends, and teachers definitely help us a lot. (MA-Alt-II-S1)

Further responses from the MA interviewees indicate that other elements impacted positively on students' academic development, namely, small class sizes (5/12 interviewees), a clear school mission (5/12 interviewees) and an effective work-study programme (6/12 interviewees). These responses were further developed by students as outlined below:

SMALL CLASS SIZES:

It is not like a public school because some public schools are huge where this school is small and has like, not a lot of students. Whereas here you have a teacher that could have known you since freshman year and you are a senior and you are close to them. (MA-Alt-II-S6)

THE WORK-STUDY PROGRAMME:

I love the job experience, the work experience is amazing. I feel like I have gained a lot of knowledge of the work world and how to be professional and how to communicate with people. (MA-Alt-II- S5)

CLEAR SCHOOL MISSION:

In the morning we'd stand up as a school as one and say it. It was based on having integrity and leadership in school and out of school. (MA-ALT-II-S1)

In analyzing the ROI interviews one can see on that there is much congruence with the MA interviewees on the importance of maintaining small class sizes, offering new experiences and sustaining a supportive environment in helping to enhance student academic development.

The importance of a supportive environment (11/16 interviewees) can be seen in some of the comments below:

I think because everyone in here has the same background really, they either got thrown out of school or are messers; we have all kind of been through the same thing so they all know. (ROI-Alt-I-S1)

It is nice. It is relaxed. It's not so like intense. Like everyone gets along with each other. (ROI-Alt-II-S1)

The ROI student interviewees' identification of new experiences (7/16 interviewees) and small class sizes (9/16 interviewees), as keys to their academic development are evident in the following comments:

SMALL CLASS SIZES:

In a smaller class, the teachers, they are better relaxed to teach and you can go around person to person as there's isn't a lot of people in there, go round making sure they are all on the same track. (ROI-Alt-I-S1)

NEW EXPERIENCES:

Some of the trips that we will be going on, some of the new subjects. I have completely new subjects, like Link. We are supposed to be going to work with that and trips and I will be looking forward to that. (ROI-Trad-S3)

While the ROI and MA interviewees therefore held many converging opinions on the characteristics of second-level school that had an impact on their academic development, divergent opinions were also identified in the data. For example, each of the MA student interviewees referred to the importance of effective school policies (12/12 interviewees) and the need for high academic standards (11/12) when considering those elements of the whole-school environment that affect their academic development.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL POLICIES:

They (the school) were straightforward. When they said something, they usually meant it. If they said they were going to suspend you, they would suspend you. It's not good to be suspended, as you know. Before they would suspend me, they would explain why, and I would know that it could never happen again. They would give me opportunities to make it up or show that I was improving. There was a consequence for every action. They would praise you or pick you out if you did something good. (MA-Trad-S2)

HIGH STANDARDS:

I like that they push me, I mean when I was at Boston Public Schools I would easily get honor roll and like, it was so much easier for me to pass it, now that I am here, it is like that I have to really try harder, usually I would get by by doing the bare minimum and I would still pass but here it is like I really have to like try and try and try, and it shows me how determined I am about my education. (MA-Alt-II-S5)

Conversely, the ROI interviewees believed that less rules and more flexibility (9/16 interviewees) was a key for their academic development. This finding shows a substantially different outlook by the two cohorts, the rationale for which will be discussed in Chapter 7.

MORE RELAXED:

I just like that it's really relaxed here, none of the usual stresses like a normal school here. Like in a normal school you are stressing over everything, over just teachers not being able to help you and then you are stressed over not understanding something and then even something as simple as a uniform, having to keep that proper all week. (ROI-Alt-II-S5)

Although not specifically asked as part of the interview schedule, students also offered their comments on the characteristics of schools that have hindered, rather than enhanced, their academic development.

Four of the most common answers given by students in MA – can be categorised under the heading of the school's learning environment: a lack of academic challenge (6/12 interviewees), a lack of discipline (6/12 interviewees), the perception of unfair rules (6/12 interviewees) and class sizes being too large (4/12 interviewees). The effect that these elements are described as having on students' academic development can be seen in the following comments:

NOT ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGING:

Because they don't set high standards for us students, they do that in the white schools, the private schools and the Catholic schools set high standards for the students to achieve but the Boston public schools don't really care, once they get a pay cheque they are happy. (MA-Trad-S3)

UNFAIR RULES:

The dress code. They are very strict on it. It's a biased scene once again because certain people have a dress code that is completely different from the dress code here. So yeah. I guess some teachers don't notice it and others don't really care for the dress code. (MA-Alt-II-S6)

The most frequently referenced characteristic by the MA interviewees of a negative school atmosphere is a "lack of community spirit" (7/12). Other named characteristics also play a role in damaging the "spirit" of the microsystem of school, according to participants. These include a lack of discipline—(6/12 interviewees) and a stressful environment (2/12 interviewees), as evidenced by the students such as these:

This year just changed so much from last year. I am not as comfortable when I came here, [as] I am not as happy to come to school as I was. And I don't like that feeling because getting up in the morning is bad

enough so when I get somewhere I want to be happy to be there, not just come because I have to. (MA-Trad-S2)

Some people who I have seen go here, it is like they tried, but the teachers did not want to give enough to, you know, did not want to give enough sympathy or support for them to get better. (MA-Alt-II-S6)

The responses of the ROI interviewees are once again in agreement with those of their MA counterparts. Firstly, a lack of community spirit is identified most frequently as a contributing factor to a poor school environment (8/16 interviewees). The explanation of what the interviewees see as a lack of community spirit can be found in a sample of their comments:

I don't know how to word it ... I don't know how to put it ... but ... there's quite a bit of racism and stuff. Sometimes it [school] can be great and other times it can just be ridiculous. (ROI-Trad-S4)

I had a lot of problems in school. There was bullying and they did nothing at all. The vice principal said he would sort it and he didn't. I was told I wouldn't have to go in front of other peoples' parents but I was called out of class and dragged in front of them. Everything they said, they turned back on. The lad who was supposed to be suspended wasn't, so I didn't go back after that. (ROI-Alt-II-S5)

ROI interviewees also concur with the MA respondents in identifying the negative effects of class sizes that are too large (5/16 interviewees) and the prevalence of what they perceive as unfair rules (5/16 interviewees).

CLASS SIZES BEING TOO LARGE:

You see the time is not really put into you in schools. In schools it is basically 30 in a class, one teacher, he goes in, he teaches what he has to teach, if you don't get it you were not listening basically, it is your own fault, there is no real communication between us. They do their thing, you come in and learn or you don't learn, you are doing your thing and then it is the next time. (ROI-ALT-I-S1)

UNFAIR RULES:

They've enforced a lot of new rules this year. Not everyone's being treated right. There's a new rule where if they see anything going on around the school that they just tell the teacher and that they'll get the highest punishment possible, like, sometimes suspension or whatever the case may be. (ROI-TRAD-S4)

Again while there are many similarities between the responses of the interviewees from both contexts there are also some differences. For example while both sets of student interviewees

discussed the stressful nature of school and the lack of class choices as issues holding back their academic development, both of these were named by more of the ROI students (5/16) as compared to the MA students (2/12). In addition, the MA students also pointed to the negative impact of an atmosphere that was “not academically challenging” (6/12) and described negative effects of “the length of the school day” (5/12), both of which were not present in the ROI interviewee results.

In conclusion, Section 6.2 has outlined the findings of the primary research study in the two contexts of ROI and MA in relation to the role of the microsystem of second-level education in enhancing the academic development of the student case study participants. When comparing the results, it is evident that the student interviewees offered remarkably similar answers with regard to what they believe has had the most impact on their academic development. A central theme in the contributions was the importance of relationships in the academic development of students, whether the student/teacher relationship or the positive atmosphere engendered in the broader school context. Following on from these findings the next section will present on the aspects of second-level education that develop self-esteem, according to participants.

6.3. Development of Self-Esteem

In this Section the results regarding the self-esteem of the student participants and what second-level school can do to enhance student self-esteem will be described. The level of self-esteem of the student participants over the two-year case study in the contexts of ROI and MA will be described in Subsection 6.3.1. This data was retrieved from the student questionnaires and it shows that the majority of students express a high degree of self-esteem, but that there is, for a significant minority, insecurities and doubts around certain areas. Subsection 6.3.2 will then delve into the various aspects of second-level education that the student case study interviewees believe has had the most impact upon their self-esteem. The most frequent of these responses include the presence of a support system, role models, achievement in school, supportive school environment and engaging in work experience.

6.3.1. Level of Self-Esteem in ROI and MA

In the 2011 and 2013 surveys, a section was devoted to gaining a general sense of the self-esteem levels of the MA and ROI survey participants. These questions were adapted from the

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Test and were asked in both iterations of the survey in order to provide a point of comparison. The five questions/statements were as follows:

1. Do you care what people your age think of you?
2. Most people respect me...
3. I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do
4. When I try hard at something I am confident I will succeed
5. I think that most people like me as a person

In 2011 the question (Do you care what people your age think of you?) received a largely positive response from both student cohorts, with a remarkable amount of congruence: 72% (118/165) of the students in MA cared at the most “a little” about what people thought of them, while 73% (34/47) of the students in ROI indicated the same. Responses to Question 2 were more divergent, with 71% (116/165) of students in MA and 47% (22/47) of students in ROI at least in agreement with the statement “Most people respect me...”. In relation to the third statement, 80% (132/165) of students in MA and 77% (36/47) of students in ROI believe it was at least “a little true” that they had the ability to do anything they wanted to do. This is followed by a further “confident” response and a similar level of congruence between the two contexts in responses to Question 4, where 81% (134/165) of students in MA and 88% (44/47) of ROI students indicated they believe the statement to be at the least “a little true” of them. Finally, responses to Question 5 show that 54% (89/165) of MA and 57% (27/47) of ROI students “agree” with the statement “I think most people like me as a person”. Overall, these results indicate a reasonably high level of self-esteem among the 2011 cohort of participating students, with a very high level of congruence between students in the two contexts.

Despite these largely positive levels of self-esteem, a small but significant segment of the surveyed population in both contexts in 2011 showed signs of a lack of self-esteem. For example in Question 5, 35% (57/165) of the students from MA answered that they “didn’t know” and a further 7% (12/165) “disagree” to “strongly disagree” with the statement, “I think most people like me as a person...”. A very similar response can also be seen from the ROI students, where 34% (16/47) indicated they “don’t know” and an additional 8% (4/47) “disagree to strongly disagree” with the statement. Other indications of a lack of self-esteem can also be seen in the responses to Question 2, as 18% (29/165) of the students from MA and 43% (20/47) from ROI answered “don’t know” to the statement, “Most people respect me”.

Moving ahead two years to the 2013 exit survey, 74% (85/115) of the case study participants in MA cared at the most “a little” about what people their own age felt about them. The result from the ROI schools for the same question was also 74% (33/45). This represents a 2% increase for the MA case study participants and a 1% increase for the ROI when comparing the two surveys, indicating a small rise in the self-esteem levels in students.

When looking at the second question we see that in 2013, 70% (80/115) of the MA students and 51% (23/45) of the ROI students at least “agree” that most people respect them. In comparing these results with the 2011 surveys we see that the MA students have shown a 1% decrease in, this area, while the ROI students have seen a 4% rise. Slight rises are also evident in responses to the remaining questions. For example, the MA students record a 5% growth in the proportion of students who believe it is at least “A little true” that when they try hard at something they are confident they will succeed. Meanwhile, the ROI students record a 12% increase in the number of students who indicate that they believe it is at least “A little true” that they have the ability to do whatever they want to do, and a 3% increase in the number of students who believe it is at least “A little true” that they will succeed when they try hard at something.

There are many similarities between the responses found in the 2011 and 2013 surveys. One of the similarities is that while again a majority of students imply a high level of self-esteem, there continues to be persistent evidence of a low level of self-esteem. For example in response to Question 2, 26% (30/115) of MA students and 36% (16/45) of the ROI students in the 2013 survey answered “don’t know” in response to the statement “Most people respect me”. Additionally, 4% (4/115) of the MA and 13% (6/45) of the ROI students responded that they “disagree” to “strongly disagree” that people respect them. When asked, in Question 5, if they thought that most people liked them, the 2013 survey shows that 37% (42/115) of the MA students answered “don’t know” and 51% (23/45) of the ROI students answered the same. An additional 6% of MA students and 4% of ROI students disagreed that most people like them as a person.

Considering that the case study participants in both context display a divided landscape with regard to self-esteem, it is essential to learn more from the student interviewees about what elements of the microsystem of second-level school have helped lead to an enhancement or reduction of self-esteem. In the next Subsection 6.3.2 the response of the student interviewees will be investigated.

6.3.2. Aspects of Second-level Education Developing and Hindering Student Self-Esteem

One objective of the case study interviews was to delve deeper into the impact that the microsystem of school can have on an individual's self-esteem. The MA interviewees (12 in total) indicate several positive school-based influences upon their self-esteem. The most frequent of these responses include the presence of a support system, role models, achievement in school, supportive school environment and engaging in work experience.

All 12 students mentioned achievement in school as a key factor in the development of their self-esteem. The majority of examples given by the students include that of academic and extracurricular successes, examples of both of which can be found below:

I started in Varsity for the rest of the year and I got MVP for the league.⁵⁶
[Being MVP as a freshman] gave me the momentum to do better in school after. (MA-Alt-I-S1)

Going from Cs and Ds in sixth grade to straight As and Bs, getting merit awards all the time, perfect attendance. I wanted to get honour roll at least once. That would just make my whole life. That would make me happy.
(MA-Trad-S3)

Students from the MA schools were also positive about the role that a supportive school environment had on the development of their self-esteem. 11 out of the 12 MA students commented that the supportive environment they encountered within their school had helped over the two years to make them more confident. Interestingly, 10 of the students singled out their teachers as the most important aspect of the supportive school community.

Teachers stayed after with me, and they told me, "Listen, it's easier than you think" and simplified it for me, and I'm fine now... more confident.
(MA-Alt-II-S2)

My history teacher is a good person and is someone that I go to with any situation and he always shows me the positive sides to situations. He motivates me to do my work. (MA-Trad-S2)

Another aspect the MA students singled out as having a positive impact on their self-esteem was their engagement with a high quality work placement and other new opportunities (7/12). The benefits of the work initiatives were commented on by many of the interviewees with some

⁵⁶ MVP or "Most Valuable Player" is an award given annually to the best player on a particular team. "Varsity" refers to the highest level of an athletic team at the high school level.

indicating that the work experience had an impact on their self-esteem and the way they see the world. Examples of the impact of their work experience can be seen in the following comments:

I have noticed coming to the school I had, this mindset that I thought rich people did not really like talking to kids like me. I developed a good relationship with the president from my job, so I felt wanted by higher classes. (MA-Alt-II-S2)

I have learned a lot of things in the work programme, which was a good thing, certain things I do at work I am going to need to know when I have my own house or my own place, so I learnt a lot of good things to keep me going in life. (MA-Alt-II-S1)

Because my boss is always reminding me, like sit up with your posture, to be more confident, and she is already telling me I can get efficient by doing different tasks and it teaches me different things like I can do in the workplace. (MA-Alt-II-S6)

Like internships, different things like in hospitals and school and stuff, so I got to see things from different perspectives. It made me wonder exactly what I wanted to do ... (MA-Trad-S2)

The MA student interviewees also point to school and community leadership opportunities that have shaped their self-esteem:

I am in LDP, which is like a Leadership Development Programme... Because I work with kids that are middle school and I am in high school, I feel like they are so close to me [in age] they would know if you are scared to talk to them, they would know if you were too scared to tell them something, so if you are confident then you would be able to hold control of the situation. (MA-Alt-II-S5)

I have grown into it, because I used to be really shy. Citizen School has helped me a lot with that. (MA-Alt-II-S4)

[MA: Alternative School Model #2] has made me confident. Here, you have two options. You either present in front of a class or else you fail. To me, failure is not an option so of course I'm going to take my chance even if I fear speaking in front of a group. (MA-Alt-II-S6)

The MA interviewees also identified the negative impact the microsystem of school can have upon their self-esteem. For these students, school-based experiences damaged their own opinions of themselves and of their ability. The school-based elements that the MA interviewees felt hindered their self-esteem the most were negative influences (7/12) and experiencing failure (7/12).

