



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

**EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN IRELAND
THE MATRIX OF INFLUENCES EXPLORED**

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Abstract

In Ireland, five per cent of young people leave school with no qualifications. In all, almost twenty per cent leave without attempting the Leaving Certificate. Early school leaving is associated with poor labour market outcomes, social exclusion and a range of other difficulties. Explanations tend towards the epidemiological and focus on the action of a matrix of risk factors and causal processes. However, this explanatory framework is contested by practitioners and qualitative researchers. Many young people have been encountered in YOUTHREACH who do not conform to the morbid stereotype. The purpose of this thesis is to test the explanatory framework for early school leaving. It accomplishes this through a combination of case study observations of a representative sample of early school leavers in YOUTHREACH centres and interviews with the Observers who conducted the case study observations.

The outcomes confirm the value of the matrix as a general framework for explaining early school leaving. Learning and other needs are found amongst the subjects. Aspects of family functioning feature, as do school-based factors. It appears that schools operate within learning/ behavioural norms and when the relationship between child and school breaks down, the school is unwilling to retrieve it. Risk-taking is much in evidence. Some subjects are clearly already established offenders and live in extreme situations. However, it is also the case that many subjects are law-abiding, some even timid and many families are quite normal. The research also finds unexpected outcomes, for example that a majority of subjects do not have problems of identity or self-esteem. This highlights the shortcomings of the matrix as a basis for resolving the difficulties of individual young people - no element applies to all.

Overall, the 'matrix of influences' helps to explain early school leaving in general, but not the individual process. Every child is different - each individual's pathway is personal, idiosyncratic and incidental. As a result, while preventive measures demonstrate many local and individual successes, early school leaving is at the same level now as in 1997. Why do preventive measures have so little effect? Partly it is because the outcomes reflect Irish society (as do schools). The prevailing explanations are pathological and responses follow suit, but in fact leaving school early may be a rational response to an intolerable situation.

A number of new paradigms are recommended in this thesis as a result, for example *education completion* rather than *school completion*. New paradigms demand changes at the level of approaches, relationships and organisation and a keener understanding of lifelong learning. The formal education system has much to learn from the non-formal system, in youth work, YOUTHREACH and adult and community education. But most fundamentally, the learner must be returned to centre stage.

Chapter 1: Early school leaving

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the background and rationale for the thesis. I will outline the scope of the research project, its rationale and approach. I will outline the general context in which the study takes place. I will also define early school leaving, its incidence in Ireland and will explain why it is perceived to be a problem. I will then discuss the evolution of policy in its regard.

1.2 Background and rationale

Every year in Ireland, one young person in five leaves the schooling system without completing the Leaving Certificate. The proportion rises to one in four for those who leave with less than 5 D grades. If the completion of second-level schooling is a young person's right and represents the fulfilment of her/his entitlement to a minimum standard of education, this is a considerable failure on the part of the education system. For the young people themselves, it represents lack of fulfilment and dissatisfaction with schooling. The alleviation of early school leaving has been identified as a national policy priority in a wide range of documents and rose 'to the top of the social policy agenda in Ireland' during the 1990s (Fleming and Murphy, 2000). According to the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF, 1997:3) early school leaving is 'among the most serious social and economic problems which this state must address'. It is a central challenge for adult education (Ireland, 2000a). Three principal reasons for this concern are identified in the literature. Firstly, it confounds the rhetoric of the education system regarding educational equality. Secondly, early school leavers are at significantly greater risk of unemployment or restriction to low-paid low-skilled and transitory employment. Thirdly, early school leaving is closely associated with social exclusion. A range of other associations also features in the literature. These include lone parenthood, offending behaviour, drug abuse and poor health.

In response to these concerns, a range of measures has been introduced in Ireland. These cluster around two broad objectives, to keep young people in school as long as possible and to provide appropriate options and mechanisms to encourage those who have left to return to education or training. YOUTHREACH is the principal out-of-school response to early school leaving. The author has been its National Co-ordinator since its inception in 1988/9.

YOUTHREACH set out to be learner-centred, flexible, enabling and multi-modal (O'Connell and Stokes, 1989) and largely succeeded in achieving this (ESF, 1996). However, its starting point was the prevailing stereotype of the target group (YOUTHREACH Working Group, 1989:7):

'The majority of early school leavers 'may display a combination of the following characteristics:

- A poor school attendance record, learning difficulties and disciplinary problems
- Insufficient personal and practical skills to cope with the transition from school to the world of work and adult living
- Cannot be readily accommodated within existing mainline education or training provision
- Lack of communications skills, including literacy and numeracy
- Difficulties with physical co-ordination and manual dexterity. Lack of practical skills.
- Poor self-image and lack of self-confidence
- Family problems
- A home environment lacking a tradition of employment/education attainment
- Direct experience of the poverty, ill-health and emotional troubles associated with a severely disadvantaged background
- Experience of crime, vandalism and substance abuse'.

This is typical of the catalogues of risk factors in which the Irish literature abounds (see, for example, Granville, 1982b; Breen, 1984b; Richardson et al,

1989; INTO, 1995; O'Sullivan and Gilligan, 1997; Hannan, 1997; Morgan, 1998a; Houses of the Oireachtas, 1999). However, since 1989 this largely morbid stereotype has been contested on three grounds.

Firstly, from the outset, YOUTHREACH practitioners identified many young people who, while corresponding to certain general patterns identified in the literature, were nonetheless different and individual. A broad spectrum of needs emerged, ranging from the mundane to the extreme. Likewise, many skills and abilities have been revealed. Their occurrence can be idiosyncratic, but many are found at high, sometimes even prodigious, levels (Stokes, 1995; ESF, 1996; Stokes, 2000). Increasingly, these practitioners questioned the prevailing stereotype of an early school leaver arguing that, while the young people had much in common no two were the same (O'Sullivan, 1994, 1998; Stokes 1992, 1995, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2000). Further doubts arose from consideration of the outcomes of certification options, in particular those developed by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVA¹) but also including the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (Ryan, 2000b, 2001, 2003; Stokes, 2000a).

Secondly, these doubts were echoed in the work of qualitative researchers such as Boldt (1994, 1997) and Fleming and Kenny (1998). These writers criticise the 'epidemiological' tendency in research and policy on early school leaving. For example, Fleming and Kenny (1998:8) found their sample of early school leavers to be 'friendly, open and welcoming':

In general, they welcomed us to their homes with confidence and introduced us to parents and other family members. They were impressive for several reasons. They had initiative and in many cases supported each other and their families. They talked about school with insight and clarity. They were earning their own money and in most cases they felt the money was quite good and if they were exploited they could leave and get another job.

Thirdly, notwithstanding considerable levels of research and expenditure throughout the 1990s, early school leaving has remained a structural feature of the Irish education system.

¹ Now FETAC

Early school leaving is the focus of considerable research and analysis. There is broad consensus that it is a complicated process affected by many variables that shape a young person's trajectory through school and beyond. These are gathered and presented in this thesis as a matrix of influences. But beyond this, views diverge. YOUTHREACH practitioners and qualitative researchers alike interrogate the academic and policy orthodoxy. They maintain that while early school leavers have much in common each set of circumstances is unique and that, while the prevailing explanatory framework may explain early school leaving in general, it does not explain why one child leaves school early and another does not. From this perspective, the YOUTHREACH Working Group profile cited above is a melange of causes, associations, characteristics and outcomes. Useful as such a profile might be, for example in justifying the expenditure of public resources, it does not answer two key questions:

- Why does early school leaving exist in general?
- Why does an individual child leave school early?

These are to be the guiding questions for this thesis. The research was conducted at a time of unprecedented social and economic change in Ireland during which increased Exchequer income allowed many measures to be introduced to alleviate early school leaving. Each of these addressed an aspect of the prevailing explanatory framework and started from one or more assumptions regarding the causes of the phenomenon. If the prevailing explanations and assumptions were true to the personal and institutional processes leading to an individual child's leaving school early, then these measures would significantly decrease national rates of early school leaving and the present research would endorse the underpinning analysis. If, on the other hand, the prevailing explanatory framework did *not* capture these personal processes, then early school leaving would remain intractable. Were that to prove the case, the present research would help explain why this substantial national policy commitment and expenditure was yielding a poor return.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The objective of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the processes involved in the phenomenon and how they influence, actively or passively, the decision to leave school. It is guided by the two questions set out above. Towards achieving the objective, the prevailing explanatory framework for early school leaving is first described and then tested through a series of biographical case studies. The thesis is structured as follows:

The first chapter of the thesis sets out the background to the study, defines early school leaving and analyses the reasons why early school leaving is perceived to be a problem. This chapter also contains a review of the general development of policy on early school leaving in Ireland and Europe.

The literature on school failure and early school leaving is reviewed in the second chapter. A new organisation of the explanatory framework is proposed. This describes a matrix of influences thought to impinge on a young person's decision (whether active or passive) to leave school early. Four overarching categories are proposed, *given* or *individual factors*, such as gender or special education needs, *contextual factors*, such as family or school functioning, *developmental factors*, such as transitions and turning points and finally *mediating factors*, such as alcohol abuse and family warmth. This matrix is the framework for the literature review.

The research methodology is described in the third chapter.

The research findings are presented in the fourth and fifth chapters. The fourth consists of biographical profiles of the young people studied. In the fifth, the outcomes are presented using the framework of the matrix of influences.

The conclusions of the research are identified and discussed in Chapter 6. Recommendations regarding the organisation of the education system with a view to preventing or alleviating early school leaving are presented in this chapter. These refer to a number of levels, paradigm, policy, system, institution and practice.

1.4 Scale and limitations

The present research project is unique in scope, scale and approach. The explanatory framework it describes and tests is global, the research field is national and its focus is local and personal. While previous research in Ireland has tested aspects of the framework, none has addressed it in its entirety or confronted it with the lived experience of individual early school leavers on a national scale. That said, certain limitations also apply to the research. Foremost amongst these is the absence of statistics for a number of years. The Annual School Leaver Surveys, which examine the post-leaving experience of school leavers in Ireland, provide data through the 1990s. However, while analysis has been conducted for 2001/2 and 2003 neither is in the public domain at the time of writing. A second limitation arises from the research context. The research is based in YOUTHREACH Centres and surveys programme participants. As I will outline in Chapter 3, this yields clear benefits from the point of view of organising the research. But it also involves certain limitations regarding representation and potential for bias. I will discuss these in Chapter 3.

I will now discuss early school leaving and educational disadvantage

1.5 Early school leaving and educational disadvantage

Early school leaving occurs in the literature as a risk or causal factor in various forms of disadvantage and disaffection *and* as a phenomenon in its own right. It is variously seen as consequence, correlative and cause and is widely accepted as a watermark of disadvantage (Breen, 1984b; Raftery, 1987; Sexton et al, 1988; Hannan & O’Riain, 1993; Kelleher, 1997; McCashin 1997; O’Mahony 1997; Mayock, 2000; Fitzpatrick et al, 2003).

The association between early school leaving and educational disadvantage is not contested. The National Economic and Social Council, (NESC, 1993:133) argues that while in general ‘education has become more accessible and has led to an enormous improvement in the educational level of the average citizen’, this development ‘has not notably benefited the disadvantaged’. In the NESC view, increased participation rates do not necessarily produce a reduction in inequalities of outcome and ‘educational qualifications increasingly determine

one's class position and life chances. In this way inequalities have remained stubbornly entrenched'. (See also Kellaghan et al, 1995). The Annual School Leaver Surveys show that inequalities are transmitted and entrenched even in periods of economic buoyancy (Collins and Williams, 1998). In 1980 the unemployment rate for young people with no qualification was 14 per cent higher than for those with a Leaving Certificate. This difference rose to 48 per cent by 1997. To some degree this is a function of interactions of supply and demand in the labour market. However, CORI (1998) argues that education has begun to replace property as a mechanism by which inequalities are preserved from one generation to the next. The organisation makes three assertions. Firstly it argues that society is highly stratified in a way that ensures that people's status and wealth are determined by the nature of their paid employment. Secondly, it claims that employment prospects are increasingly determined by educational qualifications. Finally, it maintains that educational qualifications are closely related to socio-economic status.

The meaning of educational disadvantage is contested in the literature (Rutter and Madge, 1981; Eurydice, 1994; Kellaghan et al, 1995). It is defined in the Education Act (Ireland, 1998a) as '*impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools*'. However, Boldt and Devine (1998:10) place early school leaving at the heart of their definition of educational disadvantage. For these authors it is 'the condition of possessing minimal or no formal educational qualifications and/or being inadequately trained' to the extent that 'that one's likelihood of securing stable employment is disproportionately limited as compared to one's peers by age'.

I will now discuss the definition of early school leaving.

1.6 Defining early school leaving

A number of closely related terms recur in the literature on early school leaving and educational disadvantage. They include *school failure*, *school drop-out*, *early school leaving* and *unqualified early school leavers*. There is also reference to achievement relative to age, as in *low achiever*. This usage is now

uncommon. In addition, young people may be characterised as *at risk*, which term has largely superseded *underprivileged*. *Youth unemployment*, referring to the phenomenon of unemployment among those aged between 15 and 25 also regularly occurs. All the above terms occur in the literature and all are directly relevant to this enquiry.

The term early school leaver has been used in Ireland since Roseingrave's research in 1971, though Roseingrave himself used it and 'drop-out' interchangeably. The European-funded Early School Leavers' Project which developed in Dublin from 1979-1983 (Granville, 1982b) helped establish the term. It is essentially descriptive and was favoured as more neutral and less pejorative than 'drop-out'. However, Fleming and Kenny's reservation regarding 'early school leaver' is pertinent. They comment (1998:5), that such usage may 'cloud our attempt to understand them' because the term has 'at least a slightly negative ring to it'. However, it is the generally used term in Ireland, and consequently will be used in this thesis. The term appears across such diverse domains as employment, education, training, justice, health and welfare. In most cases the emphasis is on its incidence and associations rather than on its definition. Where early school leaving *is* defined, it is usually as a deviation from a given norm, such as leaving school *before the age of 15* or leaving school *without passing five subjects in state examinations*. For example, the National Youth Federation (1998:22) defines it as 'the voluntary and involuntary decision to leave school without undertaking Junior Cycle examinations and/or prior to the legal minimum age'.

However, definitions change over time and reflect prevailing patterns of education participation and labour market demand. When the authors of the *Investment in Education* report (Ireland, 1966) estimated that 17459 young people left school early out of a cohort of 55,000 in Ireland in 1962/3 the basic qualification was the Primary Certificate (Roseingrave, 1971). These proportions are not far removed from those for young people leaving without completing the Leaving Certificate in the late 1990s. Another definition is advanced in the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Problems of Early School Leaving* (Department of Labour and Department of Education,

1988:3), in which the term early school leaver is used 'to denote those persons, mainly age 15, who have left the educational system without qualifications'. By the mid-90s, the European Social Fund Evaluation Unit (ESF, 1996) was arguing that those who left the education system with 5Ds or less at Leaving Certificate level should be considered early school leavers. This was because, at that time of labour surplus, the Leaving Certificate had become the essential qualification required for all but the most basic employment.

Research conducted by the Youth Employment Agency (1986) introduced the notion of priority groups of early school leavers. The Agency found that 51 per cent of young long-term unemployed had no educational qualifications. Thus, two priority groups were identified: those who had left school with less than 5 Grade Ds in their Intermediate or Group Certificate (**Priority Group 1**) and those who left having successfully completed the Junior Cycle (**Priority Group 2**). The former were found to have significantly greater difficulties in the labour market than the latter. The National Economic and Social Forum (1997:40/1) added two other priority groups, *those still in school* who were to be the target of preventive measures (**Priority Group A**) and *those aged between 18 and 21 who have left school early without qualifications* (**Priority Group C**).

Such definitions are predicated on the achievement of norms that reflect prevailing education participation and labour market conditions and a young person's ability to compete for, and sustain participation in, employment. They do not refer to a young person's needs nor to the factors that might prompt early school leaving. Some authors argue that lack of qualifications is best understood as a watermark of disadvantage rather than the central disadvantage that constrains a young person's participation in the labour market (Stokes, 1995; O'Sullivan, 1999; Doran and Quilty, 1999; Sheahan, 1999). Indeed, official definitions of early school leaving make no mention of a young person's entitlement to complete education to a standard that would equip him/her for adult life, or to compete in the labour market. This is despite Article 42.2 of the Constitution committing the State to guaranteeing that children receive a 'certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social'. The term 'minimum standard of education' is used in the Education Welfare Act (Ireland, 2000).

However, although identified as an issue by Devlin (1999), no official definition of what this might mean has been advanced at the time of writing. As in other aspects of public policy, there is a strong probability that a definition will be incrementally developed in the courts (see for example, O'Dalaigh, 1965; O'Hanlon, 1996 and Barr, 2000).

Nonetheless, in the last decade of the 20th century one group of young people has stood apart in terms of truncated labour market trajectory, communications difficulties, association with a range of anti-social activity and social exclusion – those who leave school with less than 5Ds from Junior Certificate. Both labour market and personal entitlement based definitions capture their general isolation. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis an early school leaver is defined as *a person aged between 15-20, who has left the schooling system before completing, or having unsatisfactorily completed, the Junior Cycle*. This is the target group for YOUTHREACH which is the central context for the research. This definition applies to all further usage of the term in this thesis.

1.7 The incidence of early school leaving in Ireland

Surveys of those leaving second level schools in Ireland are conducted on an annual basis by the Economic and Social Research Institute for the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Reports were published yearly in the 1990s as the Annual School Leavers Surveys (see for example, Williams & Collins, 1997; Collins and Williams, 1998; McCoy et al, 1999). These surveys show the incidence and general pattern of early school leaving in Ireland over time (see Table 1).

As I have already noted, lacunae exist in this research at the turn of the 21st century. Surveys have been conducted for 2001/2 and 2003 but at the time of writing neither is in the public domain. However, educational attainment was surveyed in the national census of 2002 (Ireland, 2002b). This presents a compelling picture of both historical and current educational disadvantage in Ireland. For example, the number of individuals aged over 15 who left school with only primary school education outnumbered those who have achieved a degree or higher by almost 160,000. Of particular interest to the present

research, the 2002 census shows that of 313,186 individuals aged 15-19 living in Ireland, 5,593 left school after primary school or with no formal education. A further 24,173 left with 'lower secondary' as their highest level of education, of whom almost 17,000 were male.