Within the category “Experiencing Failure”, four subheadings were identified. The most frequently mentioned area was “academics”. The effect of a perceived academic failure on students’ self-esteem was described in the following terms:

I always put myself down and that is my problem in my grades. If I don’t get a pass I get discouraged and stuff like that. (MA-Alt-II-2)

I am just never confident in myself. I always hesitate in my answers, I am never a hundred per cent sure. (MA-Trad-S1)

Another noteworthy response within the “Experiencing Failure” category was that of avoiding of failure/anxiety. An example of how this exhibits itself is as follows:

Sometimes I feel like I don’t want to talk, I guess I am afraid to cry in front of people, so I don’t talk just because I don’t want to cry. (MA-Trad-S2)

When shifting to look at the response of the ROI interviewees we can see that there is a lot of congruence with the MA interviewees. Similar to the MA students, 14 out of the 16 ROI case study participants believed that achieving in school had a positive influence on their self-esteem. Of those 14 students, 11 singled out the effects of achievements in academics:

Because my grades are better and stuff, you can see that your work is actually done and it is right, you feel happier, you can actually do it. (ROI-Alt-I-S3)

I’ve grown up with some people who I’ve known since I was a kid and when I see their lives and compare it to mine, they’re just popping kids at this moment; they didn’t stay in school and that took them downhill. I’m really proud of myself that I don’t follow other people ‘cos that could lead me to the situation that they’re in now. (ROI-Trad-S5)

In the same way that many of the MA students focused on achieving in extracurricular activities, the ROI students responded similarly:

It is hard to get up and train but then when you win something you feel very good like, you know you have achieved something. That feeling stays with you and that is what pushes you. (ROI-Alt-I-S2)

Once again similarly to the MA students, 11 out of the 16 ROI interviewees described the role that a positive school environment had on their confidence. Interestingly, both contexts describe the particular role of teachers in the general atmosphere of the school. The important

role that teachers play in building the self-esteem of the students is showcased in several of the student comments:

In this school with the teachers, they speak to you like adults. I don't know how to put it in words but basically you speak back to them in confidence, you are not worried that you will say something bad and might get in trouble. That gives you the confidence to have a conversation with someone. You could take that confidence to someone outside the school. (ROI-Alt-I-S1)

I want to be a teacher in a primary school. So I kind of look up to the teachers in a way. There is one teacher in particular, he always tells us that he went to this school as well and first time around he failed his exams. He went back and did it again and now he is our maths teacher. So that taught me, that it does not matter if I fail the first time I can come back and do it again, there is no problem with doing it again. (ROI-Trad-S4)

The ROI students also report the positive influence of other characteristics of the microsystem of school. One in particular is the impact of the school offering opportunities for growth, which corresponds closely to the responses from MA students. In the case of the ROI students, their comments related to opportunities like work experiences, interactions with third-level institutions, extra study opportunities, as well as volunteering and other experiences that the student would not normally have encountered. Example of the responses includes:

I did nearly a full year of voluntary work in the vet's every Saturday. At the start I used to be just in the back, doing the small jobs. But then I was talking to the customers and like taking in money and helping in the surgery and everything. It was just, it was little steps, but I think they knew because I was so shy at the start, they were kind of like trying to push me. (ROI-Trad-S3)

I went on a UCD programme for a week in second year. It was a week after school finished and you were just put into groups with a lot of people from different schools and you had to work together, it kind of made you more confident because you were with different people rather than your own class. (ROI-Trad-S1)

The opportunity for students to take on leadership roles in their schools, whether through student councils, mentoring, tutoring or other avenues were also singled out by students as engendering a significant growth in self-esteem. For example one of the ROI schools operates a school mentoring programme called "The Amigos", where Fifth and Sixth-Year students mentor incoming First-Year students. Student interviewees who have participated in this initiative credit it for much of their self-esteem growth:

When I was younger, I didn't want to do anything, I'd just back out of it... And that's why I did the Amigos because I'd have to talk in front of First Years and I'd be like, I have to do it. I just think – when I got into the Amigos, I thought, right I'm just going to do it. And I'll try everything now, I'll just do it. (ROI-Trad-S3)

[The Amigos] and the teachers have helped too, kind of pushing me to try and to do my best, so that gave me more confidence too. (ROI-Trad-S4)

On the opposite end of the spectrum the ROI students also offered their perceptions of what school-based elements have hindered the development of their self-esteem. Analogous to the situation found in the MA schools the impact of experiencing failure is significant (10/16).

In ROI, the students' comments around experiencing failure encompass the areas of personal, social and academic, with academics having the biggest impact upon student self-esteem.

Sometimes I can be confident. I am not really confident in school because sometimes I can get brain locked and it really brings my confidence down. (ROI-Alt-II-S6)

I'm really bad at maths so when it comes to it, I can't learn the right thing and I lose confidence. (ROI-Trad-S1)

Comparable to the situation in the MA schools, the students in the ROI describe how a poor work ethic has had a negative influence on their self-esteem.

In our mock exams I couldn't just sit there for a whole exam so I kind of just brushed through all me exams to get out as quick as I could. (ROI-Alt-II-S3)

Sometimes I am just lazy and can't get up in the morning. (ROI-Alt-II-S6)

Interviewees from both MA and ROI commented on the impact on the self-esteem of the negative influences of teachers and of anxiety related to failure. However, significantly more of the ROI students (9/16 interviewees) name both as key negative factors while only 2 out of 12 MA student mentioned both.

The power of a perceived lack of support from teachers upon self-esteem can be seen in the following comments from ROI participants:

I wouldn't feel comfortable talking to a random teacher, I would have to feel comfortable around the person, and I would rather talk to a friend in school than a teacher. (ROI-Trad-S4)

There's a trust issue. I just wouldn't trust anyone here really with my information. (ROI-Trad-S5)

It is clear, particularly from the latter comment, that students' inability to rely on their teachers for support impacts their self-esteem. Students' anxiety about failing similarly impacts negatively on them:

I am a bit of a perfectionist, if something is not absolutely perfect then I have to restart it. It is just who I am, if it does not look well, then, even writing notes in my copy or doing homework, if it doesn't look great then I will just tear it out and start over. (ROI-Trad-S4)

Normally I can talk in front of people that I feel comfortable with, but just with new people, or people you don't really know, I get awkward. (ROI-Trad-S5)

In conclusion, the case study participants in ROI and MA both offer much in regard to the potential impact of the microsystem of second-level school upon the development of student self-esteem. A comparison of the survey results from 2011 and 2013 show that the majority of the case study participants in both contexts report a high level of self-esteem that grew over the two-year case study. Interestingly however, a significant minority in both contexts reported results consistent with a low self-esteem.

Interviewees in both contexts were also asked to consider what particular aspects of the microsystem of second-level school had helped to influence their self-esteem both positively and negatively. Again the role of the teacher was identified in both contexts as having a significant influence on self-esteem. An additional trend is that both interview cohorts also describe the impact of encountering success/failure in school, whether in academics or extracurricular activities, on their self-esteem. Both of these pieces of evidence point to concrete examples of the impact of the microsystem of second-level school that has emerged from the data. Section 6.4 will now consider the role of the microsystem of second-level school with regard to civic responsibility development.

6.4. Development of Civic Responsibility

The final element of the research question to be dealt with is the role of the microsystem of second-level school in impacting the civic development of students. In order to investigate this appropriately a starting point is to look at the level of civic responsibility amongst the students in both contexts over the two-year period of the case study. The next step is then to investigate what elements of the microsystem of second-level school the students report have positively and negatively influenced their sense of civic responsibility.

6.4.1. Levels of Civic Responsibility: Case Study Participants

Overall the survey data in both contexts presents a mixed view of the level of civic responsibility of students. Within the surveys, students responded to eight Likert scale questions in relation to civic responsibility in both 2011 and 2013. The questions/statements were as follows:

1. I consider myself involved in the community...
2. I have a responsibility to look after people in my community...
3. I go out of my way to help others...
4. My community is important to me...
5. I have a responsibility to try to make my community the best place it can possibly be...
6. I can make a positive difference to the community around me...
7. Volunteering in the community is important.
8. I would like to have a leadership role in a local club or group...

In looking firstly at the 2011 MA responses, according to Question 1, 44% (73/165) of the MA students surveyed “agree” to “strongly agree” that they would consider themselves involved in the community, while a sizeable percentage of the MA student population answered “no feeling” (32%, 28/165) and over 23% (38/165) “disagree” to “strongly disagree” with the statement. This is an interesting finding when put next to the results from Question 3, as 63% (104/165) of the MA students “agree” to “strongly agree” that they go out of their way to help others. The data indicates, therefore, that while 23% of students do not feel they are involved in the community, 63% would go out of their way to help others. This disparity between

students' apparent desire to be of service and their actual level of involvement demands discussion.

A similar trend is also evident in the 2011 ROI interviewees. Question 1 shows that only 25% (12/47) of the students surveyed "agree" to "strongly agree" that they were involved in the community, while 32% (15/47) had "no feeling" and 43% (20/47) indicate that they "disagree" to "strongly disagree". When considering Question 3, however, 61% (29/47) of the students surveyed said that they "agree" to "strongly agree" that they went out of the way to help others. It appears again, therefore, that students in both contexts do not equate "going out of my way to help others" with being involved in one's community.

Questions 4 and 7 look at how much the community means to the case study participants of MA and ROI. In Question 4, 50% (82/165) of the 2011 MA students said they "agree" to "strongly agree" that their community is important to them, while 35% (57/165) register "no feeling" and another 9% (16/165) "disagree" to "strongly disagree" with the statement. With regard to the importance that they place on volunteering, 40% (67/165) "agree" to "strongly agree" that volunteering is important, with 40% (66/165) selecting "no feeling" and 12% (19/165) stating that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the statement. These results show that the importance of the community (Question 4) and volunteering (Question 7) outweigh their feeling of responsibility to the community and those in it (Questions 2 and 5). A high level of "no feeling" responses to both of these questions was evident perhaps indicating a high level of apathy among the surveyed population.

The mixed results in data collected from Questions 4 and 7 are also evident in responses from the ROI case study participants. In 2011, 47% (22/47) "agree" to "strongly agree" that their community is important to them, while 30% (14/47) had "no feeling" and a further 23% (11/47) "disagree" to "strongly disagree". As regard to Question 7 it shows that 48% (23/47) "agree" to "strongly agree" with the statement that volunteering in the community is important. However, 14% (7/47) "disagree" to "strongly disagree" with the statement, together with a further 38% (18/47) that had "no feeling" towards the topic. These results therefore indicate again that the student cohort is divided on this issue.

Following on from the initial survey in 2011, a second survey was conducted with both the MA and ROI cohorts in the spring of 2013. Results from 2013 mirror the stratified nature of the

2011 responses, with three distinct cohorts emerging: those who declare themselves civically responsible; those that are apathetic; and those that do not see themselves as civically responsible.

Again, some of the responses continue to present contradictions. For example, in the 2013 MA results, 40% (46/115) of students “agree” to “strongly agree” with the statement that they are involved with the community, a 4% drop from 2011. Concurrently, the number of students responding with “no feeling” rose from 7% to 35% (40/115) while the percentage of respondents who answered that they “disagree” to “strongly disagree” stayed the same at 23% (26/115). At the same time, the 2013 results show that more of the students feel that they go out of their way for others, as 71% (81/115) say that they “agree” to “strongly agree” (8% rise from 2011), while 22% (25/115) believe they have “no feeling” (3% rise from 2011) and only 4% (4/115) “disagree” to “strongly disagree” (6% decrease from 2011) with the statement. Similar to the 2011 data, therefore, it seems that while 40% of students do not feel they are involved in the community, 71% would go out of their way to help others. The disparity between students’ apparent desire to be of service and their actual level of involvement continues, therefore.

The divided nature of the results continued when students’ attitude to volunteering in the community was investigated. In MA, 50% (58/115) of the students “agree” to “strongly agree” with the importance of volunteering, which represents a 10% rise from the 2011 survey. At the same time, there was a 1% increase in the number of students “agreeing” to “strongly agreeing” that their community is important to them, a 3% increase in the students responding “no feeling” and a 9% fall of those students “disagreeing” to “strongly disagreeing” with the statement.

In analysing the 2013 responses of the ROI case study participants, much congruence is evident with the results found in MA. The school community is still very divided between those that are civically active, those that are not and those are negative towards it. Despite the divided results, it is clear that the ROI students show a larger growth in civic responsibility than their MA counterparts. For example, 26% (12/45) of the students “agree” to “strongly agree” with the statement that they consider themselves involved in the community (1% increase on 2011), while 43% (19/45) said they “disagree” to “strongly disagree” with the statement, which is unchanged from 2011. The 2013 attitude toward community involvement also grew, as more students “agree” to “strongly agree” that they go out of their way to help others (an increase of

8%). Those who record “no feeling” towards the statement reduced by 6% to 22% (10/45) and those that “disagree” fell 2% to 9% (4/45).

The growth in civic responsibility among ROI participants can continue to be seen as more students at 52% (24/45) “agree” to “strongly agree” that they have a responsibility to look after the people in their community (an 18% increase on 2011), which is supported by a 6% decrease to 24% (11/45) the number of students who had “no feeling” towards the question and an 11% decrease to 24% (10/45) of the students that “disagree” with the statement. A similar pattern is detected where more students at 37% (17/45) “agree” to “strongly agree” that they have a responsibility to make their community the best place that it can be (3% increase from 2011) and 10% less of the ROI students to 22% (10/45) report that they “disagree” with the statement.

The importance the students attach to volunteering in the community also improved amongst this cohort, as there was a 10% increase to 58% (26/45) in the number of students responding that they “agree” to “strongly agree” with the statement, 16% (7/45) “disagree” to “strongly disagree” (a rise of 2%). These figures are again balanced by an 11% reduction to 27% (12/45) in the number of students who responded that they have “no feeling”.

In summary, the survey results from both contexts highlight that the student participants show a diverse attitude to civic responsibility. Another finding from the surveys is that the ROI students are showing larger gains than the MA students when comparing the 2011 and 2013 survey results. The next step for this study is to look at the impact that the microsystem of second-level might have had on student attitudes toward civic responsibility. For this investigation the views of the student interviewees in both contexts will be analysed.

6.4.2. Aspects of Second-Level Education Developing and Hindering Student Civic Responsibility Development

In order to ascertain why students have a civically responsible attitude to their school and wider community, it was necessary to ask the student interviewees where this attitude originated. It was felt that by unearthing these details it could unlock lessons for microsystem of second-level schools in helping to endow their students with a civically responsible attitude.

As part of the interview schedule, students were asked where their sense of civic responsibility originated. In MA, ten participants offered responses that linked with their school experience. Of these, nine mentioned the impact of positive personal experiences of the development of their sense of civic responsibility. This thinking is highlighted in the following contributions:

There is a lot of people that helped me, coaches, people; they just helped me through life so I should give back to that community. (MA-Alt-II-S3)

They [the school] have helped me to such an extent that if I was not here I do not know where I would be. I would either have ended up dropping out of school, or being in the street doing something. The other schools around me are bad news. Here has made me wake up. (MA-Alt-II-S2)

I want to give back to the people who are helping me. I don't know how to right now but I want to, I want to be like a role model and help someone. That's what the teachers gave to me and that is what I have to give to someone else. (MA-Trad-S2)

The ROI interviewees offer similar responses when asked about the origin of their civically responsible attitude, referring primarily to the influence of positive personal experience (7/11) at school. Similar to their MA counterparts, ROI students noted how positive school experiences created in them a belief that they need to give something back. This is evidenced in the following quotations:

It [the school] helped me so much throughout my life and preparing for college that I would come back here and if I can help. (ROI-Trad-S1)

Yeah, 'cos if I didn't go to [name of school] I wouldn't have got the education I have. So I owe them for my education and for being able to go to college and do all that, so they've given a lot. They do so much for us, people don't realise that they do so much for us, giving us the education that we need ... (ROI-Trad-S4)

Both cohorts of students also identified the impact of their own positive personal experiences of participating in volunteering opportunities within and outside the school on their civic responsibility development:

I have helped out at my sister's school, reading to them and helping them with their work. I liked seeing the kids smile. (MA-Alt-II-S2)

I would like to help younger kids, maybe even in soccer, maybe managing. I would like to help people around my community, youngsters around there and keep them out of trouble. (ROI-Alt-I-S2)

Further, students from both contexts noted the reciprocal nature of service, where they benefitted personally from their positive personal experiences:

I'm in the School Amigos. You learn how to get on with other people, and speak up. We learn how to build to skills to show people how we can help them. (ROI-Trad-S1)

I hosted the Parent–Teacher meetings for our First Years and Third Years and also I spoke when we were unveiling the plaque. (ROI-Trad-S5)

In the summer, I did a programme called LeTalk. We volunteered for different programmes, and we performed for people and taught them other things, things you really need to know in life, like math. (MA-Trad-S3)

Beyond the influence of these positive personal experiences, the students in ROI described how positive role models at school played an important role in them developing an attitude of civic responsibility. This particular response did not feature in the explanations of the students from the MA case study schools. The impact of school personnel on students' sense of civic responsibility can be seen in the following:

The religion teacher, he does a lot of for the school. He does, like, a lot of services or a lot of things for the school that brings us together a lot of classes – like First or Fifth Year – he really puts the school together. (ROI-Trad-S1)

While some of the ROI and MA interviewees indicated how the microsystem of second-level school had help to develop a civically responsible attitude in their lives, others described aspects of second-level schools that had negatively impacted their development in this area.

In MA the most influential negative aspects on students' civic responsibility development were negative personal experiences of school (5/10) and a lack of connection to the school community (MA 3/10). At the heart of both these responses is a disconnection with the school community. This inhibits the growth of a civically responsible attitude and creates a negative sense of reciprocity. Examples of these experiences include:

They [the school] are adding cameras and a lot of other stuff and it is just like, yeah we need cameras in the school but we have books that have twenty-five missing pages and it is like you are wasting money on cameras when we could actually get the books. (MA-Trad-S3)

I feel like they [the school] have left out the students a lot, this is not the first year this has happened. Last year it happened too, they made decisions without consulting us, that is not communication at all. And it is harder because we are the ones sitting in classroom you know, we are dealing with the academics and everything else. Whether we like it or not we have to go to school so I don't feel like they communicate with us enough to make us feel comfortable or involved or anything. (MA-Trad-S2)

Another negative influence on civic responsibility development noted by MA interviewees is feeling personally overstretched (3/10). This prohibited them from giving back to the school community in a civically responsible way. This attitude is witnessed in several comments:

I just choose not to [get involved in school] because I am so busy with PE after school it is hard for me to sign up for many things. (MA-Alt-II-S3)

I didn't get involved with anything here because I am so busy outside of school. (MA-Alt-II-S5)

In ROI the student interviewees' chief negative influences on their civic development from the microsystem of second-level school was the presence of a divided school community (4/10) and the disproportionate influence of academics (3/10). These responses were different than the ones seen from the MA interviewees, though some overlaps are evident. The divide in the school community is evident in the following comments:

People rarely, some people, not everyone talks, like even in my class there is only 30 of us and I only talk to a couple of them, not all students talk to each other. (ROI-Trad-S2)

I would say no 'cos there are some people here, as I said before, you know, if there's racist comments around that school, you don't really have a good community. (ROI-Trad-S5)

The second negative influence on ROI students' civic responsibility development was the "disproportionate influence of academics". Their responses in this category make it clear that the students from ROI believe that school should have a broader focus than simply the transmission of academic knowledge. The feeling from some of the interviewees suggests that the heavy focus on academics affects their own personal experience of the school, which again

influences their sense of civic responsibility. These sentiments are expressed in the comments below:

I did not want to do too many stuff because I would kind of lose my focus on the exams. (ROI-Trad-S4)

I've wanted to look in clubs and volunteering places but I haven't gotten a chance, because I can't do anything else 'cos I'm still studying for my exams. (ROI-Trad-S3)

In conclusion, the findings of the study have shown that participants are largely split between those that see themselves as being civically responsible, those that are apathetic to it and those that believe they do not have any responsibility to other people. Interestingly this split is mirrored in both the 2011 and 2013 surveys in both contexts, but the ROI case study participants do show a more significant rise in those that see themselves as being civically responsible. Following on from this Subsection 6.4.2 presented the investigation into the aspects of their second-level school that had a positive and negative impact on their attitude with regard to civic responsibility. Interestingly both cohorts of student interviewees point to similar characteristics of second-level school that either hinder or engender an attitude of civically responsible attitude. At the heart of the responses of both sets of interviewees was the quality of the interaction between the school and the student. In cases where students had positive personal experiences this helped to create an attitude of civic responsibility, while those that had negative experiences detailed feeling less civically responsible.