Table 1: early school leaving in Ireland 1990-1998

Year of Survey	Leavers in school year	Leavers with no qualifications	Leavers with Group Cert/ Junior cycle, but no Leaving Cert	All Leavers
1990	88/89	4600 6.8%	12800 19%	67300
1991	89/90	3600 5.4%	11500 17.2%	67000
1992	90/91	5200 7.8%	11700 17.5%	66900
1993	91/92	3400 5.2%	9700 15%	64800
1994	92/93	3300 4.9%	10700 15.8%	67500
1995	93/94	2200 3.3%	10,000 14.8%	67500
1996	94/95	2700 4%	10,400 15.2%	68500
1997	95/96	2200 3.2%	10,800 15.7%	68900
1998	96/97	2500 3.5%	10,800 15.5%	69700

Source: Department of Education and Science, from Annual School Leaver Surveys

These young people leave the schooling system over an extended period of time. It is estimated that in any age cohort 900-1000 do not transfer from primary to post-primary school, of whom a high proportion are Traveller children (Stokes, 2000a). In 1998, three hundred and twenty children left during the first year of post-primary school. Almost 1200 left in second year and 915 left in third year without attempting an examination. Of an age cohort, between 3 and 3.5 per cent leaves with no qualifications A further fifteen per cent leaves after completing compulsory schooling (four per cent with less than 5 Ds in Junior Certificate, five percent with 5 Ds and over six per cent with one or more honour). Another seven per cent leave with less than 5 Ds in the Leaving Certificate (Collins and Williams, 1998; O'Sullivan, 1998; McCoy et al, 1999).

How do these figures compare with other countries? The Joint Committee on Education and Science (Houses of the Oireachtas, 1999:15) argues that 'Ireland has a greater problem with early school leaving than other advanced countries'. In support, they cite the proportion of 17 year olds who are not in full time

education (19 per cent in Ireland, with an EU average of 16 per cent or, if Spain, Portugal and Greece are excluded, 11 per cent). Other authorities contend that exact comparisons are difficult to establish given cultural and systematic differences (Eurydice, 1994; McDevitt, 1998; Bucchi, 1998). Reporting on a Socrates project researching European data Bucchi (1998) finds that statistics are too general and homogeneous data and formats are lacking. Rourke (1994) and Hannan (1998) conclude that the Irish figures are 'around the average' in terms of north-west Europe. The OECD estimates that across its membership between 15 and 20 per cent of young people leave school 'without worthwhile qualifications' with a 'slightly higher proportion' being classed as 'at risk of failing school' (Budge et al, 2000).

1.8 Why is early school leaving viewed as a problem?

Concern with educational disadvantage in Ireland, and in turn early school leaving, originates in the *Investment in Education* report (Ireland, 1966). Its authors drew attention to the low rates of participation in Irish post-primary and higher education by children of unskilled and semi-skilled workers and of unemployed and widowed parents. This was identified as one of the areas in which improved participation might be sought. This objective was achieved. However, the standards required for participation in the labour market and in training and higher education also rose, with the result that essentially the same objective recurred in a range of reports a generation later, such as the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (Ireland, 1995a).

Interest in early school leaving revived with the emergence of widespread and large-scale youth unemployment throughout Europe in the 1970s (Hannan, 1986; O'Sullivan, 1994; Stokes, 1995; ESF, 1996). Previously, there was ready access to a wide range of unskilled employment opportunities. Indeed, before the school leaving age was raised to 15 many of those now identified as early school leavers never entered post-primary schooling (Roseingrave, 1971). In that environment, according to Eurydice¹ (1994), failure at school was 'an educational phenomenon without any real social consequences', whereas now it is 'increasingly perceived as a major social problem'.

Why is this the case? Why is early school leaving the object of enormous expenditure in Ireland and elsewhere? While many concerns are cited in the literature, five are central. The first is the degree to which the Irish education system fails to address persistent (and increasing) inequality of outcome, thereby betraying its own rhetoric, and the degree to which early school leaving is a function of this failure. The second is the way that early school leaving inhibits both initial and continuing labour market participation. This is seen as a factor in poverty and social exclusion, the third reason for concern. The fourth is the degree to which early school leaving correlates with other difficulties. The fifth is the incidence of early school leaving among minorities, particularly Travellers. Inherent in each of these is an acknowledgement of the cyclical nature of disadvantage. Early school leaving is seen as a risk factor for unemployment and social exclusion, which are in turn seen as risk factors for early school leaving in the next generation. I will discuss these below, beginning with early school leaving as a failure of the education system.

1.8.1 Early school leaving as a failure of the education system

As Drudy and Lynch (1993) observe, 'education is a central institution in Irish life'. In this regard, the emphasis on education after the publication of *Investment in Education* (Ireland, 1966) is of seminal importance. Two of the report's main objectives were meeting the needs of a developing economy and attempting equality of opportunity in educational attainment. A rapid expansion of provision followed and the 'free education scheme' was introduced in 1967.

¹ EURYDICE: The Education Information Network in the European Community

In an increasingly competitive environment, public identification of the personal economic benefits of education, both at home and abroad, was of importance in promoting participation (Coolahan, 1981; Hannan and Shortall, 1991; Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Clancy, 1995). In 1980, 60 per cent of an age cohort sat for the Leaving Certificate. By 1995, this had risen to over 80 per cent (Hannan 1998). Where the completion of second-level education is the norm, the active or passive decision by one young person in five to abort her/his education is a matter of concern, particularly when set alongside the apparent consequences of that decision in a range of domains. However, it is the very strong relationship between social background and educational attainment that is most pertinent to our present enquiry (Raftery, 1987; Sexton et al, 1988; Clancy, 1995). As Hannan and Shortall (1991:18) comment, 'equality of opportunity values, which were clearly being emphasised internationally... were obviously being breached by the glaring social class and regional inequalities in educational provision in Ireland'. The European Social Fund evaluated early school leaver measures in Ireland in 1995. The evaluator concludes (ESF 1996:vi) that 'the level of representation of students of lower socio-economic status at second level senior cycle and third level education, betrays the relative inefficacy of the education system to counter the economic and social disadvantage of many of its clients to date'. In their survey of the post-school experience of all leavers in Ireland, According to McCoy et al (1999) participation in vocational training (by school leavers) 'operates to the advantage of those with higher second-level attainments'.

It is accepted that education alone cannot address the inequalities that exist in society. Rather, as the Combat Poverty Agency argues in the introduction to Kelleghan *et al* (1995) 'education policy is an essential part of any anti-poverty programme, since a good quality education is essential to enable young people to escape from poverty'. But at a personal level early school leaving is interpreted as a failure by the system to give young people the basic educational requirements for personal fulfilment, citizenship and employment. For example, Tussing (1981) argues that each young person is entitled to all necessary opportunities to be educated to his/her potential, a view endorsed in High Court

decisions by O'Hanlon (1996) and Barr (2000). Insofar as education is seen as an entitlement, as fundamental to the development of one's potential and to the active fulfilment of private and public roles, early school leaving represents a failure by the system in general and schooling in particular (ESF, 1996).

1.8.2 Early school leaving and labour market participation

The link between early school leaving and unemployment is a dominant theme in the literature. Those with poor qualifications are the first victims of the operation of the labour market and are statistically most likely to become long-term unemployed and socially excluded (Koditz, 1981; Hannan 1986; Breen, 1991; Bates and Riseborough 1993; Ireland, 1998b). The European Commission (1996:17), points out that 'in many areas (of Europe), the rate of unemployment of young people...is up to four times higher amongst those without vocational qualifications'. In Ireland, education is a more crucial determinant of employability than in other countries (OECD, 1993). As Breen (1991) summarises, 'how young people fare in the labour market is very closely linked to the level of qualifications they possess'. Of young people entering the labour market after school, the unemployment rate is 47.5 per cent for those with no qualifications, compared with 9.6 per cent for those with a Leaving Certificate (McCoy et al, 1999), figures that have remained consistent over time (NESF, 1997. Furthermore, having reviewed the statistics on labour market entry from 1980 to 1995, Hannan (1998:30) concludes that the relative position of those with no qualifications worsened over that period, and that 'relative chances do not get better with time...for the least qualified'.

Unqualified early school leavers are likely to spend more time in unemployment, to take up marginal and low-skill employment, to have multiple employers and to become long-term unemployed (Roseingrave, 1971; Breen 1984b; Hannan, 1986, 1998; Williams and Collins, 1997; NESF, 1997; Doran and Quilty, 1998; European Commission, 2000a; McCarthy, 2000). O'Sullivan (1994:28) observes that 'early school leavers are caught in a cycle of disadvantage which is created/structured into the system'. Furthermore, this disadvantage proved persistent even in the high-demand Irish labour market of

the late 90s (McCoy et al, 1999). Following up a cohort of early school leavers in Dublin, O'Sullivan (1999:9) found that

A significant majority of the cohort had a number of jobs after leaving school and many were involved in training schemes on more than one occasion... 49% are currently working in jobs. It is important to note that 27% of these indicated that they see no future in the jobs...

O'Sullivan (1999:15) further found that 17 per cent of respondents were 'not working, not in further training nor back at school'. She points out that, in contrast to the period 1985-1995,

in the current economic climate, getting a foothold in the labour market presents few problems for the more able and confident early school leaver. What seems to be a problem for these young people is progressing much further than the bottom end of the employment market.

The young people themselves appear to realise the consequences of early school leaving (Hannan and Shortall 1991; Hannan, 1996; Boldt, 1994, 1997; O'Sullivan, 1999; McCarthy, 2000). According to Fleming and Kenny (1998:9/10) 'many spoke to us about a growing awareness that their job would not bring them long-term satisfaction' and 'work, which was welcome at fifteen or sixteen years of age, is not adequate a few years later'.

Why are the unqualified so disadvantaged in the labour market? Hannan (1998) notes both structural and demand factors in the labour market commenting, for example, that 'Irish employers appear to pay more attention to level of education and grades received in examinations than in most other countries'. However, Breen (1984b) argues that some of the disadvantages suffered by unqualified early school leavers are persistent regardless of the demand for labour. In his view, their disadvantage is not solely a matter of lack of qualifications – other social and economic factors also work against them.

1.8.3: Early school leaving, poverty and social exclusion

As we have seen, there is a link between lack of qualifications and youth unemployment and this disadvantage persists even in a high demand labour market. But early school leaving is also seen as a general watermark of disadvantage (Stokes, 1995) and a warning sign regarding other problems of

transition to adult life (Kieselbach, 2002). This view is summarised by Charlot (1990, cited by Eurydice, 1994), that 'more than ever, failure at school begets social failure, which means a life of uncertainty, marginalisation and dependence on the structures of social assistance'. The prevailing European orthodoxy is summarised by Nolan et al (1994:xiii), who comment that 'labour market experiences have been shown to be the key influence on the risk of poverty over time, with educational attainment in turn the key determinant of labour market success'.

Social exclusion is a 'more dynamic' concept than poverty (Harvey, 1994). Its proponents focus on underlying causes as much as manifestations and on the structures and processes which exclude persons and groups from full participation in the economic, social, cultural and legal life of society. For example, the Arts Council and the Combat Poverty Agency (1997) point out that those who are unemployed, living on low incomes or working-class attend relatively few arts events. Accordingly, the 13th Recommendation in their report is that 'the Department of Education... should support and co-ordinate arts projects which target early school leavers and those at risk of early school leaving.' Harvey (1994) adds that social exclusion 'is not just about lack of money, but may be about isolation, lack of work, lack of educational opportunities, even discrimination'. The consensus on the role of education is summarised by Haveman et al (1997:420):

Persons with more education tend to have jobs with more prestige, to have better health, to secure the number of children they desire, to be more efficient consumers and to raise children who are more likely to receive more education than those with less education (Haveman and Wolfe 1984).

Seventy five per cent of impoverished households in Ireland are headed by a person with no educational qualifications (NESF, 1997). A further 19 per cent are headed by a person with only junior cycle qualifications. In summary, whether one examines poverty or social exclusion, early school leaving is seen as both cause and consequence.

1.8.4 Early school leaving correlates with many other difficulties

I have discussed the associations between early school leaving and its links with unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. But apart from being demoralising and impoverishing, unemployment also blocks other transitions to independent living, or the attainment of independent adult status (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993). It diminishes self-image, self-confidence and self-belief. A person’s sense of control declines, fatalism and levels of stress increase and there are high levels of alienation (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; Nolan et al 1994). I will now briefly examine nine significant correlations found in the literature.

The first of these is literacy. There is a strong association between early school leaving and low levels of literacy. Morgan et al (1997) conducted the Irish research for the International Adult Literacy Survey. They found that three fifths of those who left school without qualifications were at the lowest level of literacy performance. More than four fifths of this group never used a public library. They were also much less likely to participate in adult education. Morgan (1998a: 81-2) cites the study by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (1987) in which one in eight respondents reported basic skills difficulties, especially in writing, reading and numeracy. ‘The study also found a strong association between experiencing these problems and early school leaving. Almost all (93%) of those who report having problems in basic skills had left school at the earliest opportunity’. Fontes and Kellaghan (1977:17) found children whose fathers were unemployed, invalided or dead were significantly over-represented among those with ‘severe or moderate handicaps in reading and writing’. O’Sullivan (1991) studied literacy levels in CDVEC YOUTHREACH centres and found that 60 per cent of the sample had reading ages below 12 years (see also ESF, 1996). Indeed, O’Sullivan (1999:18) comments that ‘it is difficult to find an objective indicator of the level of support needed to address the literacy problem in YOUTHREACH’.

The second significant correlation is with disrupted transitions to adulthood. As Hannan and O’Riain (1993:10) point out, when unemployment is ‘a labour market destination in itself’ and ‘not just a temporary phase during adolescence’

this 'affects transitions to marriage, parenthood and independent housing'. Early school leaving, linked as it is with unsatisfactory labour market trajectories, impedes satisfactory transition to adulthood, especially for working class youth (Breen 1984b). Changes apparent in post-modern economies, where jobs have shorter lives and individuals find it more difficult to establish sustainable independent domiciles, exacerbate this effect. The unqualified have less personal and social resources to contend with the more fluid model of transition that is emerging in the 21st century (Blasco et al, 2003).

The third significant correlation is with lone parenthood (White, 1996; McCashin, 1997; Fleming and Kenny 1998; National Research Agency, 1998; Mahon et al, 1998). McCashin (1997:32) maintains that 'about 60%' (of young lone parents) 'have a level of education which would bring them to the minimum school leaving age, but not beyond' which, he speculates, would 'lend support to the well-established link between early school leaving and lone parenthood'. He adds, (1997:32)

The broad educational profile of all lone parents parallels to a remarkable degree that of the long-term unemployed. In both cases, about 50% are at or below the No Qualifications/ Primary level and about 75 to 80 per cent at or below the next qualification tier.

Mahon et al (1998:74) found that the majority of women in the lone motherhood group were unemployed. McCashin (1997:viii) links this with their poor qualifications profile:

lone parents' employment status is very strongly related to their educational status: the employment participation rate is 16% for those with no qualifications and 69% for those with third level qualifications.

Regarding the young people they worked with in Kildare, Fleming and Kenny (1998:13) noted that lone parenthood and drugs were 'two key issues', adding that some parents 'expressed concern at the "grown-upness" of their children and how at 14 these young people have a number of sexual and drug encounters'. This association is accepted by service providers such as the Eastern Health Board which targeted its Teenage Health Initiative at 'early

school leavers... in Youthreach, Youthstart and similar programmes' in order to reduce teenage pregnancies in the region (Eastern Health Board, 1997:66).

The fourth significant correlation is with problematic drug use. This is a dynamic and changing area of enquiry. Two points are central to the present enquiry. The first is that general drug use is increasing in Western societies and has moved from peripheral subcultures to general adoption (South, 1999). Mayock (2000:9) argues that in Ireland, 'both empirical and anecdotal evidence suggest that drug use can no longer be viewed as a minority activity', a view supported by McCarthy (2000). However, she adds that while research has established a general profile of 'typical' young heroin users, less information is available on 'soft' and recreational drug users.

The second is that problematic drug use, particularly involving heroin, is associated with social and economic disadvantage and poor educational outcomes (O'Higgins & Duff, 1995; Morgan, 1999 O'Higgins & Duff, 1995; Morgan, 1999; Mayock, 2000). The Eastern Health Board (1997:49) comments that 'of the young people presenting for treatment, thirty percent had left school before the official school leaving age of 15, while another thirty percent had left school at the age of 15'.

Mayock (2000) conducted a study of young people's choices about drugs in inner-city Dublin. She divided her sample into *abstainers*, *drugtakers* and *problem drugtakers*. She found (2000) that 77 per cent of the problem drugtakers had left school without any formal qualification. The reverse was true of the abstainers only one of whom had not completed a public examination.

The fifth correlation of significance is with offending behaviour is what O'Mahony (1998:62-3) describes as a 'remarkably powerful and consistent tendency for early school leaving to be associated with earlier first conviction and the accumulation of a greater number of convictions'. For example, O'Mahony (1993) found that 57 per cent of a sample of prisoners had left school by 14 years of age. He also found that only 11 per cent had stayed on after 16 years of age and only 17 per cent had obtained educational certificates at public examinations. This, he says 'amounts to a clear and stark picture of

educational failure'. O'Mahony (1993:152) adds that insofar as they have experience of work it is 'predominantly in the less well-paid and less prestigious areas and is often of a casual nature, characterised by instability'. His conclusion (O'Mahony, 1993:154) is that

Irish prisoners tend to have a poor educational and employment record, and to come from large, poor, often broken families, living in the worst areas of Irish cities and towns.

These conclusions are reinforced by subsequent research in Ireland (O'Mahony 1997, Bond 1999) and the United Kingdom (Pritchard and King 2000; Pritchard and Butler 2000). In her study of young offenders, Bates (1996) found that 80-100% had regularly been absentees from school. Bond (1999) studied young offenders in Ireland and found school expulsion and early drop-out, as well as a range of other factors, in their backgrounds. O'Mahony (1997:51) cautions against seeing a *causal* connection between early school leaving and crime, pointing out that 'the majority of people from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, and even many from multiply deprived families, do not embark on a criminal career'. But he emphasises the *correlation* between 'educational failure' and crime – only 4.6 per cent of prisoners had the Leaving Certificate, while 52 per cent of all the children of unskilled manual workers attained this standard (O'Mahony, 1997:54; see also National Crime Council, 2002).

The sixth significant correlation concerns psychological distress. Morgan (1998) cites a study by Kaplan et al (1994) which 'indicated a significant damaging effect of dropping out of high school on mental health functioning'. Hannan and O'Riain (1993:142) acknowledge that the effect of educational attainment on psychological well-being has been 'well-documented in international studies, with those having higher levels of education showing lower levels of distress'. However, they add that, when they controlled for employment status, education had no statistically significant effect.

They acknowledge that those with no qualifications were particularly distressed, but in their view 'most of the effects of education on GHQ¹ scores are explained by the differential employment chances of the poorly and well educated'. This appears to be at variance with the causal relationship suggested by Morgan. Some support for their view comes from Browne et al (1998), who reviewed admissions to psychiatric services in Ireland. They found that 'unskilled occupations had high admission rates across health boards, while employers and managers and own account workers had the lowest'. They add (1998:43) that

Admission rates for unskilled occupations were six, eight and seventeen times those of employers and managers in the Mid-Western Health Board, the Midlands Health Board and the North Western Health Board respectively. Admission rates for unskilled occupations in the NWHB were twenty times those of own account workers.

Hannan and O'Riain (1993:198) conclude that 'Overall... those who feel less in control of their own lives show far higher levels of psychological distress than those with high feelings of control. Weak feelings of control are particularly associated with unemployment'.

The seventh significant correlation is between early school leaving and 'behaviour problems', especially when coupled with poor school achievement. Pagani et al (1997) cite Power, Manor and Fox (1991) and their analysis of data from the birth cohort of the 1958 British National Child Development Study. They found that behaviour problems (followed by failure to finish high school) at sixteen years of age were the best predictors of poor physical and mental health in men and women at twenty-four years of age. This finding has been replicated in parallel studies in other countries (Pagani et al, 1997). In a similar vein, Jeffers and Fitzgerald (1997) argue that children from socially disadvantaged homes are more than twice as likely to be 'behaviourally deviant' than those from privileged homes.

The eight significant correlation is between early school leaving and increased health problems, morbidity and mortality rates (Eastern Health Board, 1997;

¹ General Health Questionnaire

Kieselbach, 2002). Differences are also identified in observance of healthy living recommendations. For example, the Eastern Health Board (1997:12) comments that

Those in the higher social classes were more likely to have breast-fed their babies. Only 32% of women in the higher professional group had never breast-fed, compared with 74% in the unskilled manual group. A similar pattern was observed with education level. The higher the level of education, the greater the proportion of mothers who breast-fed.

The final correlation concerns early school leaving, homelessness and emigration. As regards the former, the Eastern Health Board (1997:98) notes that 'when they are homeless, young people have overlapping difficulties associated with traumatic experiences, low education, low skills, housing difficulties and sub-cultural identification'. As to emigration, Harvey (1999:47) notes that 'poor, less skilled and less well qualified people continue to constitute the bulk of Irish emigrants' in the late 20th century. Harvey (1999) also notes the profile of Irish emigrants in the United Kingdom. This reveals that 7 per cent of Irish-born people have a college degree, compared to 11 per cent of the country as a whole, 37.1 per cent of Irish people have no qualifications, compared to 23.7 per cent of the population as a whole.

I will now examine policy responses to early school leaving.

1.9 Policy responses to early school leaving in Ireland

There have been many reviews of the development of Irish education policy, for example Coolahan (1981), Mulholland and Keogh (1990), OECD (1991) and Walshe (1999). While policies on educational disadvantage and early school leaving have been comprehended in general studies, they have also been examined in their own right (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; NESF, 1993; Kellaghan et al, 1995; ESF, 1996; NAPS, 1996; NESF, 1997; National Youth Federation, 1998; Boldt et al, 1998; Rourke, 1999). While there is no shortage of research into educational disadvantage and early school leaving in Ireland, a definitive historical overview has not yet been written. That task is beyond the remit that I have set for this study. Accordingly, I propose to discuss the *general* evolution

of policy on early school leaving in Ireland, noting a number of issues pertinent to the present research *en passant*.

1.9.1: Investment in Education

The role of education in developing economic performance was asserted in the 1966 report *Investment in Education* and frequently reiterated, for example in the White Paper on Manpower Policy (Ireland, 1986) and the reports of NESC (1990, 1993) and the Industrial Policy Review Group (Ireland, 1992b). A general concern with 'educational disadvantage' paralleled the commitment to economic development. Indeed, many reviews of educational disadvantage cite *Investment in Education* as a starting point (Roseingrave, 1971; NESC, 1993; ESF, 1996). As Kelleghan et al (1995:1) point out, 'In the 1960s educational provision was perceived to be the major means of dealing with disadvantage'. Citing Coleman (1968, 1973), they note three essentially American concerns which influenced research and policy on 'educational disadvantage' during the 1950s and 1960s. The first of these was a concern with possible 'loss of talent to the nation' arising from early drop-out. The second was a greater realisation (arising from the interest in civil rights) of the extent of poverty. The third was the application with new vigour (also prompted by the interest in civil rights) of the principle of equality of opportunity, 'which was radically redefined to mean not just equal access to a common curriculum...but equal participation and eventually equal achievement'.

A range of supports developed over time. For example, remedial teachers were deployed to meet the needs of students who were (in the terminology and value system of the time) considered to be 'backward' as a result of poor attendance, adverse home conditions or specific learning difficulties (Coolahan, 1981). Such measures were largely school-based and in the view of Boldt et al (1998:8)

tended to work from assumptions based on American and British theories which... suggest that "disadvantaged" children lack a suitable environment for fostering literacy abilities and positive social attitudes.

Other strategies are identified by Kellaghan et al (1995) and Boldt et al (1998) and cover a spectrum of options in pre-school, primary and post-primary school

and post-school settings. They include the provision of additional educational materials and resources, curriculum development and remedial teaching. However, these measures focused on the improvement of outcomes from schooling for those who remained within the school. Neither those at risk of leaving school early nor those who already had were regarded as a priority at this time. However, they increasingly became the focus of action from the late 1980s.

1.9.2 The Social Guarantee

Irish policy on educational disadvantage in the 1960s and 1970s was largely Anglophone and American and British influences predominate in Irish policy on educational disadvantage among school-going children. A new and fundamentally European influence emerged in the 1980s, prompted by the rapid growth in youth unemployment in Ireland as elsewhere in Europe in the late 1970s and 1980s (O'Connell and Stokes, 1989; ESF, 1996; European Commission, 1996; Welbers, 1998). This time the focus was on those who had already left the school system.

Early school leaving was acknowledged as a European problem since the 1970s (Neave, 1991; O'Sullivan, 1994; D'Iribarne, 1994; European Commission, 1996; Welbers, 1998; Stokes, 2000a, Bainbridge and Murray 2000). It was a central concern of the Community Action Programmes on Transition launched in 1976 (Welbers, 1998) and of the European Social Fund in the guise of actions to combat youth unemployment (Kastrissianakis, 1994). The European Commission regarded unemployment as a structural issue and perceived vocational training as an active instrument for generating new skills and new employment ((O'Sullivan, 1994; D'Iribarne, 1994; Bainbridge and Murray, 2000). In turn, policy regarding provision for early school leavers changed, from emphasising practical skill training with a specific vocational destination to the incorporation of communication skills, adaptability and flexibility as important constituents of training programmes (O'Sullivan, 1994; ESF, 1996).

The 1983 European Council Resolution on Vocational Training Policy guaranteed access for unemployed school leavers to full-time programmes of basic training and work experience. This was launched in 1984 as the Social

Guarantee. As a result, unqualified and unemployed young people became the focus of increasing amounts of funding (O'Sullivan, 1994; ESF Evaluation Unit, 1996). Clemenceau (1994) argues that the new actions also shifted the emphasis from the concerns with human fulfilment and cultural development to 'objectives with a stronger economic character'.

European policy on youth unemployment dovetailed with Irish labour market priorities and also with underlying policy direction on educational opportunity and participation as outlined above. The Social Guarantee was introduced in Ireland in 1984. As noted at 1.6 above, two priority groups of early school leavers were identified. On the training side, an increasing number of Community Training Workshops were established. These were small vocational training institutions, set up and managed by community groups, and targeting disadvantaged young people. They were funded by AnCO, the Industrial Training Authority (O'Connell and Stokes, 1989; O'Sullivan 1994). On the education side, a number of innovative projects explored early school leaving and piloted responses (see Granville, 1982b and Stokes, 1988 on the evolution of policy). As Granville (1982b) reports, two main emphases emerged. The first was preventive and was directed at those young people who were perceived to be at risk of leaving school early. The second targeted those who had already left school, developing an alternative pedagogy, addressing personal development and education and training needs. This latter emphasis broadly paralleled the experience of the Community Training Workshops (Crooks and Stokes (eds.), 1987; O'Connell and Stokes, 1989 and O'Sullivan, 1994).

1.9.3 The 1990s – building a continuum?

The Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 did not change the nature of European vocational training policy (Bainbridge and Murray, 2000). In June 1993, the Council agreed a resolution which re-emphasised the importance of vocational training. Importantly, it also avowed the need to strengthen links between vocational and general education. Thereafter, preventive actions aimed at retaining young people in school qualified for support under the European Social Fund.

The period following the publication of the White Paper *Growth Competitiveness Employment* (European Commission, 1994) saw the introduction of what the European Commission (1996:4) calls 'the Youthstart approach'. Three elements are identified in this approach. The first was constant development of Member State policies 'to improve the position and prospects of young people seeking access to vocational training or their first job'. The second was the use of the 'mainstream ESF' in such a way as to reinforce active labour market policies to create opportunities for young people. The third was the deployment of the EMPLOYMENT-YOUTHSTART Community Initiative to provide 'impetus for transnational innovation and exchange of good practice in a wide variety of projects focused on the guidance, training and employment needs of the most disadvantaged, the least qualified and therefore the most vulnerable young people...'

A further development came in 1996, with the European Year of Lifelong Learning, which built on *Growth Competitiveness Employment* and the White Paper *Teaching and Learning – towards the learning society* (European Commission, 1995a). Bainbridge and Murray (2001:52) assert that 'a significant aspect of the debate on lifelong learning was its focus on the need to adapt existing systems of education and vocational training'. The term and concept of lifelong learning is now well established in Europe. In Ireland, it is the overarching conceptual framework for the White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning For Life* (Ireland, 2000a). This in turn expressed policy on educational opportunities for those who left school early, either in the immediate or longer term.

The European Employment Strategy was launched in 1997. Broad priorities for the EES are established annually in the form of European Employment Guidelines. The guidelines are then incorporated into National Action Plans for Employment that set out what each country intends to do to create more and better quality jobs. Invariably, measures to assist in the integration of young people with poor qualifications feature. European policy also espoused the need to combat social exclusion, alongside improving employment opportunities and

preparation (European Commission, 1995b) and European Social Fund and other Structural Fund measures supported this approach.

Turning to Ireland, policy on early school leaving was reviewed by an Inter-Departmental Committee in 1987. This committee's report (Department of Labour and Department of Education, 1988) built on experience to that date and recommended a twin-pronged approach of prevention and response. Given the difficult economic situation at the time and the urgency of the youth unemployment crisis, the primary emphasis in the 1980s and early 1990s was on those who had left school (O'Connell and Stokes, 1989, Welbers 1998). YOUTHREACH, which was intended to draw all the preceding initiatives together into one over-arching programme, was launched in October 1988 (O'Connell and Stokes, 1989; O'Sullivan, 1994). The programme has been evaluated on a number of occasions (O'Connell and Sexton, 1993; CHL Consultants, 1995; ESF, 1996; Stokes, 2000a). It has also been the subject of academic research (for example, O'Sullivan 1994, Quinn 1995), policy reviews (NESC, 1993; NESF, 1997; Houses of the Oireachtas, 1999), explorations of its experience (Stokes, 1995) and its practice (Stokes, 1999a, 1999b; European Commission, 2000a). These reviews have generally been positive, praising the programme's flexibility and responsiveness to needs, its client-centred approach and the effectiveness of its staff. Equally, many aspects have been questioned, including progression rates (to further education or training), identification and tracking mechanisms to 'capture' those who drop out of school as early as possible. It is the central arena for the present research.

Through the 1990s in Ireland, early school leaving came to be seen as the principal indicator of educational and other disadvantages (Boldt et al, 1998; Rourke, 1999:7). A wide range of initiatives identified its prevention and the alleviation of its effects as a key objective (Rourke, 1999; Fleming and Murphy, 2000). Kellaghan et al (1995) argue that while the major motivation behind various interventions in Ireland up to the end of the 1980s 'seemed to be the promotion of equality of opportunity', changes of emphasis in policy can be seen in the 1990s. In particular, they say (1995:5) that 'equality seems to be interpreted in terms of participation, rather than access or achievement'. They

add that economic concerns are evident in policy intentions to raise educational standards. They also note the new emphasis on targeting resources where problems of inequality and disadvantage exist, on early intervention and on the identification of those in need of intervention. This emphasis finds expression in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage (1996), the Education Act (Ireland, 1998a) and the Education Welfare Act (Ireland, 2000b). Kellaghan et al also identify (1995:6) that

As the focus of disadvantage shifted from individual children, first to families and then to wider communities which children and families inhabit, so too did the search for solutions to the problems posed by disadvantage.

Certainly, the late 1990s saw increased policy emphasis across the board on 'targeting', inter-agency collaboration, partnership approaches, and area-based strategies to tackle disadvantage.

Irish policymakers actively espoused the two major European preoccupations of lifelong learning (WRC, 1997; Department of Education and Science, 2000b) and social exclusion (Harvey, 1994; Ireland, 1997). These policies were addressed through the various Operational Programmes funded under the Community Support Framework 1994-1999 (Ireland, 1994) and the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (Ireland, 1999). In these, provision was made for the various target groups and priorities identified at European level. The concern with lifelong learning was particularly important in providing a conceptual framework for the development of proposals for a national qualifications framework (TEASTAS, 1997a, 1997b).

A general change is discernible from the launch of the Human Resources Development Plan 1994-1999 (Ireland, 1994). In line with policy changes already noted above, the general emphasis increasingly shifted to the second prong of the strategy outlined in 1987, that is preventive measures aimed at those still in school. By way of example, the report of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) Working Group on Educational Disadvantage (1996:22-3) sets out 'principles in challenging educational disadvantage'. These include 'positive discrimination', 'prioritisation of preventive actions', 'emphasis on the core skills of literacy and numeracy' and 'interventions in the context of a

continuum which begins at pre-school level and continues through to adulthood'. The report sets out a strategic framework and addresses the question of budgetary policy. In this, the need to allocate 'significant extra resources' to 'actions to prevent early school leaving' and to 'the expansion of second chance options' is asserted.

Broadly speaking, the first of these has been more vigorously pursued than the second, principally through the development and entrenchment of existing measures such as such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, the 8-15 measure and the School Retention Initiative (see Ryan, 1998, 1999; Conaty, 2000). The Irish Government set a target of 90% retention to Leaving Certificate in a number of key policy statements, such as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (Ireland, 1997). Resources devoted to these measures increased significantly throughout the 1990s, and other initiatives were added, such as the School Retention Scheme (Department of Education and Science, 2002). As regards 'second-chance options', additional resources were made available to adult education, and particularly adult literacy, pursuant to commitments entered into in the National Development Plan (Ireland, 1999). This expansion was not sustained in the face of budgetary constraints in 2002 and 2003.

However, despite these and other measures, early school leaving did not decline in the final years of the 1990s. On the contrary, it increased. The Annual School Leaver Surveys (for example, Collins and Williams, 1998; McCoy et al, 1999) reveal that retention to the end of Senior Cycle in Ireland peaked at 84 per cent in 1996 before retreating to 81 per cent in 1998. This pattern is confirmed by census data from 2002 (Ireland, 2004). Some of this may be attributable to labour market forces – the School Leavers' Surveys show youth unemployment in decline during this period (from 21 per cent in the early 1990s to 11.5 per cent in 1997). Relatively unqualified young people who had 'parked' in senior cycle school programmes during the period of economic recession, began to enter the labour market directly. This is consistent with labour market experience in other countries – in times of labour surplus, young people spend

longer in education and attempt higher levels of qualification in order to compete (Budge et al, 2000).

Overall, a fault-line may be discerned between the two poles of prevention and response. This reflects not only the prevailing culture of the education system in Ireland, but also the principal external influences on Irish policymaking on early school leaving, one essentially English-speaking and academic, the second European and vocational.

1.9.4 Educational policy and Travellers

That educational disadvantage is concentrated among Travellers in Ireland has been well documented (Gmelch, 1975; Ireland, 1995b; Coughlan et al, 2001). Education policy towards Travellers is controversial and has altered course significantly over four decades. Three major phases can be identified.

The first phase followed the report of the Commission on Itinerancy in 1963. This was established as a result of the increased visibility of Travellers in urban areas in the generation after World War II when industrialisation, urbanisation and the mechanisation of agriculture undermined the traditional Traveller way of life. The Commission argued in favour of the assimilation of Travellers into the settled community. This policy was pursued between 1970 and 1983. The Department of Education's response was to propose remedial and compensatory education for Travellers to take various forms thought appropriate to different patterns of travelling.

The second phase in education policy on Travellers was initiated by the report of the Travelling Peoples' Review body. This decided in favour of integration rather than segregation, and assimilation was abandoned. Increased assertiveness by Traveller groups, in the 1970s and 1980s began to challenge prevailing policy.