6.5. Conclusion

Chapter 6 offers an in-depth presentation of the findings of the two-year case study. The case study was conducted in two contexts – MA and ROI. In each of the contexts three schools participated in the case study. A cohort of students entering the school/course was selected and worked with over the two-year period. The entire cohort of students was surveyed twice, at the beginning of the case study and at its conclusion. Concurrently, a selected number of students from the same cohort were interviewed three times during the case study. In all the contexts the surveys were used to give a wider representation of the thoughts and opinions of the case study participants, while the interviews provided the opportunity to delve deeper into the aspects of the microsystem of second-level schools that impact the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of the students.

The case study instruments have worked in tandem to provide an insight into the thoughts and feelings of students from disadvantaged communities in both MA and ROI around the ability of second-level schools to impact their academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development. The findings in Chapter 6 show that with the vast majority of issues, there exists a significant amount of confluence between both contexts. The results from both contexts and in each of the three areas (academics, civic responsibility and self-esteem) have a similar thread running throughout them all: the importance of relationships. In Section 6.2 the aspects that were identified as having the biggest positive and negative impact on the academic development was that of the student/teacher relationship and the general atmosphere of the school. In Section 6.3 the aspect of schools most identified as influencing self-esteem was the atmosphere of the school and the successes and failures of the students. Finally in Section 6.4 the students' civic responsibility development was connected most strongly with the experiences that the students had with the school. The more positive these experiences, the higher the level of civic responsibility development. These findings point to the emphasis and importance schools must attach to the multi-faceted relationships that they have with students. In the next chapter, Chapter 7, these findings will be further considered in light of the literature.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1. Introduction

The structure of this Discussion Chapter will be directed by the research question (See Chapter 1) and configuration of the Findings Chapter. Section 7.2 will present the implications of the Conceptual Framework upon the findings. The school-based elements that have been found through the literature and the primary research study to enhance academic achievement will be described in Section 7.3. Key among these components is affective skills, high expectation levels, effective teaching strategies and an encouraging school culture. School-based elements that develop student self-esteem will be dealt with in Section 7.4, with a particular emphasis on the offering of new experiences, a supportive atmosphere and achieving success in schools. Finally the school-based elements that develop a sense of civic responsibility, such as the role of positive personal experiences, school role models and volunteering initiatives will be highlighted in Section 7.5.

7.2. Impact of the Conceptual Framework on the Findings Chapter

As described in Chapter 3 the lens through which the development of second-level students in the contexts of ROI and MA is viewed is through Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bioecological Theory of Human Development. This Theory is described extensively in Chapter 3 but in summary, it explicates that there is a range of factors impacting human development, with the four major elements being Process, Person, Context and Time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

When reflecting on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) work it is clear that a range of varied and overlapping influences are at play when considering human development. Chapter 3 sets out the nested contexts that have an influence on second-level students in ROI and MA. Even at a contextual level the range of local, national and international factors are extremely varied and make a complicated cocktail of influences upon how students develop. Conscious of the range of influences on human development, the goal of this project is to investigate student perspective on what aspects of second-level schools can influence student development in the areas of academics, self-esteem and civic responsibility. It is important that the expectations of second-level schools to impact human development are always tempered with the reality that they are only one of a myriad of influences upon a second-level student in ROI and MA.

7.3. School-Based Elements that Enhance Academic Development

Conscious of the multitude of influences upon development, an important component of this research study is to investigate the school-based elements that could potentially have an impact on academic achievement in second-level schools characterised by socioeconomic and educational disadvantage. The characteristics of teachers that impact academic development are dealt with in Subsection 7.3.1 with an emphasis on their affective skills, high expectation levels and effective teaching strategies. The role that whole-school characteristics can play in improving achievement, through the creation of a welcoming, supportive atmosphere, a shared vision amongst the school community and a clear reward and discipline policy, is found in Subsection 7.3.2.

7.3.1. Role and Characteristics of Teachers Impacting Academic Development

One of the key findings emerging from the data outlined in Section 6.2 is that students view teachers as having a major impact on their academic development. Differing evidence from both contexts underscores this point. ROI students reported that their student/teacher relationships were enhanced over the two-year period, and this was matched with a rise in their overall experience of education. Simultaneously, MA students experienced a parallel decline in their overall experience of education, which was matched almost identically by a reported decline in the student/teacher relationship. While direct causation cannot be established here, what can be surmised is that teachers play a central role in a student's experience of education, which in turn can have a potential impact on the academic development of students. This is also confirmed in the literature as throughout EER research the important role of the teacher in academic development has been emphasised (Brookover et al. 1978, 1979; Rutter et. al, 1979; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993).

Findings from the primary research highlight specifically what students deem to be key characteristics of effective teachers. Chief among these are affective skills named by the participants as being open, non-judgmental and supportive. It is clear from the data that these could have a substantial effect on the students' experience of education, which academic development is a key component. For example, over the two-year period of the case study, the MA students exhibit declines in the student perception of the level of how much teachers' care, whether or not they treat students fairly and whether or not they are approachable with an

academic problem. At the same time these students experienced a parallel decline in their overall experience of education, as discussed above. On the opposite end of the spectrum, over the two-year case study period students from ROI were more positive about their experience of school and, at the same time, showed increases in their belief in how much their teachers care about them, whether or not they were treated fairly and the perception of teachers' willingness to help with problems. This trend again suggests that the perception of teacher's affective skills may have an impact on the students' perceived experience of education, and so on their academic development.

This emphasis on the importance of the affective skills of teachers is also dealt with in the literature, for example by Reynolds et al (2014), who describe the importance of building a quality relationship between the teacher and student. Sammons et al (1995) further emphasise the importance of the classroom environment and the need for a focus on respect and the development of a democratic classroom culture. Mortimore et al. (1988) also agree on the importance of the affective skills of teachers and they describe a link between teacher communication and achievement levels.

Looking specifically at schools designated as disadvantaged, Smyth et. al. (2006) recognise the importance of teachers being willing to offer encouragement and praise. Smyth et. al. (2011) together with others (Hallinan, 2008; Gorard & See, 2010) also details the importance of the use of positive reinforcement to communicate respect and care to students. Again these authors find that these values are routinely named as characteristics of good teachers. It is arguable, in fact, that exhibiting affective teaching skills is even more crucial in areas of educational disadvantage, where, because of the persistent gap in levels of achievement, every possible avenue to foster a positive attitude towards the school environment should be pursued. Additionally the affective skills of teachers could also help bridge the social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) divide that might exist between the structure of the system and the students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A second characteristic of teachers that the participating students in both contexts link with their academic development is that of a high expectation level of their students. The MA students described the need for teachers to be "hard-working" and have "high standards". When analysing the MA students' responses further, the importance of having teachers with a high expectation level is evident when considering the negative characteristics identified by the

students. In this category, “lack of effort” is presented as a major character flaw. Similar results are found among data from the ROI student interviewees as the importance of hard-working teachers and the negative characteristic of a lack of effort is mentioned. These results may suggest that the students in both contexts see a connection between the effort and expectation level of their teacher and ultimately their own academic development. The implication of high expectations upon student academic development is also evident in the literature. For example, within Section 4.2 Drudy and Lynch (1993) and Bourdieu (1986) describe one of the root causes of educational disadvantage as a mismatch between the social capitals of different socio-economic classes. It potentially could be claimed that the imposition of genuine, high expectations for students could help counter the structural inequalities in the system. This connection is also further made in the literature as Tizard et al. (1988) identifies that higher expectation levels are often matched with more challenging lessons, homework and other required work. Smyth et al (2006) agree as they found that in ROI that teacher expectation level of their students matched the amount and difficult of homework. The link between more effective teaching strategies and high expectations is further seen in Mortimore et al. (1988), where those teachers with the highest expectation levels were those who also utilised higher-order questioning and were more apt to offer encouragement to students. The work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in their classic study showed the power of high expectations, through their discovery of the “Positive Expectancy Effect”.

Students in both contexts identify effective teaching strategies as a third positive teacher characteristic, and describe the use of group work, creative activities and the ability of teachers to make complicated topics more understandable through connections to their own experience. This, they explain, impacts their academic development. Similar points are made in the literature as the NREL (1990) advocates the use of creative, intelligent lesson activities, such as presentation skills, questioning techniques, the assignment of homework and cooperative learning as best practice. Rosenshine (1987) also describes the importance of active and engaging student-centred activities. Other connections between the study’s suggestions for effective teaching strategies and the literature is the congruent importance attached to the ability of the teacher to adapt material to fit the context and learning needs of their students (Sammons et al., 1995). This individualised approach to learning attaches a subject to a platform that students can more easily access, and allows them to scaffold their learning based on this. When looking specifically at students from disadvantaged communities in ROI, the importance of active learning approaches were particularly emphasised by Smyth et. al. (2011). Again it is

arguable that in areas characterised by educational disadvantage, where families are traditionally less likely to have high educational attainment, the ability of teachers to make meaningful and accessible links to academic material is paramount (Connell, 1992).

This study was constructed as an exercise in comparative research. The aim was to look at what the two contexts under discussion (ROI and MA) could learn from each other in terms of the role of second-level schools in impacting the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development of students. With regard to academic development, what the study has found it that while there are many similarities between the ROI and MA interviewees in terms of factors that impact their academic development, divergent opinions do exist. For example, ROI interviewees state that they desire a “relaxed approach” from teachers, while this response did not feature at all in the MA student interviews. Similarly only one of the sixteen ROI interviews mentioned the importance of teachers having high standards, while the majority of MA interviewees offered this response. The desire for the ROI interviewees for a more relaxed and *laisse faire* classroom environment finds some connection in the literature as Smyth et al (2006, 2011) describe in their research how ROI students from disadvantaged backgrounds wanted teachers who liked their job and had a sense of humor. Additional explanations for the differences of opinion between the ROI and MA case study participants could be connected to deep-seated cultural morays, but it is also important to consider the impact of the type of schools involved in the study. Subsection 5.4.5 describes in detail the process used to select the participating case study schools and points out that due to a lack of first-chance, alternative second-level schools in ROI that two, second-chance educational settings were chosen as part of the study. As many of these students had encountered difficulties in the traditional education sector, especially around the rules and structure of the system, it is not surprising that a “relaxed approach” featured prominently in the ROI responses. This may also help to explain why the ROI student interviewees do not see teachers as having ‘high standards’ being important, as many of the students may have had negative experiences with the results-focused environment in the traditional second-level school.

The analysis from the findings of the primary research indicates the complexity of what students feel impacts their academic achievement. What the findings reveal, then, in summary, is that the students from ROI and MA who took part in this research confirm what the authors such as Brookover et al. (1978, 1979), Rutter et al. (1979) and Teddlie and Stringfield (1993) propose: Teachers have a significant role in the academic development of students. What this research

adds to the existing field of Educational Effectiveness Research (EER) is the voice of these research participants, who suggest that their ideal teacher is someone who is hard-working, uses innovative teaching strategies, challenges students to reach their full potential, but is also caring, supportive and trustworthy. What is also apparent from this data is what the students are not looking for from their teachers. They do not see the role of a teacher as a person who solely transfers knowledge. Concurrently, the students do not indicate a desire for a teacher to play a friendship role. What is evident is that they want someone to challenge them academically and to have high standards. The ability to balance both demands is described by the students as the key to good teaching and helping students to develop academically.

In the next Subsection the focus will shift away from the teacher to look at the impact of a wider set of school-based characteristics that have been identified as having an impact on the academic development of students.

7.3.2. Characteristics of Second-Level Schools Impacting Student Academic Development

While both the literature and this study highlight the role of the teacher in promoting student academic development, there is also significant importance attached to other aspects of second-level schools, such as the overall atmosphere/environment, class sizes, new experiences.

The case study participants from both contexts note that a supportive atmosphere throughout the school community is significant for their academic development. The importance the students attach to encountering a close-knit school community may have some connection to the findings on student self-esteem in Subsection 6.3.1 and the developmental stage of the case study participants. Whatever the origin, the student interviewees from both contexts believe a supportive environment is the bedrock of their academic development. The importance of a welcoming, family atmosphere and its impact on student academic development also finds much resonance in the literature. For example, Bandura (1992) discusses how a supportive atmosphere raises self-esteem and then in turn influences academic development. Smyth et al. (2011) agree that a school environment described as being caring and supportive is highly predictive of engagement in learning, school completion and performance. Mortimore et al. (1988) also put forward a link between praise, student self-esteem and academic development. Lubienski and Weitzel (2010) also describe how the proponents of the MA Charter School movement in disadvantage communities describe one of the benefits of Charter schools being

their ability to have a clear, unique focus that enhances the atmosphere of the school, which they attribute to playing a role in improving academic results.

Another characteristic of second-level schools that the student interviewees from both contexts deem to be important for their academic development was that of small class sizes. Conversely, when asked to identify negative characteristics of the school that hindered academic development, both sets of student interviewees identified large class sizes as an issue. This finding is interesting considering the mixed national and international data on the impact of class sizes upon academic achievement (Pedder, 2006). In analysing the responses of the student interviewees from both ROI and MA the benefit of small class sizes for them is an improvement in the classroom atmosphere. For example, the ROI students speak about teachers being more relaxed, having more time for students and being more aware of where the students are academically. The MA students concur and discuss the benefit of small class sizes as being the ability of the teacher to get to know the students. So while the students from both contexts do not equate smaller class sizes with more innovate lesson plans or necessarily better results, they do see a connection between smaller class sizes and the creation of the supportive, atmosphere that they have linked to their academic development. This particular viewpoint on class sizes finds some connection in the literature as Gilstrap (2002), Blatchford et al. (2003) and Pedder (2006) also describe that small class sizes have been found to have an impact on the student/teacher relationship and improve the teacher's knowledge of the academic needs of their students. It is arguable, therefore, that smaller class sizes could allow teachers respond more to students' needs, both academic and personal. The practice of such affective skills was noted, by the research participants who took part in this study, to be of paramount importance to their academic development. Interestingly, while the DEIS scheme in ROI provides a higher staff allocation (and therefore a lower pupil/teacher ratio) for primary school schools, no such provision is made for post-primary schools. Staffing policies in MA also do not allow for lower pupil/teacher ratios in schools designated as disadvantaged.

A further characteristic identified by the student interviewees in both contexts is the importance of new experiences upon their academic development. The students in both contexts describe new experiences as related to both school and extracurricular activities, such as work experience and connection to third-level college. What is clear from the student comments is that these "new experiences" provide the students with opportunities to see real world applications of what they are learning in school. This gives a relevance to subject material,

which the students attribute to enhancing their academic development. Silver and Harris (2009) agree with the student interviewees and describe how outside the classroom experiences, when well structured, can result in students making connections with classroom material that in the end influences academic results. Levinson (2005) also supports this and describes that the connection between the classroom and outside activities can have a powerful impact on results. The recognition of the need for extra funding to create these new experiences can be found in both contexts (ROI and MA). For example the *ESS Act* in MA give schools with a high percentage of low-income students the opportunity to access funding for the creation of initiatives that can improve achievement (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015e). Additional to the *ESS Act*, MA schools in disadvantaged communities can apply for an “Expanded Learning Time” grant that provides funding for enrichment activities for students outside of school hours (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). In ROI programmes connected to the *DEIS* initiative, like the *School Completion Programme*, give schools the opportunities to offer the new experiences that can have an impact on their academic development.

A fourth school characteristic identified by the student interviewees as being important for their academic development of students is a disciplined learning environment. Work by Weber (1971), Coleman et al. (1982) and Brookover et al. (1979) all describe the link between high achieving schools and an orderly environment. Many studies suggest that the best way to develop this orderly atmosphere is through a clear discipline strategy. Purkey and Smith (1983) suggest that the most effective schools have discipline policies that are driven by rewards and incentives as opposed to punishments. Data from MA students is very much at home in this kind of literature.

Despite some similarities from their ROI counterparts, the MA student interviewees show a slight divergence on this matter. Again one of the aims of this study is to look at what the two contexts under discussion could learn from each other in terms of the role of second-level schools in impacting the academic development of students. What the findings reveal is that while in both contexts there is a call for fairness, the MA students are more vociferous about the need for both a clear discipline and reward policy. For the ROI students there is a call for a relaxed approach, with less rules and more flexibility. Again the divergent focus of the student cohorts may show a cultural difference between the two contexts. The MA students could be fitting into the stereotypical American attitude of hard work and discipline equaling success,

while alternatively, the more relaxed social norms of Irish society could be impacting the response of the ROI interviewees. Additionally the impact of the *NCLB* legislation could be at play, as the students would be well aware of the impact of the MCAS exams both personally and at a school level (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015c). Moreover, it is once again important to consider the impact of the ROI interviewees from the second-chance educational environments. These ROI students' previous negative experiences of second-level education could be colouring the influence they attach to different aspects of second-level school and help explain their overwhelming focus on a positive and supportive environment.

In the literature, Scheerens and Blomeke (2016) detail the importance of a positive ethos, disciplinary rules, class size and the student/teacher relationship. What is most apparent from the findings of this study was that the surveyed and interviewed students in both contexts attached a significant amount of importance to the learning environment. It was clear from the students' responses that they believe that their academic development will be enhanced if they have a good relationship with their teacher and that the school has a welcoming atmosphere. Another common finding is that students in both contexts want schools to set high standards and have high expectations for them. The ROI and MA students described how the expectations of the teachers and the school for the students had a direct impact on their motivation and belief that they could achieve academically. Interestingly participants from both contexts presented these findings as a base from which effective teaching techniques, small class sizes and other such elements could have an additional positive impact upon their academic development.

7.3.3. Conclusion

Section 7.3 has conducted a discussion on the literature and this study, around the issue of the aspects of second-level school impacting student academic development. What arises from this discussion is how the relational aspect of education is paramount. Both the literature and study describe relational elements like a positive student/teacher relationship and general atmosphere within the school as the bedrock for further actions like effective teaching strategies, small classes size and effective policies to have their desired impact. In the next section the discussion will move onto aspects of second-level schools that develop student self-esteem, where relationships is also considered to be important.

7.4. Aspects of Second-level Education Developing Student Self-Esteem

When synthesizing the findings of this study in relation to the role of second-level schools in urban disadvantaged communities to impact the development of student self-esteem, some key points of focus emerge. A key point of consensus between both cohorts of student interviewees is the importance of both success and support in the creation of a high level of student self-esteem.

When considering the origin of a supportive atmosphere the student interviewees in both contexts (ROI and MA) describe the role of the teacher as paramount. The key characteristics of teachers described by the ROI and MA interviewees that helped to create a supportive atmosphere include teachers being motivational and lending practical support through a personal or academic issue. Other sources of self-esteem development attributed to the teachers from the student interviewees include the transmission of respect in their interactions. McGee and Fraser (2008) and Cushman and Cowan (2010) support the essential role of teachers in creating a supportive classroom environment. Agreement between the literature and study can further be seen in the creation of a democratic classroom climate (Hahn, 1998; Lenzi et al., 2014). The creation of a school climate guided by democratic values has been shown to have an impact on civic engagement and on self-esteem (Lenzi et al., 2014). Sammons et al. (1995) suggest an extension of the democratic classroom, as they advocate that the key to building up student self-esteem is the transmission of respect and the need to treat each student as an individual. Mortimore et al. (1988) agree and focus on the communication of respect as essential to raising esteem levels.

The recognition of the essential role of the teacher in the development of student self-esteem in disadvantaged communities can be seen in the policies of both the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the ROI Department of Education and Skills. The implementation of the “Collaborative States Initiative” in MA, sees a focus on providing teachers in disadvantaged communities with professional development around enhancing self-esteem, the implementation and creation of a school-wide plan and the focus on a cross-curricular approach to self-esteem. Further support given to teachers and schools in MA can be seen in the work of the Centre for Disease Control that offers schools help in developing and rolling out programmes that support positive self-esteem growth (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). Additionally teachers are helped to create a

respectful and supportive classroom atmosphere through grants like the “Expanded Learning Time” grant, which is targeted at schools in disadvantaged communities and prioritises funding for school culture enhancement through positive behaviour incentives (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). In ROI there exists a curriculum (SPHE) that deals with self-esteem issues and there is training and support provided to schools that are connected to the DEIS initiative in ROI around school and class plans with regard to self-esteem issues. Further DES support has come in the form of well-being guidelines that help schools develop a multi-level plan approach to developing self-esteem (Department of Education and Skills, 2013)

It is important to note though that despite the efforts of MA and ROI to enhance student self-esteem the findings and Subsections 2.2.4 and 2.3.4 of this study shows that a persistent low level of self-esteem among second-level student still exists. Schools therefore need to continue to find ways to impact students’ self-esteem development. Once again, however, using the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner’s Theory of Bioecological Development, it is accepted that there are many and varied influences on students’ self-esteem development.

Beyond the role of the teacher, the ROI and MA case study participants also identified the overall atmosphere of the school as having an influence on their self-esteem development. The students from ROI and MA describe that an important component of the creation of a positive school atmosphere is influenced by the non-teaching staff in the school, like counselors, who can provide a listening ear and a point of advice. Amongst the MA interviewees this may point to the influence of the “Massachusetts Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals” which is an initiative that targets at-risk families from disadvantaged communities and engages them in activities that builds relationships between the school and families (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). Bryk et al. (2010) advocate the building of strong relationships between the students and wider school staff. Levine and Lezotte (1990) concur and describe the special role that the non-teaching staff has in developing the atmosphere of the school setting.

An additional influence upon an individual’s self-esteem, as explained by James (1892) and Coopersmith (1981), is the amount of success that they encounter. In practice this means that the more success an individual has, the more likely that a person will have high self-esteem.

For James (1892) and Coopersmith (1981) if an individual's successes were equal or greater than their aspirations than it would have a positive affect upon their self-esteem. On the opposite end of the spectrum it would mean that if a person fell short of their aspirations than it would have a negative impact on self-esteem.

With a large volume of literature supporting the influence of success upon self-esteem, it is not surprising that this study indicates some similar results. What arise from the findings in both contexts are the multiple platforms in second-level school that students have the opportunity to experience success. Both the interviewees from MA and ROI described academics, extracurricular activities and links with outside institution as key areas where they can experience success. The student interviewees from both contexts describe that they deemed success in the academic aspects of school as paramount, which is legitimate considering the focus of second-level education. Of particular interest, however, was the impact attributed to finding success in some of the opportunities that could be offered outside of the regular classroom environment.

For example, interviewees in all of the case study schools indicated that finding success in work experience would impact their self-esteem. Subsection 6.3.2 details the positive impact upon their self-esteem arising from a successful work experience. At the heart of these positive comments is the ability of the work experience to open up a new world to the students. Most of the students who were interviewed did not have employment experience and would come from families that were familiar with unemployment and/or low-paid employment. The benefit of work experience for these students is that it proves to them that they can be successful in areas that might be non-traditional to their family. Additionally they are able to see how the skills that they are learning in their work experience are transferable to other activities that they will be involved in for the rest of their lives. The implications, then, for schools designated as disadvantaged, is that these opportunities ought to be a key part of the educational experience that they offer. A second implication for schools is that students be supported in accessing meaningful work experience placements. For some students, their own social circle or that of their parents limits access to employment. Schools may be required to help students to supported work experiences placements, where they can be mentored and be provided with opportunities to succeed.

Another opportunity offered by each of the case study sites that students indicate having a positive impact on their self-esteem was that of dedicated link with third-level institutions. Similar to the benefit displayed by the work experience programme, the links with the third-level institutions help make an unfamiliar environment more familiar. The research from Lawrence (2006) and Coopersmith (1981) describes the benefit of connections with third-level institutions or work experience sites as being an opportunity for students to “practice” being in college. This interaction is vital for students from disadvantaged backgrounds because the third-level landscape is traditionally less familiar. Without a prior knowledge or family history of accessing third-level education it can be difficult to have the self-esteem to tackle such a domain. The work of second-level schools, particularly those designated as disadvantaged, in introducing students to third-level institutions can go a long way towards breaking down particular barriers and raising self-esteem in regard to third-level education.

A third opportunity described by the students in both contexts is that of taking on leadership roles in their schools, whether through student councils, mentoring, tutoring or other avenues. The impact of leadership opportunities on the students is very much akin to the benefits of work experience programmes and the development of dedicated links with third-level institutions. Second-level educational institutions can provide students from disadvantaged communities with a link to worlds they might not be generally familiar with or possess the social capital to navigate successfully. Through the supportive environment of second-level education, students can access work experience, college experience and leadership opportunities that will make them better able to succeed and become more familiar with areas that they would not have necessarily envisioned themselves in.

The potential benefit of “new experiences” is also seen within the broader self-esteem literature. Coopersmith (1981) focuses on the impact of success on self-esteem, which highlights the influence that finding success in new experiences, will undoubtedly have upon an individuals’ self-esteem. In order to ensure success in these “new experiences” the importance of practice is essential as the more time someone is exposed to an environment or actions the more confident they will feel. The findings showcase that second-level schools can provide that “training environment” that can help engender success when transitioning to a “new experience” and the areas seen as most relevant to a second-level educational institution are links with third-level institutions, businesses or offering leadership opportunities within the school.

In the next section, the discussion will move to a focus on the school-based elements that develop student civic responsibility.

7.5. Aspects of Second-Level Education Developing Student Civic Responsibility

Overall the survey data in both contexts presents a mixed view of the level of civic responsibility of students, with three distinct cohorts emerging: those who declare themselves civically responsible; those that are apathetic; and those that do not see themselves as civically responsible. Some of the data also appears to be contradictory. For example, in 2013, 71% of MA survey respondents said they would go out of their way to help others. However, only 50% viewed volunteering as important. Furthermore, while 51% said their community was important to them, and 40% do not feel they are involved in the community.

Much congruence is evident with the results from the ROI data in that the surveyed cohort is divided between those that are civically active, those that are not and those are negative towards it. Despite the divided results, however, it is clear that the ROI students show a larger growth in civic responsibility than their MA counterparts. For example, over the two-year case study, the number of students who said that they have a responsibility to look after the people in their community grew by 18% in ROI. The importance these students attach to volunteering in the community also grew by 10%. This growth in a civically responsible attitude by the ROI case study participants could potentially be at least somewhat attributed to the curricular approach in ROI with regard to civics. Unlike MA, ROI students take a class called CSPE, which focuses on issues related to civic responsibility. In MA there is a more subtle approach, where the civics curriculum is woven throughout the history and geography curriculum. Overall, though the case study participants in both contexts display a divided outlook on their civic responsibility and this needs to be addressed further in both contexts.

When considering the data gleaned from the interviews, one of the clear findings arising out of this study from both contexts is that having positive personal experiences engenders a civically responsible attitude that is grounded in feelings of reciprocity. The construction of this belief matches both the development stage of the adolescents involved in the study and potentially a wider societal attitude in both contexts. In both explanations a level of “selfishness” exists where an individual exhibits kindness only if they receive it first. The

prominence of this belief amongst the student interviewees may also be linked to the experiences of the communities that these students have grown up in.

In both contexts the students live in communities where anti-social behaviour, violence, crime, addiction and many more social ills are prevalent. Having encountered these negative experiences, it may have understandably engendered a belief that those that hurt you should not be helped. Additionally the students may have also learned that “minding one’s own business” is a key skill, as helping those in need may put you and your family at risk. In the literature Altman and Low (1992) describe a positive version of this attitude in their discussion of the theory of “place attachment”. This theory explicates that an emotional bond develops with a community after numerous positive, personal experiences. Flanagan et al. (2007) agree and describes how higher reported levels of “place attachment” are linked with a more civically responsible attitude. Jencks and Mayer (1990) also describe this process as “collective socialisation”, where the atmosphere in a particular community can act as an agent of empowerment or disempowerment. Additionally, Watts et al. (2013) describe how the closer an individual feels to the community the more civically responsible they will be. This findings has implications for school communities, perhaps particularly in disadvantaged areas, as it is arguable that they have a role in linking the school and local community. As detailed in Chapter 2.3.5, those schools in ROI designated as disadvantaged have teachers designated as ‘Home/School/Community Liaison Teachers’. Part of their role is to involve the school in the life of the community and to involve the community and its agencies in the life of the school. In MA the “Massachusetts Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals” offers a similar set of activities to build the relationship between the school and family (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016f). It is arguable that such an initiatives are an important part of the policy landscape for schools that could enhance levels of civic responsibility amongst post-primary students.

A second observation from the findings is the important role that students ascribe to volunteer opportunities in the creation of civic responsibility. What is of particular interest is the many aspects of development that the students credit volunteering with influencing, such as an increase in self-esteem, enhancing skills and developing empathy. The multi-faceted benefits of volunteering are also highlighted in the literature. For example, participation in volunteer initiatives has been found to increase self-esteem through the attainment of new experiences and impact career development through the opportunity for young people to discern their career

choices further (Kanter & Schneider, 2013; Lenzi et al., 2014). Additionally, both the literature and primary research detail the impact that sustained volunteer initiatives can have on student participants and the wider community. Again the major beneficiaries of these initiatives are the students themselves, as the volunteer opportunities connect them to new ideas and ways of life, and put them in contact with people that are often very different from them (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Kanter & Schneider, 2013; Hardy et al., 2010). Despite the literature and case study participants' acceptance of the benefits of volunteering, Subsections 2.2.5 and 2.3.5 detail how in both MA and ROI the need for more structured volunteer experiences is apparent. In MA take up of service-learning initiatives depends very much on the school, while in the ROI context there are no formal avenues for the students to include volunteering as part of their school experience. Improving the access to volunteering should be expanded in both the ROI and MA contexts.

Another observation from the findings with regard to the development of civic responsibility is the importance also attached to relationships, which is a consistent feature across the three areas of development dealt with in this study. The key influence that the ROI student interviewees ascribe to positive role models is found in Subsection 6.4.2. The impact of role models in school like coaches, teachers and others finds resonance in the literature in Bandura's (1986) "Theory of Observational Learning", which posits that much of one's behaviour is tied to the observation of the significant others in one's life. Additionally, the literature also points to a number of influences in the development of a civically responsible attitude. Amna (2012) describes several studies that demonstrate that one's parents have the most impact on whether or not a person becomes civically engaged. McIntosh, Hart and Youniss (2007) concur and point to studies that show that the likelihood of a person voting is directly connected to whether or not their parents do. Again, it is arguable that students living in areas characterised by socio-economic disadvantaged are exposed to higher levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and illegal activity. It is therefore of even greater importance that schools are able to provide the role models that Bandura (1986) references. Again working through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory, the influence of school in this regard is arguably limited, but it nonetheless significant. It may also be significant that the context (ROI) that over the two-year case study saw the higher level of growth in civic responsibility was also the context with the more positive student/teacher relationships.

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, an in-depth look at the relationship between the findings (Chapter 6) and literature (Chapters 1 to 4) was presented. In Section 7.2. the impact of the Conceptual Framework upon the Findings was elucidated. This Section highlighted Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bioecological Theory of Human Development and how it describes the multiple aspects that impact human development. This is important to note as the remainder of the Discussion Chapter presented school-based initiatives that could impact the academic, self-confidence and self-esteem development of second-level students in ROI and MA. So while the research and literature supports the ability of second-level school in ROI and MA to impact the development of students in three designated areas, it is important that in light of Bronfenbrenner's theory that school is only one of a multitude of influences upon an individual's development.

After outlining the Conceptual Framework's implications on the findings, the school-based elements that can enhance academic achievement through a confluence of the literature and the findings were dealt with in Section 7.3. The areas highlighted as having an influence on academic achievement were several characteristics of teachers and the overall atmosphere of the school. In Section 7.4 there was discussion on the school-based elements that develop self-esteem. Again the relationship between the literature and findings was presented with an emphasis on a supportive school atmosphere, achieving success in school and the importance of offering new student experiences. Finally, in Section 7.5, the focus shifted to look at the school-based elements that develop student civic responsibility. In this section the literature and findings were considered with regard to positive personal experiences at school, school as a role model and the development of volunteer initiatives. Overall, the key thread running through the literature and findings is the importance of relationships. The student interviewees' place a premium on feeling supported, cared for and respected which in turn they connect with enhancing their academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development.

8. SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Thesis Summary

This study is a contribution to the field of Educational Effectiveness Research (EER). Its uniqueness lays in the use of an international comparative approach and student perspective to investigate the aspects of second-level schools to impact the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility of students in ROI and MA. Considering this comparative and qualitative approach to EER research, the research question is expressed as:

From the perspective of the student, what aspects of the microsystem of second-level school can enhance the academic, civic responsibility and self-esteem development in urban areas, characterised by educational and socio-economic disadvantage?

Recognising the multi-faceted nature of human development, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bioecological Theory of Human Development is used as the Conceptual Framework to guide the construction, application and analysis of the dissertation. Based on the formulation of the research question, the structure of the literature and primary research became evident.

The focus of the study's literature review was framed by the research question. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the structure of the second-level education system in each of the contexts. Additionally, it offers a discussion on current policy in each of the contexts around the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of students from urban, disadvantaged communities. Chapter 3 then outlines the conceptual framework for this study, through explaining the Bioecological Theory of Human Development. Finally, Chapter 4 provides a discussion of EER literature and the aspects of second-level schools found to impact the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of student.

In relation to the primary research study, the researcher wanted to work with students to find out what parts of their educational experience they believe are having a positive impact upon their development in the areas of academics, self-esteem and civic responsibility. In order to gather a wide sample of thoughts and opinions on how schools can best approach improving achievement it was decided that differing school models and contexts would be essential. The rationale for the chosen contexts is more fully described in Subsection 5.4.4. and the choice of the case study sites was explained in Subsection 5.4.5. The research approach of the case study was explained in Section 5.4 and the methods to be used were dealt with in Section 5.6.

After the conclusion of the two-year longitudinal study the results were compiled and are the focus of Chapter 6. Within Chapter 6 the results are separated into three distinct categories: Academic Development, Development of Self-Esteem and Development of a Sense of Civic Responsibility. Following the presentation of the findings, Chapter 7 provides an in-depth discussion into the confluence of the findings and the literature. Finally, Chapter 8 functions as an opportunity to provide recommendations arising from the study, as well as to discuss its limitations and to offer suggestions for further research. These findings and recommendations are summarised below.

8.2 Major Findings

- An important finding is the congruence that exists in the student responses from both contexts (ROI and MA). While the study was purposefully configured to work with case study sites that were located in urban areas of educational disadvantage, the similarity in student responses was nonetheless surprising. In many ways this connects well with the thrust of EER, where components of effective schools are selected as being important tenets of schools in any context.

- **Academic Development**
 - There is a correlation in both contexts between the students' perspective on the student-teacher relationship and their overall school experience and their perspective on the quality of the education they receive.
 - The student interviewees from both contexts identify hard-working, supportive and effective teaching strategies as the most important teacher characteristics.
 - The student interviewees from both contexts view lack of effort and poor teaching strategies as the most negative qualities of teachers.
 - MA student interviewees indicated a welcoming and supportive atmosphere, high academic standards and a clear discipline and rewards policy as characteristics of a positive school environment.
 - ROI student interviewees recognise small class sizes, less rules and more flexibility, and a supportive learning community as characteristics of a positive school environment.

- **Development of Self-Esteem**
 - The majority of the MA and ROI survey participants show a positive level of self-confidence, but there is a sizeable minority that reports a low level of self-confidence.
 - The MA and ROI interviewees describe role models, achievement in school, a supportive school atmosphere, and engaging in new experience as some of the major positive influences on their self-esteem.
- **Development of a Sense of Civic Responsibility**
 - It was found that the largest percentage of MA and ROI survey participants display some attributes of civic responsibility, but there are significant minorities that are either apathetic or are actually hostile towards community in which they live.
 - The ROI interviewees display more civic responsibility than the MA interviewees.
 - For both the MA and ROI interviewees, reciprocity, positive personal experiences and a sense of service were the major positive influences that helped foster a sense of civic responsibility.