The third phase was signalled by the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (Ireland, 1995). In this document, the Department of Education accepted that Travellers were a minority group with a separate culture and traditions. It marked a change in policy emphasis from integration to inclusiveness and interculturalism, although integration remained the overarching policy

objective. The White Paper expressed the objective that within ten years 100 per cent of Traveller children of 'second level, school-going age' would complete junior cycle and 50 per cent would complete senior cycle. This approach was developed by the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage (1996:13), which argued that

Where special provision within mainstream education exists, it can lead to social isolation and curricular discontinuity between traveller and "settled" pupils: access to full participation in the curriculum can also be restricted for Traveller children.

In its 'principles in challenging educational disadvantage', this document notes the range of measures proposed to promote the integration of Traveller children 'into mainstream' at primary and post-primary level. It cites key recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (Ireland, 1995b) which criticised the multiplicity of organisations involved with Travellers. By way of example it noted that, apart from the Inspectorate and the Psychological Service, no less than six different sections of the Department of Education were funding Traveller education. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group NAPS report (1996:33) proposed that education and training provision for Travellers should 'reflect and respect the culture and ethos of the Travelling community'. It also argued that a National Co-ordinator should be appointed for the Senior Traveller Training Centres, a proposal that was implemented. Other measures towards the integration of children of Travellers into mainstream education were introduced in the late 1990s. Nonetheless, at the time of writing, integration appears to be as controversial as assimilation¹.

1.9.5 Recent critiques

Contemporaneous with the research conducted in this thesis, a number of reviews have been conducted of Irish policy and provision on educational disadvantage and early school leaving. Broadly speaking, they accept the

¹ For example, newspapers in April and May 2001 reported protests and walk-outs by parents from both the settled community and settled Travellers in Rathkeale over the inclusion of the children of 'itinerant' Travellers in age-appropriate classes, i.e. classes with children of the

general intentions of the Department of Education and Science of combating these phenomena, but criticise the effectiveness with which this was being done.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) was launched by the Irish Government in April 1995. As part of the NAPS consultative process, a Working Group on Educational Disadvantage was formed, to which I have referred in the foregoing. This group engaged in a consultative process and produced a synthesis strategic statement. The Working Group's final report identifies a range of key strategies. Of particular importance to the present research is the acknowledgement of the need for 'a comprehensive range of policies and actions to **prevent early school leaving and educational disadvantage**' (report's emphasis). The report advocates 'the promotion of a culture of inclusiveness...and the development of strategies to combat the cultural and educational barriers which can contribute to under achievement in school, alienation and poverty'. The report makes the case for additional expenditure on education to combat educational disadvantage. In so doing, it represents an acceptance by the national authorities that problems existed at the time of writing.

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) reviewed policy on early school leaving in Ireland (NESF, 1997). Its report identifies structural weaknesses in provision to alleviate early school leaving. The Forum proposes new priority target groups (see 1.6) and new levels of expenditure. It acknowledges (1997:43/4) the 'resource constraints' under which Government operates. However, like the NAPS Working Group, NESF argues that 'the necessary funding for this investment in education and training must be made available through the allocation of additional resources to this area and through a re-ordering of priorities on public expenditure'. The Forum recommends a mix of 'prevention' and 'cure'. It makes recommendations on the initial teacher training process 'to take on board' (sic) the different life experiences of disadvantaged children and families. It calls on the Department of Education

same age. Protesters alleged that this was inappropriate and was retarding the development of the majority of children.

and Science to 'set a target to eliminate early school leaving before completion of the Junior Cycle within the next five years'. Regarding preventive actions, the Forum makes recommendations concerning pre-school provision, primary schooling, truancy, the transition to secondary school, curriculum, the examination system and alternatives to school. Regarding what it termed 'cures', it makes recommendations concerning YOUTHREACH, support services for that programme, employment and second-chance education.

Boldt and Devine (1998:10-11) reviewed the literature on early school leaving, and in so doing also reviewed policy. In their view, 'the present national policy' on educational disadvantages 'seems to cover three areas'. These were 'developing partnerships and co-ordinating government services', 'targeting and re-structuring resources and provision within the formal school system' and 'addressing the problem of early school-leaving and the needs of early school leavers'. They reflect on the various developments under these headings and conclude (1998:35/6) that 'the limited number of interventions undertaken under the auspices of the Department of Education does not reflect well on its stated policies on educational disadvantage'. They add that many of the interventions found outside the education system were 'initiated in response to particular needs, many of which were not being met within the formal system'. They argue that such initiatives (which are often funded on a pilot project basis) should be 'mainstreamed'. Boldt and Devine acknowledge that interventions aimed at addressing educational disadvantage may be 'deflecting attention from a system of education that is failing a large minority of students'. They endorse interventions which adopt 'an holistic approach', that is those that see educational disadvantage 'as part of wider "failures" within society beyond the education system.

Rourke (1999) is less critical. He accepts (Rourke, 1999:11) that 'Countering educational disadvantage has occupied a central position in Irish public policy for the past 15-year period'. He argues that there is 'a clear understanding' of the links between educational failure and later life difficulties, and of the need to develop strategies and programmes to encourage young people to stay in school longer and provide positive alternatives for those who leave the system

early. In Rourke's view, 'successive Ministers for Education have placed countering educational disadvantage at the top of their policy objectives' and he lists a range of initiatives in support of this view (Rourke, 1998: 11-14). Rourke also discusses the contribution to preventive education from 'local resources'. He cites the experience of projects and initiatives developed by local partnerships. Some of these are similar in outline to activities taking place under the measures he lists under 'national policies and strategies'. He does not address the potential for confusion and duplication arising from the process whereby successive Ministers announce 'innovations' in parallel with those launched by other national bodies, or local groupings. This was addressed, however, in the Report of the YOUTHREACH 2000 Consultative Process (Stokes, 2000a: 13), in which respondents argued that

There was too little co-ordination of the many initiatives and services targeting disadvantaged areas at national and especially local level. This, it was maintained, led to inconsistencies and lacunae in information and progression pathways. It also created a conflictual climate of competition between providers.

Rourke also notes that 'the intergenerational and cyclical nature of educational underachievement and early school leaving would suggest that interventions...would need to be intensive and long-term', adding that

The challenge of "turning around" decades and generations of educational disadvantage and under-achievement is not an easy one and will require strategies which are sustained, long-term, co-ordinated and integrated.

These views are widely supported. However, the Joint Committee on Education and Science (Houses of the Oireachtas, 1999) is critical of the implementation of policy across the board. For example, they note that 'the two main interventions funded by the Department of Education and Science are the designation of schools as disadvantaged and the provision of remedial teaching'. Both programmes, they comment (1998:2) are 'spread thinly across such a large number of schools that their impact is diluted'. The Committee also notes that 'current policy is to apply additional remedial resources to schools with no remedial service rather than to disadvantaged schools, where it

was originally targeted'. In an additional comment, they point out that this process is happening 'even though the programme has been found to have little or no impact in disadvantaged schools as yet'.

It is clear that the Joint Committee on Education and Science is not impressed with the implementation of policies. It comments (Houses of the Oireachtas, 1999:2) that 'there has been a pattern where programmes first introduced to give schools in difficult areas a leg up, are gradually extended far more widely and the idea of targeting is lost'. The Joint Committee adds that 'only the Home/School Liaison Service is on a significant scale and is being extended to all disadvantaged schools'. The potential resource implications of expanding 'these programmes' is also noted.

The Committee comments (1999: 2) that 'the lack of support services...is a constant complaint from schools'. It makes various recommendations, including changes in the funding regime for schools, changes in the examination system, and so on. Some of these recommendations (for example second chance opportunities for early school leavers) are also proposed in the White Paper on Adult Education (2000a). The Committee is also critical of the collection of data on absenteeism, truancy and drop-out. It comments (1999:14) that 'the statutory obligation to collect data on absenteeism under the school Attendance Act has long been abandoned by the Department of Education'. The Committee adds that that the last complete survey was in 1984, but members are cynical as to how accurate such figures would be in any event.

Finally, the YOUTHREACH programme and the general framework of policy and services in which it is nested are reviewed in *YOUTHREACH 2000 A Consultative Process – A report on the outcomes* (Stokes, 2000a). This is accomplished through a consultation process with the various stakeholders involved in the programme's delivery. The intention is to promote change and development to maintain relevance in the face of changing circumstances. In relation to national policy, the report calls for greater cohesion, availability and consistency of services and supports, more flexible and sensitive funding mechanisms (for example to provide resources consistent with need) and an emphasis on equality of outcome above other forms of equality. A number of

criticisms of the programme also emerged – these referred to all levels and emphasised the importance of consistency, clarity, quality, responsiveness, monitoring and publicity.

1.10 Issues of interpretation, correlation and causation

Reflecting on the foregoing, the incidence of early school leaving, the reasons why it is a matter of concern and the evolution of policy responses, four problems arise in the literature.

The first problem is the frequent association, and indeed downright confusion, in the Irish literature between risk factors and characteristics. A great deal of research conducted in Ireland arises from the concerns identified in 1.8 above. In Boldt's view (1994:1-3), the intention has been to identify 'the characteristics of early school leavers to see the extent to which these relate to the incidence of early school leaving'. He asserts that this is because the objective is 'to identify "at-risk" students in order to establish intervention programmes and to offer assistance, so that a greater number of young people is retained in school'. Boldt (1994) argues that while such studies provide important and useful information on early school leaving, they do not specify precisely the nature of the relationship between certain variables and early school leaving. He describes this approach as 'epidemiological', that is, one in which early school leaving is analogous to disease. Stokes (1999a, 1999b) and Mayock (2000) agree. By way of example, one notes Hannan's references to 'corrective' measures (Hannan, 1997) and the distinction made by the NESF (1997) between 'prevention' and 'cure'. In this approach, according to Boldt (1998:55), 'it is the characteristics of people themselves which put them at risk (as is the case in the identification of medical problems)'. And indeed, as noted in 1.3 above, the Irish literature abounds in lists of risk factors. Thus, for example, Granville (1982b) suggests five significant indicators for early school leaving – poor school attendance, poor school achievement, age variance (pupils who are older than their classmates), poor self-image and low motivation, and limited family support. Hannan (1997) notes Gender, Social Class and Region. Breen (1984b) classifies 66 per cent of early school leavers

using four variables, social class, employment status, school type and geographic region. Breen also identifies (1984b:112) the following characteristics for early school leavers –

higher proportions of males, of pupils with fathers in manual work, of vocational and community/ comprehensive pupils, of pupils in urban schools and of pupils aspiring to manual jobs...in addition, (they) are, on average older.

These 'risk factors' are usually seen to be part of a broader pattern of disadvantage. Many overlap with those for anti-social and offending behaviour (Graham and Bowling, 1995; Farrington, 1996; Perfect and Renshaw, 1996). The Inter-Departmental Committee report (Department of Labour and Department of Education, 1988) referred to the 'multiple deprivation of this group'. Problems were seen to relate to other such areas as health, housing and the general economic environment. (See also Houses of the Oireachtas, 1999).

Boldt (1998: 55-9) identifies three problems with this 'epidemiological' approach. Firstly, He questions the concept of a student being 'at risk', arguing that in fact all students are at risk of leaving school early. By way of example, he notes that whereas living in an urban working class area is a predictor of early school leaving, 'more people in this situation remain in school than leave'. (See also O'Mahony, 1997; Mayock, 2000). Secondly, he argues that focusing on student characteristics means that relevant characteristics of society and schools are left unexamined. Thirdly, he argues that preventive programmes are usually based on the belief that the variables associated with early school leaving are in fact the causes of early school leaving. This means that they focus on addressing or 'correcting' the variables, i.e. the student characteristics. A further difficulty with the approach may be inferred, though it is not identified by Boldt. It is the assumption that the young people themselves are the problem.

The second problem with the Irish literature is the tendency to confuse correlations and risk factors on one hand and causal processes on the other. By way of example, in reflecting on the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey Morgan notes (1998b:113) the 'unexpected' finding 'that poor literacy performance is associated with lesser involvement in a range of non-literacy

activities including participation in sport, community activities and going to films, plays and concerts'. This, he says, 'is quite remarkable, since it suggests that literacy has a role not only in education and work but in the kinds of leisure activities in which people participate even when they are not directly related to literacy per se'. He concludes his comments on this as follows:

It would seem therefore that failure in literacy is a restrictive influence extending to several domains of people's lives. Thus, the economic argument about early school leaving is not the only concern and arguably not the most important.

Here we can see an association being interpreted as a causal relationship and a consequent suggestion that addressing early school leaving and low levels of literacy achievement would also increase participation in other 'domains of people's lives'. But a causal relationship is not established. Many authors (for example, Rutter and Madge, 1981; Boldt, 1994, 1998; O'Mahony 1997; Mayock 2000) caution against such conflation of correlation and causation. Boldt (1994:9) points out that 'the variables that correlate with early school leaving are not necessarily the cause of early school leaving'. According to Rutter and Madge (1981:309), the process of causation usually involves a chain of circumstances 'no one of which can reasonably be described as basic'. They continue, 'in most cases causation involves an interaction between several different types of influence' and 'different mechanisms are involved in the transmission of different types of disadvantage'. Rutter and Smith (1995:23) point out that 'interactive effects and indirect mechanisms' must also be taken into account because 'many causal pathways involve multiple phases or multiple steps' and 'it is usual for causation to involve multiple factors that may interact in synergistic ways'.

The third problem with the Irish literature on early school leaving is that 'education' and 'school' are frequently taken to be coterminous, especially in polemical commentaries and policy documents. However, it is now generally accepted that education is a lifelong process that takes place in a range of contexts. For young people, as NESc points out (1993:132),

Educational experiences come from formal schooling, the family and the community and students who are educationally disadvantaged have been exposed to inappropriate educational experiences in at least one of these three educational domains.

This much has been recognised by policy measures in Ireland such as the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme (Conaty, 2000). However, the distinction between 'school' and 'education' has been blurred by the difficulties in measuring the impact of such initiatives and the relative ease of quantifying early drop-out from schools. The association between a range of difficulties and lack of qualifications and/or early school leaving is not disputed. But what is the central disadvantage for the individual? Is it having left school early or is it a complex web of disadvantages, of which educational underachievement is one, but not necessarily the most significant? If the latter, while there is considerable merit in developing strategies to retain young people in school, confusing 'education' and school' is likely to emphasise the personal aspects of early school leaving, rather than the social or institutional (see, for example, Richardson et al, 1989).

The fourth problem with the Irish literature is the general assumption that early school leaving is always a bad thing, and that its prevention is therefore an overriding priority. Thus, there is a preoccupation with keeping the person in the school for as long as possible. It is found in myriad reports and reviews and has provoked policy commitments such as that contained in the White Paper on Education (Ireland: 1995b) and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (Ireland, 1997) to increase retention to 90% to the end of Senior Cycle. This in turn has generated the range of preventive measures referred to above. This interpretation of the evidence ignores the presence of personal factors and cultural and social class influences. It takes no account of prevailing macro and micro-economic and social forces and employment patterns. It ignores the possibility that a person leaving school after Junior Certificate into an apprenticeship would be immeasurably better off than if s/he persisted with an unsatisfactory school experience. It also ignores the possibility that leaving school early might in fact be a rational, positive and indeed life-affirming

decision by a young person (Boldt 1998; Fleming and Kenny 1998). As Boldt (1998:59) comments

It should be remembered that the decision to leave school early is sometimes an appropriate one; that the formal school system is not the best system for everyone; that there are a number of students in school who are 'disengaged' and not benefiting from their experience; and that many early school leavers get on well with their lives and do not regret their decision.

1.11 Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I set out the background to the thesis and outlined its structure. I defined early school leaving and outlined its incidence in Ireland. I asked why early school leaving was a matter of concern. I advanced four broad reasons

- failure of the educational system to fulfil the young people's entitlement to (what is now understood to be) a minimum standard of education
- the labour market experience of early school leavers
- the likelihood of their social exclusion and
- the degree to which early school leaving correlates with other difficulties.

Why does one young person leave school early and another not? Having reviewed the position in six European countries, Smyth and McCabe (2001: 30) came to the conclusion that 'not enough is known about the particular educational experiences of the most economically or socially disadvantaged groups in society'. Boldt (1998:56) suggests that the variables associated with early school leaving 'should be studied in more detail to understand better their relationships to early school leaving in order in order to shed more light on the process of early school leaving'. This is the intention behind this research. In the next chapter, I will examine the literature on these 'influences, factors and events', constraints, economic forces, preferences and processes, that are implicated in early school leaving to one degree or another.

Chapter 2: Why do young people leave school early? Exploring the matrix of influences

2.1 Introduction

Early school leaving is the subject of considerable research, reportage and polemic. This literature has itself been the subject of a number of major reviews, for example by Rutter and Madge (1981), Eurydice (1994), Rutter and Smith (1995), Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, eds., (1997), Boldt and Devine (1998) and Costello (1999). Eurydice (1994:47) refers to an 'enormous reservoir' of research which 'abounds in studies and theories trying to interpret the phenomenon of failure at school, analysing the situations which give rise to it and defining its causes'. However, early school leaving also features either as cause, consequence or association in a wider body of literature on educational disadvantage, school effectiveness, youth unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, drug use and offending behaviour, family functioning and lone parenthood. This body of writing offers considerable additional enlightenment regarding the matrix of influences and causal processes involved in early school leaving. I will review this literature in this chapter. Towards this end, I will propose a framework within which to review the influences and causal processes involved in early school leaving. This framework comprehends the explanatory framework found in the literature. The review will involve a range of topics, disciplines and perspectives. I will begin by briefly noting the views of early school leavers and their teachers, peers and families on the reason for leaving school early.