8.3 Recommendations

The findings indicate a number of recommendations for second-level schools in ROI and MA located in urban areas, characterised by socioeconomic and educational disadvantage that may enhance the academic, self-esteem and civic responsibility development of their students.

- A priority of second-level schools in urban disadvantaged areas should be to hire teachers that possess the characteristics of affective skills, high expectation levels and effective teaching strategies and to continue to cultivate these skills among their teaching staff. Throughout the study and literature the role of the teacher is presented as being paramount in creating the conditions necessary to enhance the development of students academically, civically and in their self-esteem.
- A second recommendation is for schools in disadvantaged communities to focus on providing new experiences and opportunities for students. The elements that this study identifies as being key are a weekly high-quality work experience, direct links with third-level institutions, a wide variety of extracurricular activities and comprehensive volunteer initiatives.

- A third recommendation for schools in disadvantaged communities is to focus on the creation of a transformative school culture. While the individual teacher has a significant influence on the culture of the school, it is clear that the development of an overall school culture that is positive, thoughtful, purposeful and intentional is an activity that is much larger than individual teaching staff at the school. Practically this means that all staff members, teaching and non-teaching, students, parents and the wider community need to be involved regularly in discussions and planning sessions that focus on the culture of the school. The leadership of the school needs to prioritise these conversations and to use them to crystallise a defined set of beliefs and values for the school. These beliefs and values then need to be constantly and consistently drawn upon in the construction of school policy and the decision-making process in relation to school priorities.

8.4. Study Limitations

Any long-term project like a Ph.D. dissertation will undoubtedly encounter unexpected roadblocks. This particular study was ambitious in both its design and the organisation needed to accomplish the research objectives. The fact that the study was to take place in two countries and in six different schools made it inevitable that difficulties would arise, and so flexibility would have to be built into the research design.

Above the demands of the primary research study it is important to note again the assertions that the range of influences upon human development are varied and multitudinous. Considering the various factors influencing human development it is apparent that schools are only one of a number of influences on students and no initiative that it offers can be presented as a panacea. It is important, therefore, that the writer continues to emphasise the reality that while school can assert some influence it is relatively small considering the range of factors in a student's life. Given this, one of the major limitations of the study is that while it explicates school-based measures to improve self-esteem, academic development and civic responsibility, the ability of these initiatives over the long-term to influence whole-scale change in student's lives is debatable due to the minimal influences schools can have.

Secondly, this dissertation has focused exclusively on the opinion of students. The potential in future studies to engage other stakeholders (parents, teachers and principals) around the issue

of school initiatives to impact student development may provide additional insights that would be valuable.

With above comments in mind, the following section will offer a reflection on the elements that the researcher would amend if the opportunity arose to conduct this particular research in the future, or if a similar study was to be attempted. The elements highlighted will be the expansion of the study to include more contexts, case study sites and participants. Additionally, there will be suggestions offered around the training of third-party interviewers and the engagement of gatekeepers.

8.4.1. Recommendations for Future Study

In evaluating the limitations of this study, several stand out. One of the most apparent limitations of this study is around the structure relating to the number of schools, students and the period of the study. The study as it was configured focused on six schools, three from MA and three from the ROI. In each of the MA schools the first-year student cohort was chosen, while in the ROI schools the cohort beginning their LC was selected. In each context (ROI and MA), two schools are alternative school models and the third is a traditional school model.

Upon reflection, it is now apparent that expanding the number of participating schools, students and international contexts would have added much to the study. It would have been beneficial to add more traditional school models to the sample size of both contexts, as this would have given more diversity to the responses gathered from this particular cohort. Additionally, there would seem to be a valid argument to add a set of schools from a third context like the United Kingdom, in particular Northern Ireland. The close proximity, cultural ties and other phenomenon would have been interesting to include in the debate about what school-based elements would help play a role in improving second-level achievement in disadvantaged areas. Finally, the number of student interviewees should arguably have been higher than six in each case study site. While the researcher did engage with the entire cohort of students on two occasions through a survey, the richest data arose from the in-depth interviews conducted with the six students from each case study site.

In addition to expanding the number of schools, students and contexts in which the case study took place, it would also have been beneficial for the study to work with a cohort of students over their entire second-level career. The primary research took place within the case study

sites for two years, but it would have been interesting to work with the ROI students for the six years of second level education and with the MA students for the four years of high school. This would have allowed the researcher the ability to chart their development more comprehensively. Having the ability to work with the cohort of students for the entirety of their high school career would have also created a clearer picture of the impact second-level education had on achievement in the realms of the personal, academic and civic responsibility.

A further reflection on how this particular study could have been improved is centred on the content of the student interviews. The student interviews conducted in both contexts unearthed a significant amount of insight into what second-level students believe has had a positive and negative impact on their achievement in the areas of academics, self-esteem and civic engagement. While the data gathered in the student interviews helped this study accomplish the research objectives, it is evident that additional areas could have been investigated further. One such area was the role and impact of the principal upon the student experience of education and improving achievement. The students participating in the case study only mentioned the principal on a handful of occasions, but there would be a benefit to conducting additional studies to delve further into this crucial position in the school community. Another area where more focused questioning could have taken place was around the topic of effective teaching strategies. While the students did identify aspects of practice from certain teachers, it would have been insightful to examine this further. Additionally, it would have been interesting to hear descriptions of what the students liked and disliked about certain classroom-based teaching and learning activities. The need for this line of questioning is particularly acute considering the focus the literature gives to the topic of effective teaching strategies.

A further potential area of investigation is the formational elements of student beliefs in regard to civic responsibility/engagement. The questions in the student interview schedule largely engage students on their opinion of their civic responsibility and the various ways in which they were or were not civically engaged. So while these answers provided an insight into their level of civic responsibility and the changes to it over the two years, there would now seem to be a further benefit in directly asking the students the question about the formational influences on their attainment or lack of civic responsibility. This point is also especially important singled out due to the special consideration given to it in the literature.

With regard to the student interviews, there was arguably a need to more adequately prepare research assistants and to choose the best candidates to fulfill the role. As explained in Subsection 5.4.5, the researcher opted to use an independent third party to conduct the student interviews, teacher interviews and invigilate the student surveys at one of the case study sites. The reason for this decision was because I was the principal of the case study site and it was felt that my role might impact the results. I met with the third-party interviewer and went through the outline of the study and the objectives of the particular research instrument. Segments of other interviews were played for her so that she could get a sense of the interviews conducted at the other case study sites. Despite this training, a few negative details arose in the quality of the work carried out by the third-party interviewer. For example, the interviewer ignored a set of question around the topic of student civic responsibility/engagement towards their school. This omission had an influence on the student responses and deprived the researcher of important data around the origin of student feelings of civic responsibility/engagement. Another identified inadequacy of the third-party interviewer was her lack of initiative in asking follow-up questions. Prior to the interviews the importance of responding with follow-up questions was stressed. In order to help the third-party interviewer, an extended interview schedule was constructed, but the researcher would still have liked to see a higher quality of secondary and tertiary questions. From this experience it is evident that a comprehensive training programme for research assistants needs to be enacted. With the ability of hindsight it is clear that the researcher should have had the third-party interviewer conduct a set of pilot interviews where feedback could have been given and many of the problems outlined above could have been avoided.

An additional learning from the primary research is the difficulty dealing with various gatekeepers. The process the researcher underwent to gain approval in each of the case study schools can be found in Section 5.4.5. Five out of the six schools agreed to participate after a meeting with the researcher and after all the relevant paperwork connected to the study had been provided. The traditional school in MA had a much more rigorous process and a centralised authority called the Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation, which handles all applications to conduct research in Boston Public Schools. In the end the process took several months to negotiate and various concessions needed to be made to satisfy the central authority⁵⁷. In conducting future research projects, the researcher would advise, based on his experience, that permission to conduct research be sought approximately one year in advance

⁵⁷ See Subsection 5.7.1

of the projected start date. The experience from this particular study highlights the importance of being organised and of initiating an early engagement with the relevant gatekeepers. It is clear that getting full permission to conduct research in educational institutions can take a significant amount of time and that needs to be built into the research design.

Lastly, a major learning from this particular project is the difficulty of working with vulnerable young adults over an extended period. Of the thirty-six interviewees that began the process, just twenty-eight remained in the study at its conclusion. Appendix 6 describes the reasons for the interviewees leaving the study, but in all cases it was connected to the student leaving the school. Similar to the learning in regard to the institutional gatekeepers, it is important advice for all researchers that when working with vulnerable young adults, it needs to be taken into consideration that the difficulties in some of their lives could lead to them being unable to fulfill their role in the research project. This knowledge is essential for future projects and will certainly impact the researcher's development of future studies.

8.5 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to contribute in some way to the work of second-level schools in urban, disadvantaged communities in order to enhance the personal and academic outcomes of their students. It is hoped that this study will inspire schools to listen to their students to find out what is making a difference in their educational lives. Finally, I hope this study is a reminder that schools can never be complacent and must continuously search for new ways to do things more effectively. Schools should never cease in trying to be a reason for the hope that these students ha

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INTRODUCTION TO THE APPENDICES

The appendices that follow are related to the case studies conducted as part of this project. A list of the appendices and their content follows below. Including these documents gives greater clarity in regard to the planning, preparation, structure and implementation of the primary research that was the backbone of this study.

Appendix 1 – Description of Case Study Schools

Appendix 2 - Student Interview Schedule 2011

Appendix 3 – Student Interview Schedules 2012 / 2013

Appendix 4 – Feedback / Actions Taken from Piloting of Student Interviews

Appendix 5 – Consent Form for Student Questionnaires / Interviews

Appendix 6 – Notes from Student Interviews

Appendix 7 – Content Analysis of Student Interviews (Steps 5-7)

Appendix 8 – Feedback from Piloting of Principal Interviews

Appendix 9 – Principal Interview Schedule

Appendix 10 – Notes from Principal Interviews

Appendix 11 – Content Analysis of Principal Interviews (Steps 5-7)

Appendix 12 – Teacher Interview Schedule

Appendix 13 – Feedback from the Piloting of the Teacher Interview Schedule

Appendix 14 – Content Analysis of Teacher Interview Schedules (Steps 5-7_

Appendix 15 – Feedback and Actions from the Piloting of the Student Questionnaires

Appendix 16 – Student Questionnaires 2011/ 2013

Appendix 17 – Notes on the Administration of Student Questionnaires

Appendix 18 – Content Analysis of Student Questionnaires

Appendix 19 – Letter Outlining Conditions for Gaining Ethical Approval
from Trinity College Dublin

APPENDIX 1

Description of Case Study Schools

1.1. ROI: Alternative School Model #1

ROI: Alternative School Model #1 caters for the needs of early school leavers interested in returning to full-time education. The centre provides a two-year LC course that supports its students through a comprehensive programme of both academic and pastoral supports. The school philosophy is grounded in the values of mutual respect, hard work and the constant striving for all to reach their full potential.

An important tenet of the centre are small class sizes and individualised attention. At a maximum each year cohort has fifteen people and the average class size would be approximately nine people, with subjects like maths and English often having less. Additional to the small class sizes most students would avail of one-to-one tuition that is offered through an extensive volunteer base.

On a pastoral level the school has focused on attending not only to the student's academic, but also their personal needs. Some of the services offered include counselling, career guidance, nutrition analysis and crèche facilities. These services are offered in the unconventional setting of a converted corner house in an urban disadvantaged community in Dublin.

1.2. ROI: Alternative School Model #2

ROI: Alternative School Model #2 is located in an urban disadvantaged community in the southwest of Ireland and has over seventy-five students between the ages of sixteen and twenty. The centre provides a variety of FETAC qualifications including the JC and LCA and twelve students that are in the first-year of the LC.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was the statutory awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. From June 2001 until the establishment of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on 6 November 2012, FETAC made awards at levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

A key platform to their academic support system is small class sizes, with the largest class in the LC programme having twelve students. These smaller classes allow the teaching staff to offer almost individualised support, which is essential to the success of many of the students. Another key component is the wide and varied courses that are on offer, which allows the learner to be nurtured through various levels of education in this small, intimate environment. In theory students who present with literacy and numeracy difficulties can begin with a foundation FETAC level one course and progress through to a FETAC level four or five LC.

Recognising the need to offer supports beyond the classroom a number of programmes have been enacted within the centre. As part of the school's mentoring programme every teacher is timetabled to meet individually with their two or three student mentees. If professional help is needed the centre has employed a full-time child psychologist which allows a clinical response to many of the emotional and behavioural problems that the students possess. Also practically the centre also employs an attendance officer that tracks attendance on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis.

1.3. ROI: Traditional School Model

The traditional second-level institution in the Irish context is a DEIS⁵⁹ school located in the greater Dublin area. The school offers a five-year second-level education programme set down by the Department of Education and Skills. The first three years are devoted to the JC, which is supported by the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP).⁶⁰ At the completion of the Junior Cycle the students then progress to the Senior Cycle where they either follow the LCA or LCVP.

In regard to promoting academic achievement the school employs a number of strategies. For example, the school offers the JCSP for all first, second and third year students. Senior cycle students can apply and twelve are chosen for the Accessing College Education (ACE) programme that funds additional study hours and revision courses in preparation for the LC.

⁵⁹ "Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion", was launched in May 2005 and remains the Department of Education and Skills' policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education. 849 schools are included in the programme. These comprise 657 primary schools (336 urban/town and 321 rural primary schools) and 192 secondary schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2015c).

⁶⁰ The intention of the JCSP programme is to target schools that have been identified in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. The programme specifically targets students that have been deemed at risk of early school leaving due to a range of difficulties that may include: learning disabilities, literacy and numeracy problems, behavioural issues and simply those that do not seem able to cope with the structures of the JC (NCCA, 2010, p. 9).

Another support offered to students is a wide range of programmes to suit the needs of the diverse academic abilities that students possess. For example, at Junior Cycle the school offers Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Level options for Irish, English and maths, while at Senior Cycle both the LCA and the LCVP are offered.

ROI: Traditional School Model also offers a variety of pastoral supports. The school has a Year Head structure where a particular teacher is given responsibility for a year group in regard to academic support, dealing with parental queries or referring students onto additional services. As part of the Year Head system each class has a Class Tutor who is responsible for a smaller group of students and who reports to the Year Head. Additionally the school also has two full-time counsellors, a school chaplain and the Home, School and Community Liaison Officer, whose role is to work with the families of the students to promote a positive relationship.

1.4. MA: Alternative School Model #1

The charter school that was chosen to be a part of the case study is a State-funded public high school located in the City of Boston, MA MA, that serves the needs of 180 students. The promotion of academic achievement amongst its students is done through a number of means. At the core of their academic programme is an extended school day and year that sees the students spend an average of 225 more hours in school than those in traditional high schools. Also the school employs a teaching technique called the ‘workshop model’ of instruction, where in their sixty-five minute classes, hands-on, student-centred learning is emphasised. This innovative teaching approach is made possible through small class sizes. In cases where students are experiencing difficulties around literacy, a full-time reading specialist is employed to work with students.

Additional to a range of academic supports, the school has organised a pastoral support programme that tries to serve the individual needs of all students. Each student is assigned an advisor that they meet three times a week for fifteen minutes at a time. The school also provides crèche services to the students, as over 12% of students are either pregnant or parenting. They also have a full-time social worker that works with the Dean of Students. Furthermore the school has formed a partnership with a mental health centre that sends psychologists to the school once a week to work with students who are dealing with a variety of different issues.

1.5. Massachusetts: Alternative School Model # 2

Massachusetts: Alternative School Model #2 is a four-year, college preparatory, high school that serves the needs of 400 students in an urban disadvantaged community in Boston, Massachusetts. The school is one of twenty-four educational institutions that are part of a national network underpinned by ten mission effectiveness standards.⁶¹

The promotion of academic achievement is achieved in a number of ways. The school has decided that the student population should grow no bigger than four hundred students, which will ensure the small classes sizes which they believe is beneficial for academic success. This also allows the school to know each student personally and to be present to their various needs.

The curricular uniqueness of the model begins with the Corporate Internship Programme, where each of the students work five days a month and some full weeks a year in a variety of different businesses.⁶² This work component not only pays the student's tuition but also gives them real life experience in the corporate world. A further curricular aspect that the school uses is a proficiency exam in literacy and mathematics. This exam is separate to the normal state and class exams, but every student must achieve a 90% grade in it by the end of Sophomore Year. The exam is offered several times a year and if students do not pass the exam they are give individual tuition after school and on the weekends in order to move them toward proficiency.

Pastorally the school has a number of supports available to the students. Religious Education is an important component of the curriculum that allows the forum and space for students to develop morally and spiritually. The school has a Director of Wellness and Health who oversees five interns from the Boston College School of Social Work. The Director of Health and

⁶¹ 1. Each of the schools in the network has to be, "explicitly" Catholic in nature and connected to a religious community or diocese; 2. Each of the schools have to serve only economically disadvantaged students from all faiths and cultures; 3. Each school is to be family-centred and active in the community; 4. All schools are to be college preparatory with an expressed aim of 100% of students matriculating on to third-level education; 5. All network schools must require the participation of all students in the Corporate Internship Programme (CIP); 6. CIP is brought into the school setting so that the realms of work and school are integrated; 7. Each school has an effective administrative and board structure and complies with all applicable state and federal laws; 8. Schools are financially sound and, at full enrolment, the school is primarily dependent on revenue from the work-study programme to meet operating expenses. In addition, the school maintains a comprehensive advancement programme to ensure financial stability; 9. Each school supports its graduates' efforts to obtain a college degree; 10. Each school is an active participant in the collaboration, support, and development of the national network of schools (Cristo Rey Network, 2007)

⁶² The CIP was born out of the necessity of financing a privately funded Catholic school in an economically disadvantaged area. The structure of the system is built on the premises that each student spends four extended days in class and one day at work. The particulars of the programme are that four students share one job, which is contracted directly through the Corporate Work Study Office at each of the network schools. The business pays the school directly and this money goes to cover a significant portion of the students' tuition.

Wellness is also in charge of career guidance and implements a seminar programme with the Freshman and Sophomore students around relationships and sexual education.