2.2 The young person's perspective

Beginning with the views of young people fulfils two functions. Firstly, it establishes that every actor in the process has her or his own perspective or explanation for early school leaving. Secondly, it reminds us that the young person's experience is central to understanding her/his decisions, whether active or passive (Stokes, 2000b). Young peoples' views of education are addressed in a substantial body of research both internationally (Willis, 1977; Banks et al, 1992; Bates and Riseborough, 1993) and in Ireland (Hannan & Shortall, 1991; Boldt,

1994, 1997; ESF, 1996; Fleming and Kenny, 1998; Doran and Quilty, 1999; O'Sullivan, 1999; Mayock, 2000; Conboy, 2000). Two key themes emerge from this literature. The first is that whereas researchers, practitioners and policymakers regard early school leaving as a problem, the young people do not. Although objectively aware that dropping out of school weakens their position in the labour market and their long-term prospects one person in five chooses to do so (Gambetta, 1987; Hannan and Shortall, 1991; Boldt, 1997; O'Sullivan, 1999; Fleming and Kenny, 1998). But they do not regard their early school leaving as problematic. On the contrary, in their view it was their school experience that was the problem (for example, see Hannan and Shortall, 1991; Boldt, 1994, 1997; Quinn, 1995; ESF Evaluation Unit, 1996; Hannan, 1998). Indeed, as Fleming and Kenny (1998:6) observe, they regard leaving school as positive, that they 'have clearly launched themselves into the adult world, and stated loudly and clearly that they will not be part of an institution (the school system) which does not meet their needs' (see also Boldt, 1997). These findings are consistent with the literature on transition (for example, see Hannan and O'Riain, 1993) in which completing school is one of the key stages in the adoption of an adult identity. They are also endorsed by other research, such as the 'Shannon Talent Bank Project', which brought groups of retired people and young people together with the aid of a facilitator. One of their conclusions was that 'we would not remain in an organisation that consistently labels us as failures' (King, 1996:7-8), suggesting that leaving school early is a rational decision for many.

The second theme is the dissatisfaction of the young people with their school experience. For example, O'Sullivan (1998) followed up a cohort of early school leavers in Dublin. Two out of three of these young people cited school-based factors in answer to the question 'why did you leave school?' Their answers are presented in Table 2 below. Asked what might have influenced them to stay in school, 26 per cent answered 'nothing, I would have left anyway', such was their level of alienation. Indeed, Mayock (2000) comments that 'an overwhelming sense of indifference towards schooling and education was an equally powerful factor (to their negative experience of teachers) underlying young people's decision to leave school'. These findings are paralleled in quantitative research (for example Doran and Quilty, 1998) and qualitative research (Boldt, 1994;

ESF, 1996; Thornton, 2000; Mayock, 2000). They are also found in other countries and societies (Willis, 1977; Rumberger, 1987; Riseborough, 1993; European Commission 2000a).

I did not like school	37%
I did not get on with the teachers	16%
I was expelled/suspended	14%
Wanted a job/offered a job	17%
Wanted/offered an apprenticeship	4%
I was bullied	4%
Family problems	3%
Financial problems	2%
Friends left	1%
Total	100%

While many young people identify a particular incident that finally precipitates their leaving school (Rumberger, 1987; Boldt, 1994) the majority of Mayock's sample reports a constellation of school difficulties. They do not subscribe to the notion that school is 'a necessary prerequisite to personal fulfilment' (Mayock 2000:27). However, as Boldt (1994) points out, the young people themselves also acknowledge positive aspects of schooling and Mayock emphasises that even the most difficult young people 'did not renounce the importance of education and learning. Most, in fact, regretted having left school at an early age'. This is consistent with the comment from European Commission (2000a:6) that, whereas 'these young people may feel antipathy towards school and mainstream systems, they are not alienated from education or from learning'.

Their teachers, peers and parents identify other influences and causes (Boldt, 1994). These include domestic disharmony, family regard for education, family resources (cultural, educational and financial), unemployment, personal disabilities and 'psychological and psychiatric factors' and the 'irrelevance of the curriculum'. Also, the need for supports to compensate for these and other disadvantages has been identified in a wide range of reports and policy initiatives. (On these issues, see Granville, 1982b; Crooks and Stokes (eds.),

1988; Stokes, 1988a; Boldt, 1994; INTO, 1995; ESF, 1996; McSorley, 1997; Cassidy, 1998; Rourke, 1999; Conaty, 2000).

I will now turn to the general explanatory themes found in the literature and propose a general framework through which to examine the literature regarding the 'matrix of influences' involved in early school leaving.

2.3 Towards a matrix of influences and causal processes

There is broad agreement that early school leaving is a complex and multi-dimensional process affected by many variables and factors (Gambetta, 1987; Boldt 1994; Haveman et al, 1997; Fleming and Kenny, 1998; Mayock, 2000; O'Shea and Williams, 2001). Boldt (1994:52-3) found that young people who leave school without qualification 'do so for a variety of reasons' and Gambetta (1987:186) concludes that the young people 'evaluate rationally the various elements for making educational decisions, which include economic constraints, personal academic ability and expected labour market benefits'. He adds that personal characteristics, socially random influences, reference groups and class biases can all distort preferences and life-plans. The operation of these 'variables', 'factors' and 'elements' comprises the explanatory framework for early school leaving.

Some authors, for example O'Shea and Williams (2001), group explanations of early school leaving into two schools of thought, *individualist* and *structuralist*. The first of these refers to 'a set of variables relating to the child, to his/her family circumstances and community' including 'issues of poverty and exclusion and the inter-generational transmission and perpetuation of same through the education system'. The second school of thought relates to the 'institutional or structural context of the school itself'. Many themes and sub-themes fall within this general framework, not to mention mutually contested theories and explanations. The same themes occur in a framework proposed by Fleming and Murphy (2000:28, after Sproule et al, 1999). These authors elaborate on those explanations described by O'Shea and Williams' as 'individualist' and add a fourth and global assumption, 'exploitation'. This framework developed out of a study of responses to early school leaving in the Dublin area that attempted to

identify underpinning ‘assumptions’ and implicit or explicit explanations for early school leaving as follows:

An outline of assumptions underpinning early school leaving measures in Dublin	
Assumption	Explanation
Essentialism	A measure based on an essentialist paradigm believes that the problem is personal – low ability or low self-esteem
Consensualism	A measure based on a consensual paradigm assumes that there is a cultural deficiency in the family, group or community from which the pupil derives
Credentialism	A measure based on credentialism would argue that the problem lies within the organisation of the schooling and administrative system – what we might call a social deficiency (inflexible structures, curriculum design, teacher training, etc.)
Exploitation	Finally, a measure that takes as its starting place the notion of exploitation would argue that the cause of early school leaving can be located in the broader structures of Irish society (and)... “arises from the need to protect an economic system based on private profit” (Sproule et al 1999:39). The problem here is economic.

However, other influences and explanations are also found in the literature, many of which are not built around the notion of deficiency. Of these, three are of particular significance in the development of a matrix of influences and causes:

- Ecological (contextual) influences and processes. I will discuss this at 2.5 below;
- Developmental factors, transitions and disruptions. I will discuss these at 2.6 below;
- Mediating factors – I will discuss these at 2.7 below.

Based on the foregoing, I propose to combine the general thematic frameworks and models outlined above into a matrix comprising given, contextual, developmental and mediating factors (ie risk and resilience), as follows:

Given (individual) factors	Factors the young person is born with, such as gender, ‘intelligence’, learning needs, ethnicity
Contextual (ecological) factors	Family, kin, peers, neighbourhood, school, social class
Developmental factors	Growth, development and transitions; the influence of disruptions; adolescence
Mediating factors	Susceptibility and resilience

Using this framework, I will now examine the literature on early school leaving to examine the influences and causal processes involved in early school leaving.

2.4 Given (individual) factors

A range of given factors recurs in the research literature. Of these the most significant are gender, ethnicity, intelligence and learning difficulties. While family and social class are also 'given', they are discussed as contexts and ecosystems at 2.5.1 and 2.5.6 below. I now turn to gender.

2.4.1 Gender

Males and females have very different experiences regarding early school leaving. Two young males drop out of school without qualifications for every female. This is part of a general pattern of divergence between males and females during adolescence. It applies to all levels of education and is replicated internationally (Merton, 1996). Evans (1996) reporting on a survey of 30,000 British adolescents pointed out that

- The motivation of boys falls from year 8 onwards;
- By years 10 and 11 some 40 per cent of pupils belong to three school groups known as the disappointed, the disaffected and the disappeared and schools have little or nothing to contribute to the development of these pupils' self-esteem and self-respect. These groups are comprised predominantly of boys.

Disadvantaged young men are more likely to be heavy drinkers, to use drugs and tobacco (Silbersein et al 1995) or to spend time in prison, whereas their female counterparts are more likely to have become single parents (Gregg and Machin, 1997). Boys living in a family with a female head are significantly more likely to experience academic and behavioural problems than girls (Lipman and Offord, 1997). This may be caused by poverty rather than single parenthood (see also Carnegie Corporation of New York 1994; Evans, 1996). Poverty appears to strongly affect adolescent males who seem particularly susceptible to a reduced sense of self-esteem and personal control when parents have disagreements about money (Conger et al, 1997). They are more likely to become overtly angry and

hostile themselves, increasing the risk that they will become personally caught up in family conflicts (Cummings et al, 1994).

Gender differences continue for unqualified early leavers in the labour market. Significantly more boys (48.1 per cent) than girls (38.9 per cent) enter employment. A high proportion of girls in this group is classified as being 'unavailable for work' - 20.3 per cent of girls compared with 6.9 per cent of boys (McCoy et al, 1999). Doran and Quilty (1998) found that while males are more likely to leave (school) for employment reasons, 'females are almost twice as likely to leave for family reasons as employment' (1998:16). There is also a pay differential - gross weekly earnings are 30 per cent higher for young males in this group than for females. However, when *hourly* earnings are examined the differential reduces to 15 per cent (McCoy et al, 1999).

Why are boys more likely to leave school early, and to become involved in risky and anti-social behaviours? Why do young women do better in school? These are complex questions and have spawned an evolving and as yet inconclusive literature. However, both general and adolescent cultural factors are involved. For example, according to Evans (1996) it is 'not cool' for boys to work at their studies and, even if they do, 'they hide the fact'. But equally, school factors are involved - Doran and Quilty (1998) claim that females 'are as likely to be involved in conflict with teachers but males are eight times more likely to be expelled'. However, although males are more likely to leave school early, female early school leavers are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts, for example in terms of engagement with the labour market (Hannan and O'Riain, 1993; Quinn, 1995; McCoy et al, 1999). In addition, they perceive themselves to be so. For example, having observed a group of early school leavers in Kildare, Fleming and Kenny (1998) find that

The boys were mostly working. They want money. Their focus in many cases was even more short-term than the girls... The girls had a greater sense of self and appeared more mature. Some seemed confused and sad about their situation in life. They wanted appropriate education, but would not return to school for it... They (had) experienced the teaching regime of school as a form of bullying... Their feeling of having been 'put down' was much more striking than with the boys.

As noted at 1.8.4 above, lone parenthood is also associated with early school leaving. UK research indicates that males who complete GCE and A levels are only half as likely to become young fathers as those without such qualifications (Acton and Hynes, 1998). However, the burden of lone parenthood is almost exclusively borne by young women. Fleming and Kenny (1998) find that young fathers are 'not interested in parenting and in 75 per cent of cases did not stay with the mother of their child' (see also Quinn, 1995; White 1996).

The intensive study of which young lone parenthood is worthy is beyond the scope of this thesis. Indeed, as Mahon et al (2001:25) note, while unmarried teenage parents are subject to 'negative attention in the media and public discussion, young mothers under twenty have not been the focus of much research' (in Ireland). Insofar as they have, the approach has been epidemiological, focusing on the identification of various risk factors and problematic outcomes. The research shows an increase in non-marital births as a proportion of all births in Ireland (from 14.6 per cent in 1990 to 26.5 per cent in 1997). But these births are concentrated among women in the 20-30 age group and the number of mothers under twenty has *fallen* since 1980. Virtually all mothers under 20 are unmarried. Most are aged 18 or 19. Births to women below 16 years of age have remained well below 100 a year. This is at variance with popular perception (Magee, 1994; Mahon et al, 2001). Two factors have increased the visibility of young lone parents. Firstly, the introduction of the 'Unmarried Mothers Allowance'¹ in 1973 gave lone mothers an independent income and with it the option of keeping and rearing a child as a solo parent. However, there is no evidence that this has contributed to an increase in births to mothers under 20 (McCashin, 1997; Mahon et al, 2001). Secondly, marriage and adoption have declined as post-pregnancy or post-birth options for unmarried mothers, including teenagers (Mahon et al, 1998). In addition, during the 1990s, one in five conceptions to women under 20 ended in abortion. This is twice the general rate of abortion for Ireland (Mahon et al, 1998; Mahon et al, 2001). Indeed, Mahon et al speculate (2001:8/9) that abortion is a factor in the reduced incidence of teenage births.

¹ Now known as the Single Parent Family Payment

As regards early school leaving, it is the association of problematic lone parenthood with what Hannan and O'Riain (1993:125, citing Ineichin, 1981, 1997) describe as a 'vortex of disadvantage' that is most pertinent. A combination of resources and cultural values *may* mean that abortion is a less frequent solution to teenage pregnancy in working class communities. Regrettably, no data are published on the social or economic characteristics of Irish women having abortions, and this must remain speculative. However, the standard of education of lone parents in Ireland is very low, with about 50 per cent having no formal education or primary level only (Magee, 1994; McCashin, 1997). As Hannan and O'Riain (1993) comment, 'single motherhood... typically follows a particularly unsatisfactory set of transitions through education into the labour market'. These authors (1993:126) find that

Young women from working class backgrounds, whose mothers only received primary education, who themselves gained the Intermediate Certificate or less and who spent over 60% of their time in the labour force unemployed, show a strong propensity to become single mothers.

It is suggested that working class values strongly endorse the raising of children as a worthwhile role (Hannan and O'Riain, 1993) and that parenthood provides a legitimate alternative role, for women at least (Willis, 1977). Taking these factors together, it may be that more young women from disadvantaged backgrounds keep their children and, lacking the personal resources themselves, financial and cultural supports from family, and sympathy and appropriate childcare arrangements from their school, do not persevere with their education (Mahon et al, 2001). That is not to suggest that these young women lack support from their families – on the contrary, they have high levels of social-emotional support (Hannan and O'Riain, 1993; Boldt, 1997). But they are not encouraged to stay in education nor, when they do, are they particularly welcome there.

In summary, the foregoing suggests that gender is a significant influence on early school leaving in general, with effects that persist beyond the school. But it is not itself a cause. And does lone parenthood influence or cause early school leaving? The answer is yes. Becoming pregnant and giving birth causes an interruption to education, often indefinitely. Such is true of all young mothers. However,

younger females, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are most likely to entirely abandon their education (McCashin, 1997; Mahon, et al, 1998).

2.4.2 Intelligence

The concept of intelligence is itself contested. As Reber (1985) comments, 'Few concepts in psychology have received more devoted attention and few have resisted clarification so thoroughly'. Its definition, measurement and implications have been subjects of bitter disputes and extravagant claims for over a century (Gould, 1981; Benson 1987; Gardner, 1993; Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). Nonetheless, there is a body of research in which it is associated with, and identified as a possible determinant of, early school leaving. However, this view is fiercely contested on many grounds and the literature on the subject is both substantial and rich in controversy.

A considerable body of evidence accrued over the 20th century regarding 'intelligence' and its measurement and representation as a person's intelligence quotient or IQ. This research originates with developments in psychology in the early 20th century, in particular tests devised by Binet and Simon (Smith, 1985; Reber, 1985, Gardner, 1993). These tests were originally intended to help in the identification of pupils requiring special help (in remedial classes). However, through the 20th century they were increasingly used to assess the genetic potential of individuals and even social classes (Gould 1981; Eurydice, 1994; Reber, 1985; Gardner 1993) and have been widely used in both education and employment. The premise linking intelligence and early school leaving arises from many studies based on such tests. It is argued that success in school depends on heritable intelligence, which can be represented by a person's IQ and that this can be used to predict a person's trajectory through the schooling system. Thus, for example, Greaney and Kellaghan's (1984) finding that student performance on the Drumcondra Verbal Reasoning test was related to withdrawal and continuation in education. While in eclipse in the last decades of the 20th century, this view was revived by Herrnstein and Murray (1994).

The idea of heritable intelligence as a determinant of school failure and predictor of success has frequently been challenged (for example, Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Charlot, 1979; Gould, 1981; Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Goleman, 1996; Mac Ruairc, 1998). One strand of opposition rejects the idea that

a 'paper and pencil' exercise could measure something as complex as human intelligence or capacity (Gould, 1981; Gardner, 1993). The concept of intelligence embodied in IQ tests is also challenged, being seen as too narrow and exclusive of other equally important capacities. Some opposition is political, and relates to a perceived misappropriation of psychometric tests by racists and reactionaries. In Smith's view (1985:149), such testing may have been well-intended to begin with, but 'the argument on racial difference, rife at the time, spilled over into desire to prove this difference in quite the most sensitive area, that of intellect...' Others question the premise on the basis of anomalies. For example, Goleman (1996) cites research by Harden and Pihl (1995). These authors studied primary school boys who were performing poorly in school despite having higher than average IQ scores. The researchers identified that they had impaired frontal cortex functioning. The boys were impulsive and anxious, often disruptive and in trouble, 'suggesting faulty prefrontal control over their limbic urges'. This, says Goleman (1996) increased their risk of problems like academic failure, alcoholism and criminality despite their intellectual potential. The premise is also questioned on the basis of *contrary* research results. For example, while studying the influence of family background on educational outcomes Teachman et al (1997:415) found that IQ had 'no mediating effect on educational outcomes'. This, they argue

runs contrary to arguments made by Herrnstein and Murray (1994) about the primary importance of intellectual ability. According to our results, while intellectual ability has a positive impact on educational attainment, it does not mediate the influence of measures of family background. Indeed, our results were virtually unchanged when IQ was included in the model...