1.6. Massachusetts: Traditional School Model

The Massachusetts: Traditional School Model is a four-year high school that serves over 1,200 students from diverse backgrounds. The high school is college preparatory in its curriculum and strives to have its entire student body ready to be successful in college.

Academically the school offers a number of initiatives to support the diverse range of abilities in the student population. As the school has a number of immigrant students and those from non-English speaking backgrounds, it offers a comprehensive English Language Learner (ELL) programme that supports the student throughout their engagement with the school curriculum. The school also caters for the needs of students with Special Educational Needs through a programme that encourages inclusion but also provides for additional supports outside the classroom environment. In mainstream education there is a large focus on literacy and numeracy and all subject teachers are pushed to see their role as helping to develop these academic abilities in their students.

Pastorally, the school operates a wide-ranging programme that attempts to address the serious issues that many in the student population have to face. The team assigned to this duty is called the Student Support Team (SST) and it consists of guidance counsellors, social workers and the Deans of Students. The SST operates within each grade level, their role is to liaise with groups both within, and outside the school to ensure students' needs are dealt with accordingly.

APPENDIX 2

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2011

Academics

1. Did you like your last school? What was your favourite part? What did you dislike the most? / *What has been your experience at ROI: Traditional School Model so far? What has been your favourite part?*
2. What would you have changed about your former school? / *What would you change about ROI: Traditional School Model?*
3. How would you describe your relationships with teachers at your last school / *ROI: Traditional School Model?* What did you like about them? What did you dislike? What could have improved the relationship?
4. Do you feel you received a good education at your last school / *ROI Traditional School Model?* What did they do a good job with? What could they have improved upon?
5. How did you choose to come to the school you are attending at the moment? / *Why did you decide to stay in school to do your LC? Why ROI: Traditional School Model?*
6. What are you looking forward to in your new school? What have you liked so far? / *What are you looking forward to during your LC years? What have you liked so far?*
7. How would you compare your old school with your new one? What is different? / *How would you compare your Junior and LC experience at ROI: Traditional School Model? What is different?*

Career and Educational Aspirations

1. What are your goals in life?
2. Do you see education being an important part of reaching your goal? Why?
3. What are your plans after your LC?
4. How far do you think you will go in your education? College degree?
5. Once you have completed your education what would you like to do?
6. Who would be your role model in life? Why?
7. What, if anything, inspires you?

Self-Esteem

1. Would you describe yourself as being a confident person? Why or why not?

2. When faced with a difficult task how would you approach it? Do you like to be challenged?
3. How do you think you compare to your friends (Intelligence, athletic ability, looks, popularity and etc.)?
4. Are you proud of what you accomplished so far in life? Why or why not?
5. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
6. What do you think is most important in life?

Civic Responsibility

1. Are you involved in any activities after school?
2. What does the word community mean to you?
3. Are you proud of the city that you live in? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever volunteered in your local community? Country? World? If not would you like to? Why?
5. Would you regularly help someone in your local community? When? How often? How?
6. Would you feel like you have a responsibility to give back to your community? Why or why not?
7. How would you react if someone in your community were in trouble? What if you knew them? What if you didn't? Would it depend on what type of problem?
8. Who would you look to for an example of how to be a good person? Why?

APPENDIX 3

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2012 / 2013

Academics

1. What do you like about your school? What is your favourite part? What do you dislike the most?
2. What would you change about your school?
3. How would you describe your relationships with teachers at school? What do you like about them? What do you dislike? What could improve the relationships?
4. Do you think your school is doing a good job preparing you for the next step in your education? What do they do a good job with? What could they improve upon?
5. Why have you stayed in school?

Career and Educational Aspirations

1. What are your goals in life?
2. Do you see education being an important part of reaching your goal? Why?
3. What are your plans after you graduate from High School / LC?
4. How far do you think you will go in your education? College degree?
5. Once you have completed your education what would you like to do?
6. Who would be your role model in life? Why?
7. What, if anything, inspires you?

Self-Esteem

1. Would you describe yourself as being a confident person? Why or why not?
2. Would your friends, family, teachers describe you as confident? Why or why not?
3. When faced with a difficult task how would you approach it? Do you like to be challenged?
4. How do you think you compare to your friends (Intelligence, athletic ability, looks, popularity and etc.)?
5. Are you proud of what you accomplished so far in life? Why or why not?
6. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?

7. What do you think is most important in life?

Civic Responsibility

1. Are you involved in any activities after school?
2. What does the word community mean to you?
3. Are you proud of the city that you live in? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever volunteered in your local community? Country? World? If not would you like to? Why?
5. Would you regularly help someone in your local community? When? How often? How?
6. Would you feel like you have a responsibility to give back to your community? Why or why not?
7. What would your attitude be to those that find themselves in difficult financial or moral situations?
8. Who would you look to for an example of how to be a good person? Why?

APPENDIX 4

FEEDBACK/ACTIONS TAKEN FROM PILOTING OF THE STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Table 12: Feedback and Actions Taken from Piloting of the Student Interview Schedule

1. Suggested change in question four in the section named “Academics.”
 - a. Change from: “Do you think your previous school did a good job in preparing you for the next step in your education?”
 - b. To: “Do you feel you received a good education at your last school?”
2. The following question should be omitted from the “Self-Esteem” Section:
 - a. Would your friends, family and teachers describe you as confident?
3. Recommended change to question seven under the heading “Civic Responsibility”.
 - a. Change from: “What would your attitude be to those that find themselves in a difficult financial or moral situations?”
 - b. To: “How would you react if someone in your community was in trouble? What if you knew them? What if you didn’t? Would it depend on what type of problem?”

Actions Taken

1. All the above recommendations were accepted

APPENDIX 5

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES/INTERVIEWS

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is John O'Malley and I am a Ph.D. student at Trinity College Dublin. As part of the requirements of the programme I am completing a dissertation on improving second-level achievement in urban areas of educational disadvantage.

As part of this piece of research it would be immensely helpful to obtain a wider sense of the development of students during their LC years at (*Insert Specific School*). In order to gauge this development I am seeking a sample of Fifth-year students to take part in a questionnaire and/or interview, which has been fully approved and sanctioned by the Ethics Committee at Trinity College Dublin. Both the questionnaires and interviews will be administered on three occasions in September 2011, June 2012 and then again in June 2013. The content of the questionnaire /interviews will be focused on the following topics:

- Career and educational aspirations
 - Self-Esteem
 - Civic responsibility
 - Academics

In all cases the results of the questionnaires/interviews will be *completely anonymous* and *confidential*. After collecting the information the report that will follow *will not include any reference to the school or the students* that have taken part. If you are willing to have your son/daughter participate in the questionnaire/interviews, please sign the form below and return it to the school as soon as possible. I would like to also state that if at anytime you or your son/daughter would like to discontinue their participation in the case study it is within your/their rights to be removed from the case study. I thank you very much in advance for your consent and if you wish to discuss any aspects of the study then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

John O'Malley
12 The Avenue, Innwood
Enfield, Co. Meath, Ireland
email: jomalle3@nd.edu
phone: 085.707.3932

_____ (Detach
and Return) I, _____, **give/do not give** (circle appropriate) permission to my
son/daughter (circle appropriate) to take part in the questionnaire/interview for a Ph.D.
dissertation in connection with Trinity College Dublin.

(Parent's / Guardian's Signature)

MA: CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES/INTERVIEWS
(9th Grade Cohort)

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is John O'Malley and I am a Ph.D. student at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. As part of the requirements of the program I am completing a dissertation on improving second-level achievement in urban areas of educational disadvantage.

As part of this piece of research it would be immensely helpful to obtain a wider sense of the development of students during their initial years of high school. In order to gauge this development I am seeking a sample of first year students at (*Insert Specific School*) to take part in a questionnaire and/or interview, which has been fully approved and sanctioned by the Ethics Committee at Trinity College Dublin. Both the questionnaires and interviews will be administered on three occasions in September 2011, June 2012 and then again in June 2013. The content of the questionnaire /interviews will be focused on the following topics:

- Career and educational aspirations
 - Self-Esteem
 - Civic responsibility
 - Academics

In all cases the results of the questionnaires/interviews will be *completely anonymous* and *confidential*. After collecting the information the report that will follow *will not include any reference to the school or the students* that have taken part. If you are willing to have son/daughter participate in the questionnaire/interviews, please sign the form below and return it to the school as soon as possible. I would like to also state that if at anytime you or your son/daughter would like to discontinue their participation in the case study it is within your/their rights to be removed from the case study. I thank you very much in advance for your consent and if you wish to discuss any aspects of the study then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

John O'Malley
12 The Avenue, Innwood
Enfield, Co. Meath, Ireland
email: jomalle3@nd.edu
phone: 011.353.85.707.3932

_____ (Detach
and Return)

I, _____, **give/do not give** (circle appropriate) permission to my **son/daughter** (circle appropriate) to take part in the questionnaire/interview for a Ph.D. dissertation in connection with Trinity College Dublin.

(Parent's / Guardian's Signature)

APPENDIX 6: NOTES FROM STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Table 13: Notes from Student Interviews ROI/MA - Fall 2011/Spring 2012

Interviews Fall 2011

Conducting of Student Interview: Republic of Ireland

1. ROI: Traditional School
 - a. Time Frame: Approximately thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six (Four women and two men)
2. ROI: Alternative School #1
 - a. Time frame: 30 minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six (Five men and one female)
 - c. Notes:
 - i. Because the researcher is the principal of this institution, an independent third-party was used to conduct the interviews
3. ROI: Alternative School #2
 - a. Time frame: Approximately thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six (Four men and two women)

Conducting of Student Interview: State of Massachusetts

1. Mass: Traditional School
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six (Three men and three women)
2. Mass: Alternative School #1
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six (Three men and three women)
3. Mass: Alternative School #2
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six out (Three men and three women)

Interview Spring/Summer 2012

Conducting of Student Interview: Republic of Ireland

1. ROI: Traditional School
 - a. Time Frame: Approximately thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six out of six (Four women and two men)
2. ROI: Alternative School #1
 - a. Time frame: 30 minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six out of six (Five men and one female)
 - c. Notes:
 - i. Because the researcher is the principal of this institution, an independent third-party was used to conduct the interviews.
3. ROI: Alternative School #2
 - a. Time frame: Approximately thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six out of six (Four men and two women)
 - c. Notes
 - i. One of the interviewees was not present on the day the interviews were conducted. A time was arranged and the interview was conducted via Skype in the beginning of June 2012.

Conducting of Student Interview: State of Massachusetts

1. Mass: Traditional School
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Four out of six (One man and three women)
 - c. Notes
 - i. Two of the students were absent on the day that the researcher was in Massachusetts. After several attempts to reschedule were not successful it was believed to be best to interview the students during the third scheduled interview in June 2013.
2. Mass: Alternative School #1
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Four out of six (Two man and two women)
 - c. Notes:
 - i. Two of the original six students, one man and one woman, had left the school during the 2011/2012 school year. Another of the male students was absent on the day that I visited the school and a Skype interview was arranged for July 2012.
3. Mass: Alternative School #2
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six out of six (Three men and three women)

Table 14: Notes from Student Interviews ROI/MA - Spring/Summer 2013

Interview Spring/ Summer 2013

Conducting Of Student Interview: Republic of Ireland

1. ROI: Traditional School
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six out of six (Two men and four women)
 - c. Notes
 - i. Interviews were conducted at ROI: Traditional School. The interviews were held over a one-week period, with the interviews themselves being conducted in the morning before school.
2. ROI: Alternative School #1
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Six out of six (Five men and 1 woman)
 - c. Notes
 - i. Because the researcher is the principal of this institution, an independent third-party was used to conduct the interviews
3. ROI: Alternative School #2
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students Interviewed: Four of six (Three men and 1 woman)
 - c. Notes:
 - i. There were two less interviewees from ROI: Alternative School #2 in this last round of interviews. One of the female participants had decided to remain in the school but switched to a different course. Part of the participation criteria for interviewees was that they were involved in the Traditional LC course. Since she was no longer in this course she was removed from the case study. One of the male participants that were present at the two previous interview sessions had decided not to continue in school anymore and left the school entirely.

Conducting Of Student Interview: State of Massachusetts

1. Mass: Traditional School
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students: Four out of six (Two men and two woman)
 - c. Notes:
 - i. In this final round of interviews one of the students that were not present for the second interview in June 2012 was available on this visit. The second student that was not in attendance for the June 2012 interview was also not present on this day. Repeated attempts were made to follow up with the student but a phone interview was never arranged. Finally one of the female participants from the previous two interviews had transferred to another school so she was not available for interview.
2. Mass: Alternative School #1
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students: Two out of six (One male and one female)
 - c. Notes:
 - i. Since November 2011 four interview participants decided to transfer to a new school. Only one male and one female student remained for the final interview.
3. Mass: Alternative School # 2
 - a. Time Frame: Thirty minutes per interview
 - b. Number of Students: Six out of six (Three men and three women)

APPENDIX 7

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STUDENT INTERVIEWS (STEPS 5-7)

1. Academics

- a. Positive qualities of teachers
 - i. Trustworthy
 - ii. Hard working
 - iii. High standards
 - iv. Supportive
 - v. Patient
 - vi. Relaxed approach
 - vii. Knowledgeable
 - viii. Effective teaching strategies
- b. Negative qualities of teachers
 - i. Lack of effort
 - ii. Poor teaching strategies
 - iii. Strict
 - iv. Low standards
 - v. Not trustworthy
- c. Characteristics of a positive school environment
 - i. Peer role models
 - ii. Effective school policies
 - iii. Clear discipline and reward policy
 - iv. Dress code
 - v. Split gender classroom
 - vi. Small class sizes
 - vii. Clear school mission
 - viii. Work-study programme
 - ix. Less rules and more flexibility
 - x. Offering new experiences
 - xi. Sports
 - xii. Supportive
 - xiii. High academic standards
 - xiv. Good facilities and services
 - xv. Students treated as adults
 - xvi. Supportive learning community
 - xvii. Welcoming atmosphere
 - xviii. Good friends
 - xix. Diverse student body
- d. Characteristics of a poor school environment
 - i. Not academically challenging
 - ii. Lack of extracurricular activities
 - iii. Length of school day
 - iv. Lack of class choices
 - v. Unfair rules
 - vi. Poor work experience
 - vii. Class sizes too large
 - viii. Lack of discipline
 - ix. Stressful

- x. Poor school facilities
- xi. Lack of community spirit
- xii. Poor public reputation
- xiii. High staff turnover
- xiv. School too small

2. Self-Esteem

- a. Aspects that develop self-esteem
 - i. Having responsibilities
 - ii. Support system
 - iii. Family
 - iv. Friends
 - v. Community
 - vi. Celebrities
 - vii. Leadership training
 - viii. Learning from life experiences
 - ix. Personal beliefs
 - x. Having faith
 - xi. One's talents
 - xii. Achievements in school
 - 1. Academics
 - 2. Extracurriculars
 - 3. Socially
 - xiii. Supportive school environment
 - 1. Atmosphere
 - 2. Support of teachers
 - 3. Structure of the school
 - xiv. Engaging in work experience
 - xv. Part-time employment
 - xvi. Overcoming past struggles in school
 - xvii. School offering opportunities for growth
 - 1. Leadership
 - 2. Personal / Career advancement
- b. Aspects that hinder self-esteem development
 - i. Poor work ethic
 - ii. Negative influences
 - 1. Friends
 - 2. Family
 - iii. Experiencing failure
 - 1. Academics
 - 2. Personal life
 - 3. Social life
 - 4. Sports
 - iv. Perceived low expectations from school
 - v. Too high expectation from school
 - vi. Teachers not supportive
 - vii. Anxiety / Avoiding failure

3. Civic Responsibility

- a. Feelings of civic responsibility to the home community
 - i. Feeling of responsibility
 - ii. Positive change in feeling of responsibility
 - iii. Negative change in feeling of responsibility

- iv. No feeling of responsibility
- b. Origins of civic responsibility to the home community
 - i. Sense of service and obligation
 - ii. Reciprocity
 - iii. Self-Interest
 - iv. Examples of positive role models
 - v. Close connection to the community
 - vi. Good reputation of community
 - vii. Experiences in volunteering
 - viii. Pride in community
 - ix. Believe in helping people
 - x. Positive personal experience
 - xi. Feeling of safety
- c. Origins of the denial of civic responsibility to the home community
 - i. Negative personal experiences
 - 1. Littering
 - 2. Violence
 - 3. Poor work prospects
 - ii. Poor reputation of area
 - iii. Lack of positive role models
 - iv. Lack of connection to community
 - v. Personal interest over communal
 - vi. Lack of empathy
 - vii. Lack of work ethic, poor attitude
 - viii. Government inaction
 - ix. Focused on self-interest
 - x. Focused on self-interest
 - xi. Poor attitude and lack of effort
 - xii. Fear of repercussions
- d. Feelings of civic responsibility to the school community
 - i. Feeling of responsibility
 - ii. # of students where question was not asked
 - iii. Negative change in feeling of responsibility
 - iv. No feeling of responsibility
- e. Origins of civic responsibility to the school community
 - i. Reciprocity
 - ii. Close connection to school community
 - iii. Example of positive role models
 - iv. Personal interest over communal
 - v. Positive personal experiences
 - 1. Academic support
 - 2. Positive atmosphere
 - 3. New experiences
 - 4. Personal support
 - 5. Good relationships with teachers
 - vi. Sense of Service and Obligation
- f. Origins of the denial of civic responsibility to the school community
 - i. Divided school community
 - ii. Disproportionate influence of academics
 - iii. Lack of pride in school
 - iv. Negative personal experience

1. Poor relationships with classmates
2. Mismanagement of school
3. Feeling excluded
4. Failure in school activity
5. Poor facilities in school
6. Poor relationships with teachers
7. High stress environment
8. Poor communication
- v. Poor attitude and lack of effort
- vi. Feeling personally overstretched
- vii. Negative personal experience
- viii. Serving one's self-interest
- ix. Lack of connection to school community
- x. School only doing job

APPENDIX 8

FEEDBACK FROM PILOTING OF PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS

Table 15: Feedback and Actions Taken From the Piloting of the Principal Interview Schedule

1. What does the researcher mean by “achievement” in the case study?
2. The following interview question was described as overwhelming as it dealt with too many different aspects:
 - a. What are some of the major academic, moral and civic achievements of the school? What has been at the heart of these successes?
3. It was suggested to remove all uses of the abbreviation “etc.”.
4. In the section entitled, “School Philosophy and Practical Expression”, two questions were suggested to be redundant:
 - a. What is the guiding philosophy of the school? How is it fostered amongst staff, students and the wider school community?
 - b. What values are at the heart of this institution? How are these brought to life on a daily basis with staff, students and etc.?
5. Add the following question:
 - a. How do staff and students live out the school’s values?