Some opponents accept that test results are as they are, and secondly that they are an accurate predictor of success or failure in school. For example, as Rutter and Madge (1981:110) report, 'at all ages, middle class children in the (UK) National Survey had considerably higher intelligence and attainment scores than did their working class counterparts'... Similar outcomes are found in Ireland (Lyons, 2002). But these critics argue that, rather than measuring intelligence, the tests measure 'school-readiness', principally cultural capital (see 2.5 below). By way of example, Mac Ruairc (1998) describes research demonstrating 'an almost

“steps of the stairs” progression (in test outcomes) as one moves up the social class spectrum’. He says that the outcomes of the standardised test reveal ‘a marked difference’ between the scores of the children in the working class areas and the children in the middle class areas’. Mac Ruairc (1998:65) adds that

The reactions of the teachers to standardised assessment tests differ on the basis of the social class of the school. The middle class schools find the tests useful and see a role for them in school policy. This attitude may be as a result of the success children in the middle class schools had with the test. The teachers in the working class areas... are using a test that the children find difficult and are coping with results that are skewed as a result of the bias of the test.

In his view, ‘if the results of the test are used as criteria for general assessment of children, the problem for the working class child is worsened’. Many agree, for example Drudy and Lynch (1993), who question the objectivity of IQ tests, arguing that they embody middle class cultural values. These views are linked with a substantial body of research on the schools and in particular social replication and cultural and class bias to which I will return at 2.5.4 below.

The premise that ‘heritable intelligence’ can be used to predict early school leaving school failure is also challenged by Stokes (1995:III:7). He bases this on surveys of early school leavers carried out by the YOUTHREACH Working Group in 1991 and 1992 in which the opinions of teachers and trainers working with the young people were canvassed. It emerged that only 17% of participants were described as ‘slow learners’ while 14% were ‘capable of exceptional work’. These figures suggest a normal range (though not necessarily distribution) of ability. He elaborates on these issues in a subsequent paper, noting reports (from YOUTHREACH) ‘of individuals who cannot complete simple mathematical exercises on the one hand, but who can profitably buy and sell cattle on the other’ (Stokes, 1996:8). He cautions against overstating the case, adding that

Some of the young people have great difficulty in learning. Some may well need supported or sheltered employment. Others are exceptional in a narrow range of aptitudes. Many display quite remarkable variation in ability levels across a range of media. For example, we have young people who are exceptionally adept with materials (such as wood or metal) but who have grave difficulties in literacy. Nonetheless, it is clear that many of those who

have left school without adequate qualifications, and with a history of personal failure in school, are capable of very significant levels of achievement.

The author then notes Multiple Intelligence Theory as a useful framework within which to consider this experience. This theory derives from a collation of evidence from various realms, including psychology and neurology. Its core message is summarised by Gardner (1993:xiv):

If we are to encompass adequately the realm of human cognition, it is necessary to include a far wider and more universal set of competences than has ordinarily been considered.

Proponents of this theory do not view intelligence as a single immutable and measurable entity. Instead, Gardner proposes that a range of different intelligences may be identified, each of which has evolved for a particular purpose, and that everyone has these intelligences, albeit at different levels. He also proposes that cultural factors are significant in our definitions of intelligence. For example, certain societies value memory and the capacity to tell stories, others value the ability to compose and record stories. But, he asks, is one necessarily superior to the other? Gardner defines an intelligence as 'the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings' (Gardner, 1993). Based on this definition and these criteria, he proposes seven separate intelligences. These are *linguistic*, *mathematical/logical*, *spatial*, *musical*, *bodily/kinaesthetic*, *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal*.

Multiple Intelligence Theory has already spawned a considerable literature, both for and against. Gardner is at pains to emphasise that it is still a *theory* in the process of being tested and explored, and that other elements are emerging as it evolves. Thus, an eighth 'intelligence' has been added to the foregoing list, 'naturalist intelligence' (Gardner et al, 1996; Campbell, 1997; Hoerr, 1997).

To conclude, there is some evidence of an association between lower IQ scores and early school leaving. However, the validity of the concept of heritable intelligence as measured by psychometric tests is contested, as is a direct causal relationship between intelligence and early school leaving. It may be that low IQ scores are an index of disadvantage or 'school-readiness' for many, and that it is the associated problems that cause the young person to drop out, not the low IQ.

I will now turn to the related area of learning difficulties.

2.4.3 Learning difficulties and conditions

A wide range of special educational needs is cited in the literature as being associated with, and possibly causal in, early school leaving. They include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD, dyslexia (also known as Specific Learning Disability or Difficulty) and dyspraxia (see Reber, 1985; Goleman, 1997; McKernan, 1998; Attwood, 1998; Munden and Arcelus, 1999). A spectrum of difficulty and disability is identified. A learning disability such as autism presents particular difficulties. However, there is debate regarding the existence, identification and developmental pathways of learning disabilities such as ADHD and dyslexia. The former is regarded by many as a medical/neurological condition and is usually treated with the drug Ritalin. But there are other perspectives. Educational responses focus on the child and her/his ecosystem and psychotherapeutic responses focus on emotional issues on the basis that these are causing the symptoms of ADHD. As for dyslexia, Poole (2003) notes 'a variety of accepted definitions'. It is not that a set of 'symptoms' cannot be identified. But medical, educational and indeed psychological perspectives differ. In any event, the outcomes for the child are the same however the problem is explained. Those presenting with the symptoms collectively recognised as dyslexia are at risk of leaving school early, firstly through frustration with their inability to equal their coevals in reading and writing and secondly because they perceive their 'treatment' to be a sign of failure (McDevitt, 1998; Poole, 2003).

There is less debate concerning the neurocognitive disorder known as Asperger's Syndrome, often described as a mild form of autism. The affected person usually has normal intelligence but experiences difficulties in the following areas: Reciprocal social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication and general life skills. McKernan (1998) suggests that 'individuals affected by the syndrome usually have normal intelligence but extremely poor social and communication skills'. Its prevalence in Ireland is unknown but McKernan cites Swedish research that suggests a level of 1 in 300 of the population. Males are much more commonly affected. According to McKernan (1998:52), between 50 per cent and

80 per cent of those with Asperger's Syndrome leave the education system between the ages of 12 and 17 years. He does not cite a source for this assertion.

Notwithstanding such estimates, it is not known how many individuals have learning difficulties such as Asperger's Syndrome or indeed dyslexia. In general, writers such as McKernan argue that early diagnosis and remedial measures would help those in need and would reduce the incidence of challenging behaviour and early school leaving. If this is the case, it is not the learning difficulty that causes early school leaving, but the absence of assessment mechanisms and appropriate responses. At the time of writing, however, as well as predisposing young people to leave school early, special educational needs also appear to cause such an outcome.

2.4.4 Ethnicity

The ethnic mix of Irish society is becoming considerably more complex at the beginning of the 21st century. There is as yet no evidence of higher levels of early school leaving among new Irish ethnic groups. However, high levels of educational disadvantage and early school leaving are found in the Travelling community. Although it is accepted that the situation is changing, a large majority of Travellers have never attended a post-primary school (National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group, 1996). This lack of participation extends to the labour market with Travellers entering the Traveller economy in preference to the mainstream labour force (National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage, 1996). Also, while school attendance by young Travellers has improved in recent years, according to the Houses of the Oireachtas (1999) 'lack of regular school attendance remains a problem within the Traveller community'. According to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage (1996:13)

Only a minority of Traveller children transfer from primary to second level schooling, and it is estimated that 80% of those aged between 12 and 15 years of age did not attend any school. The majority of those who attend second level school leave within the first two years.

As to why this should be the case, many explanations for have been offered, including Traveller culture, cultural oppression and poverty. Classically, Traveller attitudes to education are characterised as pragmatic, with education

being seen as a legal requirement and as a means to an end. It is still the case that many Travellers regard Confirmation as the end of a child's education and the beginning of adulthood. Traveller culture places a strong emphasis on work and trading and the family. Its economy exists alongside the settled economy and in many families boys are expected to adopt working roles when they reach an appropriate age (Gmelch, 1975; Moriarty, 1996; Joyce, 1999; Coughlan et al, 2001). As the Houses of the Oireachtas (1999: 18-19) point out, these young people are at risk from the same factors as the settled community, but

additionally, have other specific risk factors pertaining to them, including low school attendance, lack of parental involvement, Traveller nomadism and the lack of inter-cultural education.

The NAPS working group report lists a range of 'key issues in relation to educational participation of Travellers in education at post-primary level'. They include the high cost of second level schooling for low-income families, lack of continuity between the child-centred approach of primary school and the subject focus of second level and various cultural factors. However, the report (National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage, 1996:14) adds that

Travellers face major discrimination in their day-to-day lives in terms of access to appropriate educational options, cultural barriers to participation, access to training and work experiences, to employment, and to shops and leisure activities.

I have looked at a number of given factors associated with early school leaving in the literature. Four are of particular importance – gender factors, including lone parenthood, heritable intelligence, specific learning difficulties and ethnicity. I will now turn to the ecosystems in which the young people grow and develop.

2.5 Ecological (contextual) factors

The literature on educational disadvantage and early school leaving contains many references to environmental influences. For example, NES (1993:133) explains that 'educational experiences come from formal schooling, the family and the community and students who are educationally disadvantaged have been

exposed to inappropriate educational experiences in at least one of these three educational domains'. According to Coleman (1966:325)

Inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school.

In their surveys in 1991 and 1992, the YOUTHREACH Working Group found that 29 per cent were victims of 'a difficult domestic/community environment such as ongoing violence, intimidation or sexual abuse'. Similar proportions emerge from a study of the guidance, counselling and psychological service needs of YOUTHREACH participants (NCGE, 1998). Reflecting on the more negative aspects uncovered in their fieldwork with early school leavers in Kildare, Fleming and Kenny (1998:42) ask

What experience of childhood do many children have which leads them to be sexually active and parenting at an age when other children from other social backgrounds are having a different experience, and working to different ambitions and agendas?

In their view, most of the answers can be found 'in the experiences of the family, friends, neighbours and the media, which are the main constructors of sexual identities'.

Support for the view that environment is an influence and potentially causal is strong. But how does this work? Once again, the literature is rich in lists of risk factors and characteristics, but weak in terms of demonstrable causal processes. Thus, for example, Breen (1984b) identifies that a high proportion of children who left schooling early came from homes in which the father did not have a steady job. Other such factors mentioned include socio-economic status, low educational attainment by parents and single parent families (Morgan 1998a).

A more complex understanding is reflected in the use of the terms 'context' and 'ecology' to describe the dynamic mix of circumstance and process involved. The difference is between passive (environmental risk factors) and active (ecological processes). An ecological approach sees the individual child growing and developing in a series of linked and interacting ecosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989; Rutter, 1995; Greene and Moane, 2001). The first of these is the

family, but in turn they include school and neighbourhood, and so on. Ecological explanations focus on the interactions between the individual and the various ecosystems, but also on those between the ecosystems themselves. Brofenbrenner (1979, 1989) identifies the following as the key contexts or ecological systems in which learning takes place: family, kin, peers, schools, neighbourhood, community, region and country. The child interacts with each of these ecosystems and, in turn, they interact with each other. Brofenbrenner identifies five levels of interaction:

1. Face-to-face interactions between the individual and given settings such as family, school or peer group. (For those in employment, it would also include the workplace). He calls these *micro-systems*.
2. Interaction between the above settings themselves, for example, in the case of a school-going child, between school and family. These are *meso-systems*.
3. Interactions between settings in which the person is not present are *exosystems*. As an example, Brooks-Gunn, (1997:8) cites the association between the parent's workplace and the parent's home or marital relationship. These influence the child even though the child is not present in either system.
4. *Macrosystems* consist of the culture in which the first three systems operate. They comprehend belief systems, knowledge, customs and lifestyles.
5. *Chronosystems* operate over time, for example changes in the individual and in the environment.

It may be, as Brooks-Gunn (1997:8) suggests, that children whose families are poor live in different ecological systems than children whose families are not and that 'the interactions among systems probably differ for poor and not-poor families'. However, she adds that these premises have not been tested.

In the following sections I will look at the key ecosystems as they occur in the research literature on early school leaving – family, kin, peers, school and neighbourhood and community.

2.5.1 The family

Many 'family' factors are thought to be influential in early school leaving. However, the difficulty in unravelling the different aspects is generally acknowledged (Banks, 1968; Roseingrave, 1971). There is general agreement that the family itself is in transition (Kiernan & Wicks, 1990; Hess, 1995; Hill and Tisdall, 1997; Frønes, 1997). Alternatives to the 'traditional' two-parent

nuclear family structure are becoming proportionately more normal in Ireland as elsewhere in Western Europe. There is more cohabitation and postponement of marriage, with increases in single-parent and stepfamily households and decreases in family size (Hess, 1995). Within these arrangements, children and adolescents are increasingly likely to experience multiple transitions in the structure and functioning of their families of origin throughout their lifetimes (Hess, 1995; Mahon et al, 1998). Kiernan and Estaugh (1993) identify three subdivisions of cohabiting groups, 'nubile cohabitants', 'those who have previously been married', and 'never-married couples with children'. This last group is most relevant to our enquiry. According to Hess (1995:133), their relationships appear to be much more unstable and prone to dissolution than those of married couples and 'the large majority lives in disadvantaged economic circumstances'.

Studies of the family normally divide between structure and functioning (Hess 1995). I will now examine their relationship with early school leaving, beginning with family structure.

(i) Family structure

As we have seen, post-modern society has seen a diversification of family structure. But is this associated with early school leaving? Some research supports such a contention. Larger families, single-parent families and step-parent families have all been associated with negative educational outcomes (Hess, 1995; Morgan 1998a). Particular attention has been paid to the possible negative effects of divorce or parental separation (Amato and Keith 1991; McLanahan 1997). Four structural factors are found in the literature: the number of siblings; family separation and disruption; living in a female-headed family and the 'step-parent effect'.

As regards the number of siblings, a substantial body of research is devoted to the relationship between family size and the cognitive and intellectual development of children (Chesnais, 1985; Hess, 1995). Hess, (1995:159) cites a broad range of authors in support of her contention that 'Larger families can be somewhat negatively associated with psychological well-being (especially among males) and this negative relationship is most pronounced with regard to educational achievement and attainment'. It is also argued that children from large families are twice as likely to have 'disorders' as are those from smaller

families (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; Jeffers and Fitzgerald, 1997; Peters and Mullis, 1997). However, the effect appears to be limited to children raised in large families, that is those with four or more children (Hess, 1995) and while early school leaving may be comprehended within this general finding on educational achievement there is little to suggest a direct causal link.

Turning to disruptions, family life is likely to be disrupted by any of a range of events. Families change home, a new child is born, individuals leave or enter the labour force, parents separate, divorce, remarry, and so on. These transitions are sources of stress that require adaptation and reorganisation on the part of all family members (Hess, 1995). Three family structural experiences feature in the literature on early school leaving, marital breakdown, parental remarriage and living in a single parent (and normally female-headed) family (Amato and Keith, 1991; Barber and Eccles, 1992; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, (eds.), 1997).

Does marital or relationship breakdown influence or cause early school leaving? Some researchers think so. For example, Fombonne (1995) notes studies indicating ‘a threefold increase in drop-out from school from non-intact families’. Amato and Keith (1991) analysed 92 available studies of the effects of divorce on children’s psychosocial adjustment. They used seven domains to estimate its net impact: school achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, social adjustment, mother-child relations and father-child relations. They found significant negative effects of parental divorce across all domains of well-being. That said, they also found that the effects were generally weak, and certain conduct and adjustment problems dissipated over time. Commenting on these and other findings, Hess (1995:172) concludes that ‘family structural changes marked by marital dissolution and reorganisation place children and adolescents at significantly higher risk for short-term problems in psychosocial well-being’. But Weissbourd (1995:53) argues that children are not necessarily better or worse off as a result of divorce. He maintains that they can be affected by it in different ways, adding that ‘It is a myth that divorce is a modern scourge, but it is also a myth that divorce is non-pathogenic or neutral. Reality is far more complicated’.

According to McLanahan (1997:47) ‘living in some types of non-intact families is more difficult for children than living in others’. Thus, growing up with a

divorced or never-married mother 'is almost always associated with lower educational attainment and more behavioural and psychological problems', whereas growing up with a widowed parent is not. Timing also matters. 'Recent disruptions', she maintains, 'including both divorce and remarriage, are especially difficult for children'. Sons and daughters react differently to divorce and separation. As Fombonne (1995:583) comments, 'the current wisdom is that mother-son relations become persistently more difficult, whereas adolescent daughters and their mothers tend to develop close and intimate relationships'.

It appears that relative impoverishment is the most significant (though not the only) outcome of divorce, especially for the custodial family (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Pagani et al, 1997). Many observers believe that it is this, rather than the parental separation, that places the children at greatest risk regarding educational outcomes and other effects. These include poor child nutrition, lack of materials and support at home, moves to more disadvantaged neighbourhoods and schools, depression and entrance into deviant sub-cultures (Hess, 1995). However, McLanahan (1997:48) is ambivalent:

I suspect that family structure is more important than poverty in determining behavioural and psychological problems, whereas poverty is more important than family structure in determining educational attainment.

But is it the family structure that poses the risk to children, or is it the distress consequent on family conflict and impoverishment? The research evidence favours the latter. Fombonne (1995) cites a number of large-scale longitudinal studies that show that it is 'marital discord rather than separation (that) is the intervening mechanism'. According to Weissbourd (1995) children in high-conflict homes are more likely to suffer from depression than children in single-parent homes (see also Amato and Keith, 1991; Block et al, 1986).

In conclusion, there is a general association between parental separation and early school leaving but the direct effects are weak. The literature suggests that the stress arising from family conflict and post-separation impoverishment is the most powerful causal factor, and that its effects in the family find expression in the school.

The third family structural factor noted in the literature concerns single-parent households (and specifically female-headed families) in which many children are reared or find themselves in after parental separation. According to Fombonne (1995) 'adolescents in single-parent households have been comparatively little studied'. Does living in a single-parent family influence or cause early school leaving? Many authors argue that it does, and that being reared in or making the transition to a single parent family (usually female-headed) after divorce or separation, is detrimental to educational outcomes and likely to contribute to early school leaving (Morgan, 1998a; Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Kiernan, 1992). However, this view is contested. Lipman and Offord (1997: 283) assert that 'different family constellations show significantly different influences on children's morbidity'. As McLanahan (1997) points out, being reared by a widowed parent appears to have no negative effects on children.