Actions Taken

1. The researcher has included an explanation of achievement and what components of achievement will be considered. Also a deliberate attempt has been made to query the principals around three areas of achievement: academic, personal and civic responsibility.
2. The question was divided into three separate questions:
 - a. What are some of the major academic achievements of the school? What has been at the heart of these successes?
 - b. How is your pastoral programme in the school structured? What is being done well? What areas would you like to see improved?

- c. How is a sense of civic responsibility developed amongst the students? What is working well and not so well? Are there volunteering opportunities?
3. The use of “etc.” was removed from all answers.
4. The question was rewritten to read
 - a. What values/philosophy is at the heart of this institution? How do staff and students live these out?
5. Recommendation adopted

APPENDIX 9

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Values and Philosophy of the School

1. What values/philosophy is at the heart of this institution? How do staff and students live these out?
2. Is there anything particularly unique about your project in comparison to other second-level institutions? How have these unique elements impacted on students?

Academics

1. What are some of the impediments to a successful academic career exhibited by students? How does the school address them? What is being done well? What could be improved?
2. What is the school's strategy to promote academic achievement amongst its students?
3. What are some of the major academic achievements of the school? What has been at the heart of these successes?
4. How does the school prepare students for the next level of education? What is being done well? What could be improved?
5. How is positive attendance promoted? What has been most effective? What has not?
6. How is good behaviour encouraged amongst the student body? What has been successful? Areas for improvement?

Civic and Self-Esteem Development

1. What impediments do students present with that hinders their personal development? How does the school address them? What is being done well and not so well?
2. What values would you like to see instilled in the students that leave this institution? How do you nurture these in their time with you?
3. How is your pastoral program in the school structured? What is being done well? What areas would you like to see improved?
4. How is a sense of civic responsibility developed amongst the students? What is working well and not so well? Are there volunteering opportunities?
5. What initiatives aimed at the personal and civic development of the students would you like to see implemented in the coming years?

The Future:

1. How do you see the school developing over the next ten years?
2. What opportunities lie ahead?
3. What challenges lie ahead?

APPENDIX 10

NOTES FROM PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS

Table 16: Notes From Principal Interviews

Principal Interview: Republic of Ireland Summer 2011

1. ROI: Traditional School Model
 - a. Time Frame: Forty-five minutes
2. ROI: Alternative School Model #2
 - a. Time frame: Sixty minutes for interview one /One hour and twenty minutes for interview two.
 - b. Notes:
 - i. In addition to the principal, the researcher also interviewed the regional coordinator of the project. The reasoning behind this decision was due to the fact that the organisation structure of the institution is such that three individual centres, including one of the case study participants, answers directly to this individual. Given this configuration the manager has a large impact on the policy and vision of the institution. It was therefore decided to include this person in the interviews.
3. ROI: Alternative School Model #1
 - a. Time frame: Fifty minutes
 - b. Notes:
 - i. This particular setting deserves a special mention because the researcher is currently the principal of the institution. Due to practical and ethical issues the researcher designated an independent third-party to conduct the interview.

Principal Interview: State of Massachusetts Summer / Fall 2011

1. Massachusetts: Alternative School Model #1
 - a. Time Frame: Forty-five minutes
2. Massachusetts: Alternative School Model #2
 - a. Time Frame: Forty-five minutes
3. Massachusetts: Traditional School Model
 - a. Time Frame: Forty-five minutes
 - b. Notes
 - i. The postponement of the interview at this case study site was due to the delay in confirming the participation of the school as the researcher had to wait for the approval of the Office of Research, Assessment and Evaluation to conduct research in a Boston Public School. This approval was granted in August 2011 but the next visit to the Boston area by the researcher was not until the first week of November 2011.

APPENDIX 11
CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS (STEPS 5-7)

1. Values and Philosophy of the School

a. School Values

- i.** College preparatory
- ii.** High expectations
- iii.** High level of student support
- iv.** Service of economically disadvantage
- v.** Individualised attention
- vi.** Build resilience
- vii.** Respect
- viii.** Hard work
- ix.** Reaching full potential
- x.** Close connection between staff and students
- xi.** Equality
- xii.** Justice

b. Values into Action

- i.** College acceptance needed to graduate
- ii.** Conversations on college
- iii.** Interactions between staff and students
- iv.** Family atmosphere
- v.** Extra academic support
- vi.** Example of staff members
- vii.** Practice what you preach
- viii.** High expectations
- ix.** Collegiality between staff

c. Key Programmatic Elements

- i.** Weekly work experience
- ii.** School size
- iii.** Small pupil teacher ratio
- iv.** Emphasis on teacher / student relationship
- v.** Expectations on staff members
- vi.** Specialised academic staff members
- vii.** Student support team
- viii.** Use of credit based system
- ix.** Culture of innovation / embracing change
- x.** Close connection to wider network
- xi.** Non-traditional premises
- xii.** Informal approach (No uniforms; address teachers by first name)

2. Academics

a. Impediments to academic success

- i.** Literacy
- ii.** Numeracy
- iii.** Learning disabilities
- iv.** Lack of motivation
- v.** Lack of confidence
- vi.** Low self-Esteem around academics
- vii.** Attendance

b. Successful remedies to identified issues

- i.** *Academic*

1. Intensive testing to diagnose issue
2. Intensive remediation (additional classes and tutoring sessions)
3. Homework support
4. Use of scaffolding techniques to build Independence
5. Use of basic skills testing
6. Professional development of teacher around improving literacy
7. School-wide plan for literacy development
8. Small class size
9. One-on-one tutoring
10. Homework support
11. Student focused curriculum (use of practical subjects)
12. Flexible course offerings
13. Student input into course / schedules
14. Individualised curriculum
15. Full-time functioning library
16. High expectations of students and teachers

ii. Attendance

1. Clear expectations and rules
2. Intensive attendance support programme
3. Positive working relationship with parents / guardians
4. Use and dissemination of data to track attendance statistics
5. Attendance connected to grade
6. Positive incentives
7. Negative consequences
8. High expectations
9. Attendance awards
10. Payment connected to attendance
11. Centre evaluations conducted by students

iii. Behaviour

1. Professional development for staff on dealing with issues
2. Negative consequences
3. Creation of a positive atmosphere
4. Student empowerment
5. Use of public meeting
6. Positive incentives
7. School environment
8. Emphasis on respect
9. Clear expectations and rules
10. Use of restorative justice practices
11. Developed pastoral system
12. Behavioural support unit

c. Areas Identified for Improvement

i. Academic

1. Reading comprehension levels
2. Professional development for teachers
3. Moving away from negative consequences
4. Need to engage with student body
5. Attendance support
6. Improvement of positive incentives

d. Preparation for College

i. Current Initiatives

1. Rigorous academic curriculum
2. College support for graduates
3. Corporate work / study experience
4. Intensive focus on literacy
5. Use of scaffolding techniques
6. Focus on building resiliency
7. High expectations
8. Intensive focus on literacy
9. Career guidance
10. Links with businesses
11. Links with third-level institutions

ii. Areas identified for improvement

1. Numeracy
2. Study skills
3. Coping skills for college life
4. Better relationship with third-level institutions
5. Building independence
6. Science instruction
7. Formal support for graduates
8. Increasing student motivation
9. Developing forward planning
10. Work with families
11. Developing additional academic support programmes
12. Mentoring (in-school, local businesses, third level)

3. Civic and Self Esteem Development

a. Impediments to self-esteem and civic development

- i. English language learners
- ii. Lack of parental support
- iii. Experience of extreme social problems
- iv. Lack of personal confidence
- v. Substance abuse
- vi. Bleak outlook on life

b. Successful Remedies to Identified Issues

- i. Family support programme and classes
- ii. English as a new language courses
- iii. Connections with justice system
- iv. Connections with outside services
- v. Counselling
- vi. Formal opportunities for civic engagement
- vii. Parental engagement initiative
- viii. Health and relationship curriculum
- ix. Formal opportunities for civic engagement
- x. Structured mentoring programme
- xi. Student council

4. The Future

a. Plan for future development

- i. Facilities
- ii. Academic
- iii. Extracurricular

- iv. Personal development
 - v. Staff development
 - b. Challenges
 - i. Financial
 - ii. Achievement
 - 1. Academic
 - 2. Civic
 - 3. Self-Esteem
 - iii. Wider Issues
 - c. Opportunities
 - i. Financial
 - ii. Achievement
 - 1. Academic
 - 2. Civic development
 - 3. Self-esteem development

APPENDIX 12

TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

1. How long have you been involved with the organisation and in what capacity? What is your role with the students?
2. Why did you choose to work at this particular school/project? Why have you decided to stay?

School Philosophy and Practical Expression

1. What values/philosophy is at the heart of this institution? How do staff and students live these out?
2. What do you feel is unique about this place in comparison to other second-level institutions? How have these unique elements impacted on students?

Achievements/Improvements

1. In your opinion what difficulties do your students have that prevent them from reaching their full potential in school? How does the school address these issues? What has been successful? What needs to be improved? Does the staff have the opportunity to influence policies? Is there a forum for staff to exchange ideas in respect to this?
2. How well do you think the school is preparing students for the next level of education? Are there connections extended after the student has left school? What more could be done?
3. In regards to academic achievement what areas of improvement has the school identified? What steps are being taken to address these concerns?
4. Is there emphasis in the school on continuous professional development amongst the staff?

Student/Teacher Relationship

1. How would you describe the student-teacher relationship? What has been done to promote a positive relationship? What could be done further?

Civic and Self-Esteem Development

1. What values would you like to see instilled in the students that leave this institution? How do you nurture these in their time with you?
2. What role does the staff play in the personal development of each student? What is the attitude of the staff toward taking on responsibilities outside of teaching?

3. How would you rate the pastoral programme within the school? What is being done well? What could be improved on?
4. How does the school promote a sense of responsibility to others within the school and to the wider community? What role does staff play in this regard? How could this be improved?
5. What initiatives aimed at the personal and civic development of students would you like to see implemented in the coming years?

The Future:

1. How do you see the school developing over the next ten years?
2. What opportunities lie ahead?
3. What challenges lie ahead?

APPENDIX 13

FEEDBACK FROM THE PILOTING OF THE TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Table 17: Feedback and Actions From the Piloting of the Teacher Interview Schedule

1. It was suggested that a few of the questions in the section entitled, “Achievements/Improvements”, were inappropriate. Within this section the interviewer asks several questions about the case study schools and what they are doing well and what they need to improve upon. The teacher involved in the piloting process felt that these questions could lead to critical remarks about the principal and other staff members.
2. Three new questions were recommended:
 - a. What alternative activities could improve academic achievement?
 - b. Is there a forum for staff to exchange ideas in respect to this?
 - c. Are there connections made with students after the student has left school? Is there a facility for this?
3. Warm-up questions were proposed:
 - a. How long have you been teaching?
 - b. Describe your typical day at school.
4. New question suggested for section named, “Achievements and Improvements”:
 - a. It was felt that a question on the opportunity and emphasis on continuous professional development in the school would be appropriate.

Actions Taken

1. It was agreed the following ethical protections would need to be explained in advance:
 - a. That the name of the school or teacher would not be used in the final report
 - b. That the interview and the transcripts from the interview would not be shared with anyone.

c. That the interviewees would have the opportunity to review the completed transcript and to suggest any changes that might be needed.

2. Recommendations 2 through 4 were adopted

APPENDIX 14

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TEACHER INTERVIEWS (STEPS 5-7)

1. School Philosophy

- a. School Values
 - i. Holistic Education
 - ii. College Preparation
 - iii. Good Citizens
 - iv. High Expectations
 - v. Reaching Full Potential
 - vi. Individualised Attention
 - vii. Focus on Care and Support
 - viii. Equality
 - ix. Justice
 - x. Respect
- b. Values into Action
 - i. Constant Improvement (Curriculum Developments, etc.)
 - ii. Attention to Detail (Dress Code)
 - iii. High and Clear Expectations
 - iv. Focus on Literacy and Numeracy
 - v. Close Relationship between Staff and Students
 - vi. Comprehensive Student Support Programme
 - vii. Flexible Scheduling
 - viii. Environment of Mutual Respect
- c. Key Programmatic Elements
 - i. Low Pupil/Teacher Ratio
 - ii. Use of Credit-Based System
 - iii. Graduate Support Team
 - iv. Faith-Based Ethos
 - v. Emphasis on Improvement
 - vi. Corporate Work Study
 - vii. Family Atmosphere
 - viii. Student Centred
 - ix. Behavioural Support Unit
 - x. Initiative to Support Positive Attendance and Behaviour
 - xi. Additional Academic Support

2. Academics

- a. Impediments to Academic Success
 - i. Literacy
 - ii. Numeracy
 - iii. Lack of Organisation
 - iv. Lack of Responsibility
 - v. Lack of Motivation
- b. Successful Remedies to Identified Issues
 - i. Testing to Diagnose Issues
 - ii. Focus on Basic Skills
 - iii. Clear Expectations
 - iv. Scaffolding
 - v. Basic Skills Testing

- vi. Focus on Critical Thinking Skills
- vii. Individualised Tuition
- viii. School Support Team
- ix. Attendance Awards
- x. Interaction between School and Home
- xi. Negative Consequences

3. Preparation for College

- a. Current Initiatives
 - i. Stricter Graduation Requirements
 - ii. Scaffolding Independent Learning
 - iii. Higher Level Class Requirement
 - iv. Curriculum Changes to Improve Readiness
 - v. Formal Support Links with Colleges
- b. Areas Identified for Improvement
 - i. Developing Independent Learners
 - ii. Developing Formal Programme to Support Graduates

4. Student / Teacher Relationship

- a. Opinion of Relationship
 - i. Good Relationship
 - ii. Mixed Relationship
- b. School Initiatives to Promote a Good Relationship
 - i. Expected by Teachers
 - ii. Emphasised by School Administration
 - iii. Focus of School Policies
 - iv. Counselling
 - v. Family Atmosphere
 - vi. Effort of Teachers
 - vii. Close Connection to Families
 - viii. Student Support Programme
 - ix. Small Class Sizes
- c. Areas Identified for Improvement
 - i. More Direction From School Administration

5. Civic / Self –Esteem Development

- a. Pastoral Programme
 - i. Strong Student Support Team
 - ii. Link with Outside Agencies
- b. Opportunities for Civic Engagement
 - i. Service Opportunities within the School Community
 - ii. International Service Opportunities
 - iii. Domestic Service Opportunities
 - iv. Service Opportunities within the School Community
 - v. Service Requirement in Curriculum
- c. Areas for Improvement (Self-Esteem)
 - i. Gaining Independence
 - ii. Engagement with Employers
 - iii. Improved Health and Relationship Education
 - iv. Formal Support Programme for Senior Students
- d. Areas for Improvement (Civic)
 - i. Increase Service Opportunities
 - ii. Increased Funding
 - iii. Activities for Political Awareness

- iv. Recognising and Encouraging Student Leadership

6. The Future

- a. Plan for Future Development
 - i. Facilities
 - ii. Academic
 - iii. Extracurricular
 - iv. Personal Development
 - v. Staff Development
- b. Challenges
 - i. Financial
 - ii. Achievement
 - 1. Academic
 - 2. Civic
 - 3. Self-Esteem
 - iii. Wider Issues
- c. Opportunities
 - i. Financial
 - ii. Achievement
 - 1. Academic
 - 2. Civic Development
 - 3. Self-Esteem development

APPENDIX 15

FEEDBACK AND ACTIONS FROM THE PILOTING OF THE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Table 18: Feedback and Actions from Piloting of the Student Questionnaires

1. It was felt that in “Experience of Education” question six there should be lines available for students to write down an answer.
2. In the “Self-Confidence” section it was thought that an additional answer of “NO” should be added to the first questions.
3. In the section “Civic Responsibility” the students believed that an open-ended question on the survey giving people the opportunity to explain their feelings about their community would be important.
4. The student also suggested that the answer choice “NEUTRAL” should be removed, as they did not understand the meaning of the word. After some discussion what the word meant it was decided that the term “NO FEELING” would be more appropriate.
5. Question eight in the “Experience of School” section should be amended to the following:
 - a. Change from: Who or what influenced you to attend your new school?
 - b. Change to: Who or what influenced you to attend (*insert specific school*)?
6. Question nine in the “Experience of School” section should be changed to the following
 - a. Change from: What are you looking forward to in your new school?
 - b. Change to: What are you looking forward to at (*insert specific school*)?
7. In the “Career and Educational Aspirations” section change one of the questions to:
 - a. Change from: What is the highest level of education you want to complete?
 - b. Change to: How far would you like to go in education?
8. Change wording of question in the “Self-Confidence” section:
 - a. Change from: I think that most people like me as a person...
 - b. Change to: Do you think that most people like you as a person?
9. One student found several of the questions difficult to understand:
 - a. What is the highest level of education that you want to achieve?
 - b. When comparing yourself to others what do you think?
 - c. I think most people like me...
10. Several students had a problem with the vocabulary used in some of the questions:
 - a. A student had a problem with the word “Apply” in the question, “When I apply myself to something I am confident I will succeed.”
 - b. A student had difficulty with the meaning of the word “former” in the question, “What would you have changed about your former school/course?”
11. One of the students believed several of the questions left her unsure about the subject of the question:
 - a. What are you looking forward to in your new school/course?
 - b. When comparing yourself to others what do you think?

Actions Taken

1. Recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 were adopted
3. The researcher did not add this request to the questionnaire as it was felt that under the current rating system an accurate picture of the student's thoughts on community could be gained through closed questioning.
8. This suggestion was not adopted as the original format of the question fit the rating scale better than the suggested change.
9. The suggestions were noted but no action was taken as in the other consultation sections these issues were not raised. The researcher agreed to monitor the results of these questions closely as they could be amended for the June 2013 questionnaire.
- 10A. Changed from: 'When I apply myself to something I am confident I will succeed...' to 'When I try hard at something I am confident I will succeed.'
- 10B. Changed from: 'What would you have changed about your former/school or course?' to 'What would you changed about your last school?'
- 11A. Changed from: 'What are you looking forward to in your new school/course?' to 'What are you looking forward to (*insert specific school*)? (Either academically, socially or both).
- 11B. The suggestion was noted but the question was not altered.

APPENDIX 16

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2011 / 2013

Directions

- Circle the answers to the following questions that best describe yourself (**ONLY CIRCLE ONE ANSWER PER QUESTION**)
- Remember your answers are completely confidential and your identity will remain anonymous

ACADEMICS

1. How did you feel about your last school?

Liked it a lot Liked it Somewhat No Feeling I had to go Disliked it

2. What did you like best about your last school? _____

Explain your answer: _____

3. What would you have change about your last school?

Explain your answer: _____

4. Do you feel you received a good education at your last school?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

5. Did you think that most of your teachers in your last school cared about you?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

6. Were you treated fairly by teachers in your last school?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

7. If you had a problem with your schoolwork at your previous school would you have told a teacher about it?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

8. Who or what influenced you to attend (*Specific School*)?

Parent/s or Guardian/s Friends Your own Choice Other*

If answered Other* then please explain: _____

9. What are you looking forward to at (*Specific School*) (either academically, socially or both)? _____

Explain your answer: _____

ACADEMICS (ROI: Traditional School Model)

1. How would you rate your overall experience at (*Specific School*) so far?

Excellent Good Satisfactory Poor Very Poor

2. Why did you come to (*Specific School*)?

Parent/s or Guardian's Decision Friends were going Your own Choice
Other*

If answered Other* then please explain: _____

3. What do you think was best about (*Specific School*) during your JC years?

4. What would you have changed about (Specific School) during JC years? Why?

Explain your answer: _____

5. Do you feel (Specific School) has prepared you to begin the LC?

Most Definitely Definitely Somewhat Not Really No

6. Did you think that most of your JC teachers cared about you?

Most Definitely Definitely Somewhat Not Really No

7. Were you treated fairly by your JC teachers?

Most Definitely Definitely Somewhat Not Really No

8. If you had a problem with your schoolwork while you were doing the JC would you have told a teacher about it?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

9. Who or what influenced you to do the LC?

*Parent/s or Guardian/s Friends Your own Choice Other**

If answered Other* then please explain: _____

10. What are you looking forward to on the LC course (either academically, socially or both)? _____

Explain your answer: _____

Career and Educational Aspirations

1. What life long goals do you have for yourself?

2. What academic goals do you want to accomplish in High School / on the LC ?

All passes 1 Honour 2 Honours 3 Honours 4 Honours or more

3. How far would you like to go in education?

4. What job would you like to do once you complete your education?

5. Where do you see yourself in ten years?

Self-Esteem

1. Do you care what people your age think of you?

No Very Little A Little Somewhat A Lot A Great Deal

2. How confident are you in your own abilities?

Very Little A Little Somewhat A Lot A Great Deal

3. When given an important job to do what do you expect will happen?

I won't even try I will fail I will most likely finish it I will do a great job

4. When comparing yourself to others what do you think

Much Better Than Better Than Equal To Less Than Much Less Than

5. I think that most people like me as a person...

Strongly Disagree Disagree Don't Know Agree Strongly Agree

6. Most people respect me

Strongly Disagree Disagree Don't Know Agree Strongly Agree

7. I plan and use my time well

Very true A Little True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

8. I am a good leader when something needs to be done

Very true A Little True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

9. I try to do the best I possibly can

Very true A Little True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

10. I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do...

Very True Little Bit True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

11. I try to get the best results when I do things...

Very True A Little Bit True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

12. When I try hard at something I am confident I will succeed...

Very True A Little Bit True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

Civic Responsibility

1. I am active in community groups (sports, church and etc.)

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I consider myself to be involved in the community

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I am proud of the city that I live in.

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I have a responsibility to try to make my community the best place it can possibly be.

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I have a responsibility to look after those people in my community.

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I can make a positive difference to the community around me

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I go out of my way to help others

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I would like to have a leadership role in a local club or group

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. My community is important to me

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Volunteering in the community is important

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2013

Directions

- Circle the answers to the following questions that best describe yourself (**ONLY CIRCLE ONE ANSWER PER QUESTION**)
- Remember your answers are completely confidential and your identity will remain anonymous

ACADEMICS

1. How would you rate your overall experience in your current school?

Excellent Good Satisfactory Poor Very Poor

2. What do you like best about your school? _____

Explain your answer: _____

3. What would you change about your school?

Explain your answer: _____

4. Do you think your school is doing a good job preparing you for your next step in education?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

5. Do you think that most of your teachers care about you?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

6. Are you treated fairly by your teachers?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

7. If you have a problem with your schoolwork would you tell a teacher about it?

Most Definitely Definitely Possibly Not Really No

8. Why have you stayed in school? _____

Explain your answer: _____

Career and Educational Aspirations

1. What life long goals do you have for yourself?

2. What academic goals do you want to accomplish in High School / on the LC?

3. What is the highest level of education you want to complete?

4. What job would you like to do once you complete your education?

5. Where do you see yourself in ten years?

SELF-ESTEEM

1. Do you care what people your age think of you?

No Very Little A Little Somewhat A Lot A Great Deal

2. How confident are you in your own abilities?

Very Little A Little Somewhat A Lot A Great Deal

3. When given an important job to do what do you expect will happen?

I won't even try I will fail I will most likely finish it I will do a great job

4. When comparing yourself to others what do you think

Much Better Than Better Than Equal To Less Than Much Less Than

5. I think that most people like me as a person...

Strongly Disagree Disagree Don't Know Agree Strongly Agree

6. Most people respect me

Strongly Disagree Disagree Don't Know Agree Strongly Agree

7. I plan and use my time well

Very true A Little True Don't Know Not Really True Very
Untrue

8. I am a good leader when something needs to be done

Very true A Little True Don't Know Not Really True Very
Untrue

9. I try to do the best I possibly can

Very true A Little True Don't Know Not Really True Very
Untrue

10. I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do...

Very True Little Bit True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

11. I try to get the best results when I do things...

Very True A Little Bit True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

12. When I try hard at something I am confident I will succeed...

Very True A Little Bit True Don't Know Not Really True Very Untrue

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

1. I am active in community groups (sports, church and etc)

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I consider myself to be involved in the community

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I am proud of the city that I live in.

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I have a responsibility to try to make my community the best place it can possibly be.

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I have a responsibility to look after those people in my community.

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I can make a positive difference to the community around me

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I go out of my way to help others

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I would like to have a leadership role in a local club or group

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. My community is important to me

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Volunteering in the community is important

Strongly Agree Agree No Feeling Disagree Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX 17

NOTES ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Table 19: Notes on the Administration of Student Questionnaires - MA Fall 2011

Administration of Surveys / Fall 2011

State of Massachusetts

1. MA: Traditional School
 - a. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - b. Participating students: 63 (out of a possible 160)
 - c. Time frame:
 - i. The surveys were administered during the months of November and December and took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to complete
 - d. Notes
 - i. Despite numerous contacts from the researcher the school did not seem prepared for the visit. Arriving in the school and gauging the reaction of various staff members it was apparent that the questionnaires had not been completed in advance despite several assurances. Promises were given that the permission forms and questionnaires would be administered as soon as possible. About four weeks later and after several phone calls, the school mailed the documents but it only included about 40% of the entire cohort of students.
2. MA: Alternative School #1
 - a. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - b. Time frame:
 - i. The surveys were administered during the months of September and October and took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to complete
 - c. Participating Students: 25 (out of a possible 63)
 - d. Notes
 - i. Permission forms were sent home but only about 40% returned the forms, so the questionnaires were only conducted with that particular section of the cohort.
3. MA: Alternative School #2
 - a. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - b. Time frame:
 - i. The surveys were administered one day in November and took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to complete
 - c. Participating Students: 77 (out of 100)
 - d. Notes
 - i. In Massachusetts: Alternative School Model #2 the permission forms and questionnaires were completed and returned by the vast majority of the cohort but prior to the researcher's visit to the school the secretary misplaced the completed questionnaires. Because of this the researcher questionnaire again and this assurance was followed through.

Table 20: Notes on the Administration of Student Questionnaires – MA Spring 2013

Administration of Surveys / Spring 2013
State of Massachusetts

1. MA: Traditional School
 - a. Surveys Administered: March 2013
 - b. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - c. Time frame:
 - i. The completion time per student was around twenty minutes.
 - d. Participating Students: 33 (out of a possible 160)
 - e. Notes
 - i. The low number of students participating in the second round of the surveys can be connected to the low number of permission forms returned. Additionally the number of participants was also hindered by an expressed opinion by the school contact person that some of the students in the year group did not have time to participate in the survey.
2. MA: Alternative School #1
 - a. Surveys Administered: March 2013
 - b. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - c. Time frame:
 - i. The completion time per student was around twenty minutes.
 - d. Participating Students: 7 (out of possible 25)
 - e. Notes
 - i. The low number of students participating in the second round of the surveys can be connected to the low number of permission forms being returned. Additionally, the school contact person was keen on only working with the 25 students that had completed the first round of surveys back in 2011. This limited the number of respondents and led to the low number of responses.
3. MA: Alternative School #2
 - a. Surveys Administered: March 2013
 - b. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - c. Time frame:
 - i. The completion time per student was around twenty minutes
 - d. Participating Students: 75 (out of possible 100)
 - e. Notes:

Table 21: Notes on the Administration of Student Questionnaires - ROI Fall 2011 and Spring 2013

Administration of Surveys / Fall 2011
Republic of Ireland

1. ROI: Traditional School
 - a. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - b. Time Frame:
 - i. The surveys were administered during the month of September and took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to complete
 - c. Participating students: 26 (out of a possible 30)
 - d. Notes
2. ROI: Alternative School #1
 - a. Survey administrator: Independent third party
 - b. Time frame
 - i. The surveys were administered one day in September and took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to complete
 - c. Participating students: 11 (out of possible 11)
 - d. Notes
 - i. The researcher's position in the school precluded him from administering the questionnaires and so, similar to the interviews, a third party was designated to complete the work
3. ROI: Alternative School #2
 - a. Survey administrator: School contact person
 - b. Time Frame:
 - i. The surveys were administered during the month of September and took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to complete
 - ii. Participating Students: 10 (Out of a possible 11)

Administration of Surveys / Spring 2013
Republic of Ireland

1. ROI: Traditional School
 - a. Survey administrator: Researcher
 - b. Time frame:
 - i. The researcher visited the school on one day in May 2013 and administered the surveys. The completion time per student was around twenty minutes.
 - d. Participating Students: 25 (out of a possible 30)
 - e. Notes
 - i. Five of the students were absent the day the surveys were administered
2. ROI: Alternative School #1
 - a. Survey administrator: Independent third party
 - b. Time frame:
 - i. The surveys were administered one day in May 2013. The completion time per student was around twenty minutes.
 - d. Participating Students: 9 (out of a possible 11)

e. Notes

- i. Two of the students were absent on the day that the surveys were administered

3. ROI: Alternative School #2

a. Survey administrator: Researcher

b. Time frame:

- i. The surveys were administered one in May 2013. The completion time per student was around twenty minutes

d. Participating Students: 11 (out of a possible 11)

e. Notes

- i. The researcher visited the school in May 2013 and the entire cohort was available to take part in the survey.

APPENDIX 18

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES (STEPS 5-7)

1. 2011 Questionnaire

a. Academics

i. What did you like best about your last school?

1. Hours
2. Friends
3. Academics
4. School Environment
5. Nothing
6. Blank
7. Teachers
8. School-Based Programmes/Activities
9. Facilities
10. Rules and Schedules
11. Location
12. Extracurricular Activities
13. Completing the Exam

ii. What would you have changed about your last school?

1. Everything
2. Rules
3. Teachers
4. School Facilities
5. Academics
6. Nothing
7. School Environment
8. Other People
9. Extracurricular
10. Food
11. Uniform
12. School Hours
13. Fighting
14. School Management Issues
15. More Clubs and Activities
16. Own Work Practices
17. Strictness
18. Less Work
19. More Breaks
20. More Effort by the Students
21. More Revision Work

iii. What are you looking forward to at your new school/course (either academically, socially or both)?

1. Being Successful in School
2. Graduate
3. Going to College
4. Socialising and Successful in School
5. Getting a Good Education
6. Extracurricular Activities
7. Academic Success

8. Academic and Social Life
9. New Experiences
10. Work Programme
11. Gaining Maturity
12. Extracurricular Activities
13. Improving the School's Reputation
14. School Structure and Atmosphere
15. New Subjects and Activities

b. Career and Educational Aspirations

- i. What lifelong goals do you have for yourself?
 1. Graduate from High School
 2. Go to College
 3. Good Career
 4. To be Successful
 5. Good Career and Family
 6. Raise a Family
 7. Work in the Public Service
- ii. How far would you like to go in education?
 1. Second-Level
 2. Third-Level
 3. Postgraduate
- iii. What job would you like to do once you complete your education?
 1. Professional
 2. Healthcare
 3. Public Service
 4. Sports
 5. Arts
 6. Criminal Justice
 7. Arts and Fashion
 8. Military Service
 9. Tech-related
 10. Self-employed
- iv. Where do you see yourself in ten years?
 1. Family
 2. Successful
 3. Away from Home
 4. Entrepreneur
 5. Professional Athlete
 6. Involved in Arts
 7. Involved in Fashion
 8. Criminal Justice Career
 9. Good Job and a Family
 10. In a Good House

2. 2013 Questionnaire

a. Academics

- i. What do you like best about your current school?
 1. Staff/Teachers
 2. Support
 3. Quality of Education
 4. Community and Activities

5. Work Experience
 6. Food
 7. Friends
 8. Size
 9. Atmosphere/Environment
 10. Getting Paid
- ii. What would you change about your current school?
1. Rules
 2. Food
 3. Teachers
 4. Facilities
 5. Schedule and Rules
 6. Academics
 7. Rules
 8. School Schedule
 9. Teachers/Principal
 10. Students
 11. Size
 12. Length of School Day
 13. Rules/Policies
 14. Environment
 15. Student Behaviour
 16. Student/Teacher Relationship
- iii. Why have you stayed in school?
1. To go to College
 2. Forced to go
 3. Prove People Wrong
 4. Finish High School / Leaving Certificate
 5. Be successful
 6. Parental Influence
 7. Like School
 8. Good Career
 9. Sports
 10. Personal Reasons
 11. Better Future
 12. Familial Influence
- b. Career and Educational Aspirations**
- i. What lifelong goals do you have for yourself?
1. Graduate from College
 2. Travel
 3. Have a Well-Paying Job
 4. Be Positive
 5. Be Successful
 6. Provide for Family
 7. Be Happy
 8. Entrepreneur
 9. Go to College
 10. No Plans
 11. Graduate from College and a Good Career
- ii. What academic goals do you want to accomplish in school?
1. High school / Leaving Certificate

2. College
 3. Postgraduate Level
 4. No goals
- iii. How far would you like to go in education?
1. High school / Leaving Certificate
 2. College
 3. Postgraduate Level
 4. No goals
- iv. What job would you like to do once you complete your education?
1. Construction / Engineering
 2. Healthcare
 3. Office Work
 4. Criminal Justice
 5. Business
 6. Work with Children
 7. Entertainment and Fashion Industry
 8. Architect
 9. Science
 10. Entrepreneur
 11. Business
 12. Public Service
 13. Trade
 14. Entertainment
 15. Lawyer
- v. Where do you see yourself in ten years?
1. In a Job
 2. Graduated from College
 3. With a Family
 4. With a Family and Working
 5. In Education
 6. Successful
 7. Owning a Business
 8. Working and Living in a Foreign Country
 9. Away From Home

APPENDIX 19

LETTER OUTLINING CONDITIONS FOR GAINING ETHICAL APPROVAL FROM TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

12 the Avenue
Innwood
Enfield
Co. Meath

May 25th, 2011

Trinity College- Dublin
School of Education
Education Department
3087 Arts Building
Trinity College
Dublin 2

To Whom It May Concern;

My name is John O'Malley and I am a part-time Ph.D student at Trinity College Dublin. I am writing today in response to the Ethical Approval Committee's decision on May 16th, 2011.

As per the requirements laid down by the Ethical Approval Committee I will comply with the following requests of the Committee:

- 1. P. 14. The statement that the research will "show" a positive impact is unacceptable for research ethical reasons. Research explores, asks questions, inquires but cannot be used to a pre-ordained or pre-determined end.*
- 2. P. 15. A clear rationale will be necessary in the final version of the methodology on the choice and matching of the three institutions in Boston with those in Dublin. It cannot simply be the case that they are chosen or matched on subjective grounds. While convenience sampling is a recognised method for constructing a sample frame, the frame here is so small that all doubts about favouritism of manipulation of matches must be addressed.*
- 3. It is suggested that the case be bounded by eighteen participants. The Ethics Committee would like to see that there is a plan in the methodology for sample attrition with the details of the recovery mechanisms.*
- 4. P. 17 questionnaires. The sample size of the population must be indicated here. The results of learning effects over the period of 2011-2013 should be discussed also in the methodology.*

5. *The research ethics section of the methodology and the conduct of the research should reflect the commitment to anonymity and especially withdrawal. There is not sufficient presently on the latter issue. Also required are some statements on data storage and protection.*
6. *The interview question concerning “models of a good person” do not seem to have a rationale in the research questions and project design and the ethics committee requires that this question be removed from the interview protocol.*
7. *A minor point: the reference to “honours” in...Leaving Cert is dated. These have been referred to for a number of years as “Higher Level” and “Ordinary Level”. To avoid confusion with interviewees, the correct term should be used.*

Once again I thank you for taking the time to review my submission and your most helpful comments. If you have any additional remarks please do not hesitate to contact me at 085.707.3932 or at jomalle3@nd.edu.

Sincerely,

John O'Malley