Lipman and Offord (1997) find that children who have lived in families persistently headed by a single mother have the most difficulties in social interactions, followed by children in a family that became female-headed later in life. But is the same true of educational outcomes? Peters and Mullis (1997) argue that it is not. They find that 'living in a female-headed household at age fourteen (mother only) did not significantly affect academic outcomes' and the mother-only effect on academic outcomes disappears completely 'as soon as we controlled for income'. Fombonne (1995) adds that early school leaving is more likely when parent and adolescent are of a different gender. The opposite is the case in step-families. This suggests that, while financial stressors are influential in early school leaving, others (in this case, relational or emotional) also influence the young people. So, living in a female-headed family is associated with early school leaving, and in many cases may be influential. However, it is less the family structure than the attendant financial and emotional pressures that are causal.

The fourth family structural factor is the 'step-parent effect'. If impoverishment consequent upon family breakdown is a significant stressor for young people, it might be assumed that remarriage or a new partnership (which would alter the financial situation) would have demonstrable positive effects. But McLanahan (1997:48) disagrees, arguing that 'remarriage is not a panacea for divorce or out-

of-wedlock childbearing'. But does living in a step-parent family influence or cause early school leaving? There is evidence of a negative 'step-parent effect' on behavioural and psychological outcomes (Lipman and Offord, 1997). However there is less certainty as regards educational outcomes. McLanahan (1997) suggests that children in stepfamilies fare somewhat better in this regard than do children in single-parent families. However, Kiernan (1992) finds that family disruption (due to death or divorce) followed by parental remarriage is linked to earlier transitions, including earlier school leaving. Peters and Mullis (1997) agree and the effect persists even when controlling for income effects. Regrettably, their results did not allow them to identify the reason for the step-parent effect nor its causal pathway. Pagani et al (1997:312) suggest that 'children often perceive remarriage as a second transition that compounds the emotional stressors of the post-divorce period'. Having reviewed the literature on this subject, Hess (1995) divides the consequences into short-term and long-term. She argues that the introduction of a step-parent requires 'major readjustments on the part of all family members, which often leads to increased tensions'. The step-parents themselves have particular short-term difficulties, especially step-fathers. It appears that drop-out from school is more likely (in step-families) where the parent and adolescent are of the same gender (Fombonne, 1995).

In conclusion, while living in a step-family eases financial pressures on young people, it frequently introduces other stressors for both young people and parents. Particular effects are noted in behaviour and interpersonal relations, especially for early adolescents. These may be linked with early school leaving. However it is agreed that research to date is inconclusive. I will now discuss family functioning.

(ii) Family functioning

Within the ecology of the family, the second major influence on children's well-being is family functioning. It is likely that many of the associations noted above are explained by functioning rather than structure (Hess, 1995; McNamara, 2000). For example, stresses consequent on poverty are seen to have morbid effects on parenting practices and styles and parent-child roles and relationships. In turn, these are thought to influence participation in education. Family functioning also comprehends family role systems. Bernstein (1971) identifies

two types of family role structure, the positional family and the person-centred family. The first of these is characterised by a clear separation of roles and a 'closed' communication system. In the second, the child is seen to be an important member of the family and there is an 'open' communication system which attaches significance to communication and language, a factor that has been used to explain the relative advantage of different class groups. Some authors (for example, Coleman, 1968) argue that the skills, attitudes and abilities of pupils that are inherited from their home environment have a significant effect on their school outcomes. Others identify non-economic factors that influence academic success. Bourdieu coined the term 'cultural capital' to comprehend the cultural differences that reproduce social class division. In his view (Bourdieu, 1983: 244), 'the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family'. That capital includes the level of parental education, varying investment in and commitment to education and awareness of the dividend to be gained from participation in education. Bourdieu (1973) argues that education demands a linguistic and cultural competence that is not automatically provided by schools. Bourgeois families, that is, those who are embedded in the dominant culture, transmit this competence and their children become fluent in the codes that allow them to decipher the message of the dominant culture. I will discuss language and social reproduction at 2.5.4 below. As regards family functioning, five influences on a child's participation in education are identified in both theoretical discourses and field research:

The first of these is *low levels of parental education and training*. Many subsequent researchers endorse Roseingrave's (1971) finding that early school leaving is 'a characteristic of the educational background of the great majority of the parents'. Conversely, the higher a parent's level of education, the greater the child's preference for staying on in school (Breen, 1984b, Gambetta, 1987, Hannan and O'Riain, 1993; Kellaghan et al, 1993; Ehrenberg and Smith 1994; Peters & Mullin, 1997; Morgan, 1998). Furthermore, parents themselves cite low levels of parental education as a cause of early leaving (Boldt, 1994). But how does this work? Once again, the literature is long on associations and short on causal processes. It is true that many parents are or feel unable to help their children (for example with homework) once they enter post-primary school

(Boldt, 1994; Morgan 1998). Yet, this seems a flimsy explanation for such a persistent effect. Some writers also associate lack of reading material and early school leaving (Smith et al, 1997, Morgan 1998, citing Ekstrom et al, 1986). Peters and Mullin (1997) are less certain, accepting that this effect may be due to 'a correlation between the availability of reading resources in the household and other unmeasured characteristics of the family that promote educational values'. Other writers cite lack of cultural capital (Bernstein, 1971, Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) to which I will return at 2.5.4 below. Overall, it seems likely that low levels of parental education part of a wider constellation of factors and processes that predispose young people to leave early but with the possible exception of language, to which I will return when discussing the school as an ecology, are not themselves independently causal.

The second family functioning influence is *a lack of esteem for, or utilitarian view of, education*. Many researchers have found that parents of early school leavers hold education or, perhaps more to the point, schooling, in low esteem. For example, Roseingrave (1971) found that 'the value systems of the homes (of early school leavers in 1970) showed little signs of a projection of parental ambitions for high educational performance'. There was little evidence of social mobility, any such ambitions expressed were 'vague and divorced from the reality of their employment conditions' and 'the drop-outs were in the majority of cases the sons of drop-outs'. He cites the parents' emphasis on 'the purely functional' aspects of education and notes the contradiction between parental awareness of the importance of education and the general lack of parental ambition for their children (Roseingrave, 1971). (See also Eurydice, 1994; Erikson and Johnson, 1996; Smyth and McCabe, 2001). Having interviewed early school leavers and their parents, Boldt (1994) argues that the most important factor (in early school leaving) apart from school experiences is the clear absence of any significant involvement, positive influence or encouragement from the parents. The young people report that their parents were too busy or not interested in their schooling and that they didn't ask about homework. By and large, he reports, the parents agree. Although they do not 'blame' themselves, these parents feel there was more they might have done for their children. Drudy and Lynch (1993) maintain that the parents are aware of the

value of education, but economic pressure leaves them little time to worry about schooling. They argue that parents feel alienated from schools and are not fully aware of what their children are taught at school or of the organisational structure of schools. However, McSorley (1997) suggests that some parents at least condone absence from school amongst that group of young people who leave before fifteen years of age. Boldt (1994) concludes from his interviews with parents that when the young people reach a certain age they make their own decisions and, while these might be questioned, it is seen to be the child's choice as to what s/he wants to do. It is not determined whether this is a (rural or urban) working class attitude, or indicates a lack of awareness or confidence with which to challenge the young people, or indeed the schools, regarding the decision to leave early. He subsequently notes (Boldt, 1997) that for female early school leavers who had pregnancies, 'family support was of immense importance', though not, as we have already seen above, for remaining in school. He adds that in general, 'the level of family support... for seeking employment did not seem to be present for them in regard to their schooling'.

These views move this combination of lack of esteem for education, utilitarianism and alienation beyond being an association. It appears to be a significant influence on early school leaving in general, and perhaps a cause in individual cases.

The third family functioning influence is *lack of interest by parents in their child and her/his education, low parental motivation and expectations and fatalism* (Roseingrave, 1971; Craft, 1972; Kellaghan et al, 1993; Eurydice, 1994; Boldt, 1994; MacDonald and Roberts, 1995; Goleman, 1996; Morgan, 1998a). For example, when asked how parents failed their children, Boldt's sample of parents identifies a lack of parental commitment to the children's education. They also feel that parents don't do enough to encourage their children in education, but rely on others to do it for them. Boldt (1994) notes that in almost every case mothers were much more involved than fathers in dealing with schools, in providing any encouragement and guidance and in trying to persuade children to stay on in school. But the Commission on the Family (1998:423, citing McKeown et al, 1998) argues that there is a direct parallel between the level of involvement of a father in his child's life and the child's well-being 'in terms of

cognitive competence and performance at school'. There is also evidence that positive attitudes and future orientation in parents influence young people to stay in school and that pessimism and fatalism influence them towards, or facilitate them in, leaving (Craft, 1972). Craft finds that again mothers are more significant in this regard than fathers. Boldt (1994) agrees. High levels of fatalism are also found. But few of these factors operate in isolation from each other. Also, their influence is likely to be closely connected to what happens in the school. Boldt (1994) speculates that a child's more problematic experiences in school are not counterbalanced by the home and are thus intensified. (See also Roseingrave, 1971; Breen, 1984b; Gambetta, 1987; Department of Labour and Department of Education, 1988; Kellaghan et al, 1993; Morgan, 1998a).

The fourth family functioning influence associated with early school leaving also is *parenting practices and styles* (Rutter and Madge 1981; Hanson et al, 1997). Hess (1995) cites 'mounting evidence that young people embedded in families characterised by high levels of conflict, or by parents who are not able to provide adequate supervision, effective discipline and emotional support have an increased risk of experiencing a range of psychosocial disorders'. These include 'school problems and academic failure', 'school drop-out and unemployment', 'decreased feelings of self-competence and poor peer relationships' and 'early sexual activity and unwanted pregnancy'. Among the influential factors noted in the literature are aggression, violence and arbitrary discipline. For example, Goleman (1996) describes a longitudinal study of 870 children from New York State who were studied from the age of 8 to 30. The most aggressive among them were most likely to have dropped out of school and to have committed violent crimes by the age of 30. Their children repeated the pattern. In addition, parental discipline was found to be inconsistent. If the parents were in a bad mood, the children would be severely punished, if the parents were in a good mood, the children could do as they pleased. In this way, punishment was not an outcome of what the child had done, but of how the parent felt. This, he concludes, 'is a recipe for feelings of worthlessness and helplessness, and for the sense that threats are everywhere and may strike at any time'. Conger et al (1997) agree, concluding that a mother's harsh parenting has a negative affect on adolescent self-confidence which in turn disrupts school performance and that harsh

parenting has a similar adverse impact on academic achievement. Hanson et al (1997) find that negative responses such as 'yelling and spanking' are inversely associated with children's welfare. They also find that the opposite is also true - positive interactions 'had beneficial effects on three areas of children's well-being: school performance, initiative and quality of life' (Hanson et al, 1997; Belenky et al, 1986; Fombonne; 1995; Smith et al, 1997).

The fifth aspect of family functioning that recurs in the literature concerns *the availability and use of a family's economic resources in sustaining educational participation*. Indeed, some researchers regard restricted family income as the primary factor behind many negative aspects of family functioning. As Hanson et al (1997:190) comment:

Children from economically disadvantaged families exhibit lower levels of physical development, cognitive functioning, academic achievement, self-esteem, social development, and self-control than do children from more advantaged families... (McLanahan and Sandfeur 1994; Haveman and Wolfe 1994).

The view that failure (or success) at school is closely linked to the economic conditions of the pupil's social background is widely supported (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Eurydice, 1994; Axinn et al, 1997; Smyth and McCabe, 2001). The 'rational choice' model first proposed by Erikson and Jonsson (1996) and later championed by Smyth and McCabe (2001) offers an explanation of how this works. In this model, educational choices are made according to the (perceived) costs and benefits associated with continued participation. Variation in outcomes is related to a number of factors such as lack of economic resources (which limits participation in education if families cannot afford the direct and indirect costs involved), the different cultural resources available to social class groups and so on (see also Eurydice, 1994). Other influences are significant, such as labour market demand for low-skill workers (Budge et al, 2000). However, such decisions are likely to have been primed by any of a range of other effects of family poverty. For example, Hanson et al (1997:220) find that discipline (supervision and control) increases children's well-being in poor households, and reduces children's well-being in non-poor households. On the other hand, 'praising and hugging affect the well-being of economically deprived children

more strongly'. They argue that 'residence in a non-intact family and economic deprivation combine to reduce children's capacity to respond positively to good parenting practices'.

Financial pressure, especially when a consequence of unemployment, can lead to significant psychological distress, including feelings of worthlessness (Whelan et al, 1991). Weissbourd (1995:62) argues that when a parent is depressed, children may be deprived of many of their needs. He adds that this is more likely among those living in poverty, who often have to cope with a range of problems such as unemployment, health problems or mental illness, hunger and eviction. These create huge anxieties for parents and can compromise their ability to cater for their children's basic needs. Explorations of the impact of parental depression also suggest a causal link with some of the dysfunctions already noted above. For example, Weissbourd (1995:74) also notes that depressed parents do not exercise consistent forms of discipline. They are either too lenient or too strict. He also cites a study of a long-term unemployed father that showed that, the longer he was unemployed, the more likely he was to describe his child in negative terms. A number of factors can mediate or enhance the effect of a parent's depression – the child's temperament, support from siblings or community adults, and whether the family has the resources to deal with the crisis. Conger et al (1997:305) conclude that 'daily stressors involving family finances have a particularly strong direct influence on the school performance of adolescents'. They find that financial conflicts reduce the adolescents' self-confidence... Their findings are, they argue, 'consistent with the notion that family economic problems have an adverse impact on the school performance of teenage girls and boys'.

Overall, the research consensus is that family functioning influences early school leaving. Having discussed the family as an ecosystem, through family structures and family functioning, I will now explore the extended family, or kin.

2.5.2 Kin

The second ecosystem encountered by the child is its extended family and kinship network. The extended family has been the subject of extensive study in its own right (Hess, 1995) and is an acknowledged presence in the lives of early school leavers (Hannan and O'Riain, 1993; Boldt, 1997). Young and Willmott (1968) observe that marriage connects three families, the man's family of origin,

the wife's family of origin and the family of marriage. These are linked in turn through their various members with other families in an 'interlocking pattern'. Young and Wilmott term this a 'kinship network'. Two additional characteristics were noted:

- A preference for living near their families of origin, a pattern noted by many other observers and one 'often tacitly supported by housing authorities';
- Strong interactions and regular contacts between these families, often on a daily basis, but particularly between married women and their mothers.

Young and Willmott (1968:48) describe clusters of families 'made up in the main of the three generations of grandparents, parents and grandchildren'. They call this the extended family. The grandmother is its 'head and centre' and her home is its meeting place. She performs a range of services, starting with help and advice given at and after childbirth, sometimes taking over her daughters' household while she is inactivated. In the event of receiving conflicting advice, women take that offered by their mothers (See also Craft, 1987; Gaffney et al, 2001). Variations also occur. For example, a single parent who is out of contact with the father of her child may be restricted to her own kin.

But what is the connection between the extended family and early school leaving? In general, it acts as a buffer between the child and both the immediate family and the external environment. For example, Boldt (1997:18/19) found that 'parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins, both in Ireland and the United Kingdom' provided 'much personal support' after they left school. But the extended family's influence is not always benign (Young and Wilmott, 1968). Hannan and O'Riain (1993:20) note that some researchers have 'controversially' identified a culture of poverty or unemployment, which they describe as

a contra-culture which arises in networks or communities of interlinked families with very high and persistent unemployment rates and low job-search and employment commitment levels; a culture or way of life which may be transmitted across generations... (Lewis 1959, 1961, 1966, 1968; Moynihan 1965; Matza 1966; Halsey 1974; Wilson 1987).

Before concluding this brief discussion of the influence or otherwise of the extended family, a paradox should be noted. It concerns 'social capital'.

According to Putnam (1995, 2000), this term 'refers to the collective value of all "social networks" and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other'. While many of the neighbourhoods in which early school leavers might be thought to be low in these networks, and therefore in social capital (NESF, 2003), the extended family, where active, appears to represent a positive form of social capital. I will return to this in 2.5.5 below.

Having examined the family and kin, I will now turn to the last mentioned, the 'group of friends' or peers.

2.5.3 Peer Groups

The peer group is one of the key sites of positive socialisation by which children and young people become committed to society's values and to specific roles within society's structure (Hill & Tisdall 1997). However, the influence of peers on early school leaving has not been the subject of sustained research (Morgan, 1998). That said, 'reference groups effects' – the expectations and standards of evaluative reference arising from membership in current or aspired to groupings – have been identified and there is broad agreement that peers are significant in early school leaving (Hannan and O'Riain, 1993). Fleming and Kenny (1998:9) comment that 'School leaving works like a trigger or domino effect: if one in a family or in a group of friends leaves school others will follow'. This view is supported by research experience in Scotland where in 1987 over 10,000 young people participated in a study of their leisure habits, their feelings about school and family, their health and their hopes and fears for the future. It was known as the Young Peoples' Leisure and Lifestyles (YPLL) project. In their extensive account of its outcomes, Hendry et al (1993:127) comment that the findings 'highlight the importance of peer pressure in adolescence'. They continue:

Peer pressures transmit group norms and maintain loyalties amongst group members. However, conformity to the group is the price that has to be paid for approval and acceptance by peers.

The peer group and the school are instrumental in gradually separating the child from the family (Eurydice, 1994). Within the new ecosystem of the peer group, children form non-familial friendships. Hill and Tisdall (1997:97) see this as an important part of their lives. It offers them the opportunity to develop rules (and

norms) with people on an equal level, rather than with adults who have power over them. Contact with peers is based more on personal liking than kin relationships. Friends are a source of information and support and help a child develop a sense of identity. They also offer feedback and evaluation as well as new ideas. Friendships, argue Hill and Tisdall, also allow children to practise social skills.

Play is a significant element in these developments. It is crucial to the development of socialisation and self-esteem, and in its absence or adulteration, the young person is likely to lose out. Thus, for example, when a group of American psychologists conducted a large-scale study of women to explore levels of 'knowing', they encountered 'bleak images' amongst the least knowing which they thought 'suggest childhoods with neither much play nor dialogue' (Belenky et al, 1986:32). Erikson (1995:199) proposes that play is an attempt by the child to deal with his daily experiences by 'creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning'.

As children grow older, their perception of friendship changes as they grow to value emotional support such as intimacy and trust over physical aspects, such as playing together. I will return to adolescence in due course. However, as regards the peer group, Hess (1995:174) notes that 'Peer relationships become more salient during adolescence' (see also Coleman, 1995). According to McNamara (2000) and Weissbourd (1995), at the hinge of the 20th and 21st centuries, children often rely on other children to fulfil needs once met by the family. However, adolescents reliant on peers when support from parents is lacking may be more susceptible to antisocial peer pressure (Collins, 1990). McNamara (2000:41) points out that 'Adolescent peer groups are highly influential in determining the sources and outcomes of stressful life events for young people'. She adds that cliques emerging in early adolescence

tend towards exclusion and social prejudice, and great importance is placed on issues of loyalty, confidentiality, trust and generosity. Lapses... may disqualify the young adolescent from the clique, causing much distress and alienation.

Contrary to popular opinions, being a member of a clique in adolescence is a significant predictor of adolescent emotional well-being and ability to handle

stress (Weissbourd, 1995) and, as Hill and Tisdall (1997) find, falling out with friends can be a source of considerable distress for children. They add that children with stable and close friendships have high levels of self-esteem. Two types of less popular children are identified by Hill and Tisdall (1997), the neglected and the rejected. They describe the first of these as insecure, lacking in self-confidence and in social skills. They argue that these children are not disliked, they are neglected or isolated. As they describe the second of these, the rejected child, s/he joins in activities with peers, but is disruptive. This child frequently tries to impose her/his own wants on peers, which can lead to rejection. They argue that such a child may have friends, but also tends to be unpopular. This may engender a sense of isolation and alienation, and many such children leave school as soon as they can.

Are peers influential in early school leaving? Not always but often, is the general conclusion, either by their own act of leaving school, or by their exclusion of individuals from the peer activities. I will now turn to the school as an ecosystem.

2.5.4 Schools

As we have already noted, early school leavers themselves cite their school experiences as the main reason for leaving school and do not regret their decision to leave (Boldt, 1997; Fleming and Kenny, 1998; Thornton, 2000; Mayock 2000). As the ESF (1996:89) summarises, 'the school experiences of these young people have, in the majority of cases, been hugely negative'. Many researchers agree (Willis, 1977; Banks et al, 1992; Hannan and Shortall, 1993; Bates and Riseborough, 1993; Boldt, 1994; O'Sullivan 1998; Doran and Quilty, 1998; Smyth 1998; Mayock, 2000; European Commission, 2000a). Morgan (1998a:81) notes that 'school rates of drop-out are found to vary widely even when controlling for differences in student population'. This, he suggests, means that 'school-related factors exert a powerful influence on a student's decision to leave school'.

Clearly something breaks down between many young people and school. But what? There is considerable convergence in the literature as to the school factors that influence young people's performance in, and persistence with, school

(Rutter et al, 1979; Eurydice, 1994; Learmouth 1995; Smyth, 1998; Nicaise et al, 2001). Ten themes are identifiable in the literature.

The first key theme regarding school as a context concerns *schooling and the reproduction of inequality*. Poor and working class children have what Rutter and Madge (1981) describe as widespread and persistent difficulties in school-type learning and they are more likely to leave school early. This has been the case for generations (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Clancy, 1995; Boldt and Devine, 1998). Many initiatives have been introduced to alleviate this effect, yet it persists. Why is this? Some writers locate the answer to this question in the nature of schooling itself. They argue that education is driven by an academic agenda that suits certain children only (Gould, 1981; Gardner, 1993; Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Commission on the Points System, 1999). This is not necessarily confined to one class or another but for reasons that are elaborated in these and following paragraphs working class young people are likely to be disproportionately disadvantaged. A second school of thought argues that the educational difficulties of poor children are due to a disparity between the skills used at home and those needed at school. In this view, the children are not in fact disadvantaged at all and the problem lies in the approach adopted by schools (see, for example, Cole and Bruner, 1971; Bernstein, 1971; Ginsberg, 1972; CORI, cited in NESF 1997, Houses of the Oireachtas, 1999). This view underpins the Home School Community Liaison Scheme in Ireland (Conaty, 2000). Rutter and Madge (1981:115) accept that 'there is probably something in this view, although it appears an oversimplification'. But the broadest and most substantial school of thought looks at how education reproduces inequality. Its proponents argue that young people are alienated by a schooling system that replicates the values of capitalism and the production processes of the industrial age and implements a consensual curriculum set by the dominant ideology (Cusick, 1973; Willis, 1977; Giroux, 1981; Bates et al, 1984; Apple, 1979, 1982; Lynch 1989). This approach stresses the repressive, selective and socially reproductive functions of schooling. The school is seen as disabling for any of several reasons:

- 'disadvantaged' students are the product of economic processes of society in general, and schools simply reinforce existing inequalities in society;

- there is a 'hidden curriculum' at work that reproduces inequalities;
- the school's organisation and modes of operation favour certain social classes, to the detriment of the disadvantaged;
- it fails to take account of the values and culture of pupils from disadvantaged social classes, which leads to cultural conflict.

It is argued that the school's norms correspond to the cultural norms of the dominant class. Freire (1990) describes the 'banking' concept of education, 'in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits'. This, he argues, 'serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed'. Teachers are seen to be the agents of this continued dominance. As Mac Ruairc (1998:62) comments,

Teachers are predisposed by their predominantly middle-class backgrounds (Kelly, 1970; O'Sullivan, 1980; Clancy, 1995), their training and all their educational experience to promote values and attitudes that tend to be in harmony with the system.

The school embodies and transmits a 'cultural capital' which incorporates these values as well as a body of attitudes. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have this capital or the assumptions through which it operates. Therefore, the world of the school is largely foreign to many children. This leads to exclusion from school and also to self-excluding behaviour. In this context, early school leaving represents a form of resistance (Illich, 1971, 1974; Bourdieu, 1972; Lister, 1974; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1977; Apple, 1982; Lynch, 1989; Riseborough, 1993; Eurydice, 1994).

The second theme concerning the school as a context is *the Irish school system* itself. Some observers argue that early school leaving is intrinsic to the Irish education system, built as it is around schools (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Stokes 1995; MacRuairc, 1998). But to what degree is this a function of the education system itself? This is characterised by Hannan (1998:35) as 'extremely rigid' and 'time bound', with 'a lot of institutional/provider interests built into its maintenance'. It is highly selective and differentiates between children on the basis of ability and social class. Furthermore the social class composition of schools influences student aspiration and achievement independently of the

individual's class background (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Clancy, 1995). Hannan (1986:85) found early school leaving to be 'quite concentrated' in 'schools that cater mainly for working class children or children from small farms or from families of unemployed manual workers, vocational schools and schools in which the poorly educable are concentrated'. However, early school leaving is not restricted to particular school types (Rourke 1994; Boldt, 1994). Indeed, in her study of early school leavers in Dublin, O'Sullivan found (1998:6) that 41 per cent attended voluntary secondary schools and 38 per cent attended vocational schools. However, she adds that 'the concentration of early school leavers is in VEC schools'. O'Sullivan cites Hannan's observation (1986) that vocational schools, because they do not impose selection procedures, receive and must cope with a disproportionate number of students with lower ability levels and other attendant difficulties (see also Breen, 1984a; Smyth, 1998). It is suggested that this concentration explains the high levels of early school leaving from vocational schools. Smyth (1998) disagrees, arguing that the variation across school types may be related to different historical traditions in each of the schooling sectors. In her view, schools are more or less effective in countering early school leaving *regardless of type* (see also Hannan and Shortall, 1991) and the differing levels of success are attributable to intra-school factors such as organisation and functioning. It is also the case that unlike other European countries, provision for Irish adolescents is 'almost exclusively full time at the secondary level, with little post-secondary alternance education, except for a small number of apprenticeships' (Hannan et al, 1995:326). In Holland, by contrast, after twelve years of age a child may choose from a wide variety of courses. The lack of alternatives in Ireland is a structural barrier to those who have weaknesses in the core curriculum. I now turn to school organisation.

The third theme regarding the school as a context is *school organisation*. Three features of the internal organisation of schools feature in the literature on early school leaving. The first is the general organisation of schooling into classes. While not thought to be directly causal, it facilitates the detachment of children who are less school-ready, less motivated, less gifted or more troubled. One young female early school leaver bitterly recounted to Thornton (2000) how her teacher told her parents that she was so quiet that she 'hardly even noticed her'.

As Cusick (1973:214) comments, school organisation 'provides an enormous amount of time when students are actually required to do little other than be in attendance and minimally compliant'. The second aspect is streaming. This is a differentiation process whereby young people are grouped according to academic ability, usually measured by psychometric tests. According to the literature, streaming

- has a strong negative impact on grades and examination performance among those allocated to lower grade classes
- has a negative effect on levels of early school leaving in the first three years of post-primary school;
- has significant polarisation effects, and tends to create greater inequalities between students at the ends of the ability and lower socio-economic status continuum;
- reinforces and perpetuates the relationship between socio-economic background and educational achievement.

(See Bryk and Thum, 1989; Hannan, 1987; McDevitt, 1998; Smyth, 1998; Sheehan, 1999).

In regard to these two aspects of school organisation, it is often argued that smaller classes (whether streamed or not) will alleviate early school leaving (for example, INTO, 1995). However, there is evidence that this is not the case. For example, when O'Sullivan asked her cohort of early leavers what might have influenced them to stay in school only 26 per cent mentioned smaller classes. O'Sullivan observes that many were already in small classes in school. Indeed, small remedial classes may themselves be a causal factor in early leaving, being stigmatised as 'relegation' classes, as McDevitt (1998) notes regarding the experience in France where, as a consequence, 'the use of remedial streams has been discouraged and reduced'.

The third aspect of school organisation identified is the adequacy or otherwise of support services such as guidance and counselling (Banks, 1994; NESF, 1997; Watts 2002).

So, school organisation can contribute to and even promote early school leaving. However, school organisation is informed and animated by other, largely human, effects (Smyth, 1998).

The fourth theme regarding the school as a context is to do *with school functioning*. Three characteristics of school functioning are of interest to this thesis. The first is the school's ethos and expectations. A positive academic climate within the school promotes higher attendance rates and retention within the schooling system. Pupils perform better in examinations where teachers expect them to continue in full-time education (Bryk and Thum, 1989; Smyth, 1998). The reverse is also true. Reporting on the outcomes of a range of pilot projects across Europe, the European Commission (2000a) comments that 'young people do not persist with a regime that rejects them. They react by dropping out'. The second is the degree to which schools involve parents and young people in their organisation of policy and activity. Those that do, especially if they offer a pleasant environment and support structures for teachers, have lower rates of early school leaving (Rutter et al, 1976/1981; Rutter et al, 1979; Learchmouth, 1995; Smyth, 1998). Smyth sees this as an 'inclusive' school atmosphere. While Rutter et al (1979) note that 'exactly what serves to create a particular school atmosphere remains uncertain' it can reasonably be said that its general disciplinary climate does so, and this is the third characteristic. Schools that are effective in retaining young people have clear guidelines for discipline (a 'strict-but-fair' system) with an emphasis on encouragement rather than punishment (Rutter et al, 1979; Smyth, 1998). However, while Hill and Tisdall (1997) accept that excluding pupils who are disruptive can improve school performance, they point out that such actions can also deprive the excluded individual child of necessary requirements for proper learning. This can result in such children fostering delinquent behaviour as well as leading to future 'social, economic and civil exclusion' (see also Bond, 1999).

The school's disciplinary climate is cited as an influence by early school leavers themselves. When ESF (1996:90) asked early school leavers why they 'didn't like' school, they referred to 'teachers shouting, uniforms and a range of other aspects ranging from "masters picking on me" to the disallowance of earrings'. Likewise, Boldt (1994) identifies a cycle of misbehaviour, punishment and

misbehaviour that further alienates the young people from school. All his sample of early school leavers identify a particular incident that precipitated them to leave school (see also Rumberger, 1987). Boldt (1997:25) describes how one young man 'left over an incident in which he was refused permission to leave class when he complained of feeling ill. A confrontation ensued and he walked out of his class and the school. He did not return'.

So, a school's ethos and expectations, inclusiveness and code of discipline contribute to early school leaving in general and appear to be directly causal in the case of individual young people. However, another reason why a young person might not 'like' school is the unsuitability of the curriculum.

The fifth theme regarding the school as a context or ecosystem is *the curriculum*. This is normally understood to comprehend both syllabus and teaching methodology. All curriculum development actions derive from the assumption that the curriculum is unsuited to the needs of some (or indeed all) young people. Two poles of argument are found regarding early school leaving – either particular children are unsuited to the general curriculum or the general curriculum is unsuited to particular children. A number of developments in Ireland have been predicated on this perceived mismatch, such as the Junior Cycle School Programme (Granville 1982a, 1982b; Cassidy, 1998). However, Stokes (1995) ascribes 'the significant detachment' that takes place in post-primary school to 'the way in which learning is structured in the post-primary school, and the young person's changing relationships with, for example, the curriculum... and teachers'. He states that 'early school leavers are a complex group, comprising a range of subsets', and suggests that one of the reasons a young person would leave school is because 's/he is gifted in areas which schooling does not currently value'. Many authorities agree (Drudy and Lynch, 1993; Eurydice, 1994; Boldt, 1994, 1997; Goleman, 1996). Drudy and Lynch (1993:158) tell us that no specific research has been carried out on the content of curricula, but 'community work in many working class areas reflects the concerns that the curriculum is structured in a way that is disadvantageous to working class children'. Drudy and Lynch conclude that 'the curriculum, therefore, is another mechanism through which social and educational inequality is perpetuated'.

But is it that the curriculum is unsuitable, that it is too demanding, or that it is offered in way that is not appropriate to all young people? The answer is ambiguous. Mayock (2000:27) finds that 'a large number of early school leavers felt that they were unable to cope with the academic demands of the curriculum'. The young people surveyed for O'Sullivan's research were asked about factors that might have helped them to stay in school. Forty eight per cent answered 'If I was allowed to attend just the subjects I liked'. She comments (1998:9) that

a more personalised programme might have helped a significant number of young people to stay. Nearly half the respondents indicated that going to school just to attend the teacher or subject they liked would have helped them to stay at school.

This corresponds with the findings of the ESF (1996:89), that '64% of respondents said that "interesting subjects" were the most liked aspect of school', and is endorsed by Boldt (1994). When Hill and Tisdall (1997) asked young people why they played truant they said it was because of particular courses adding that they would stop truanting if they were given more choice as well as change in content and in the teacher's method of teaching (see also McDill, 1986). According to McCombs and Pope (1994, cited in Budge et al, 2000:29),

Individuals are naturally motivated to learn when they do not have to fear failure, when they perceive what they are learning as being personally meaningful and relevant and when they are in respectful and supportive relationships with teachers.

That major developments have been initiated in curriculum, teaching practice and school organisation to meet changing needs of students indicates a general acceptance that such factors are significant in prompting early school leaving. However, as Fleming and Kenny (1998) point out, the school (still) operates on the basis that it is a bounded system, and that 'everyone who arrives at the door must agree to work according to the rules of the system'. They liken the boundary of this system to a membrane around the school within which innovations take place. Thus, 'whenever the educational system designs a new programme or whenever teachers' unions call for change, it is done on the assumption that it is within the membrane that the change will happen'. In their experience as researchers, they say, this is a problem for early school leavers

because 'the condition laid down by the system is precisely the condition that prevents them coming into school and staying there'.

The sixth theme in the literature concerning the school as a context concerns *teachers*, the key agents through whom the child experiences this 'bounded system'. For children and adolescents, the teacher is the face of the education system, and for early school leavers, it is often perceived to be unfriendly. Furthermore, the literature is consistent on the subject. As Boldt (1994:54) comments

One cannot but be struck by the experiences of school described by early school leavers... There was broad consensus that most teachers did not care about them, did not understand them and were not able to relate to them... The findings indicate clearly that a pupil's experience of school is one of the most important factors in determining whether or not he or she will remain in school to obtain a qualification. It is also apparent that this experience depends largely on relationships with teachers.

This is endorsed by Cullen (2000a) and by Budge et al (2000) according to whom the most important element of successful programmes with troubled teenagers is the quality of the relationships between adults and young people (see also Levering, 2000). Rutter et al (1979), Bryk and Thum (1980) and Smyth (1998) report that rates of absenteeism and early school leaving are higher where pupils have a negative experience of interaction with teachers and lower where interaction is positive. Where this relationship breaks down, the young people are more likely to drop out of school. Early school leavers' often visceral hatred of school results from perceived ill-treatment by one or more teachers or lack of respect for poor teachers (Boldt, 1994, Mayock, 2000). Where dislike of a subject is cited, this also is often associated with a particular teacher (ESF, 1996). But the reverse is also true (Stokes, 1995; Cullen, 2000a). Boldt (1994) found that the young people could usually identify one teacher they liked, who could control the class and who made the subject interesting. Those surveyed for O'Sullivan's research (1998) were also asked about factors that might have helped them to stay in school. Forty nine per cent of the respondents answered 'If I was allowed to go only to the teachers I liked'. This is consistent with findings by Rutter et al (1979) and others that high expectations regarding work and

behaviour elicit positive responses from the young people. The opposite is also true, as Smyth (1998) reports. She identifies teachers' *perceived* attitudes to pupils as being significant. Pupils under-perform where teachers are perceived to be disinterested in pupils or are constantly giving out to them. Further positive views are expressed by Fleming and Kenny (1998:15) who find that schools

have an impressive knowledge about their students and generally see young people as candidates for leaving long before it happens. The school sees some students making a gradual move away, marked by increasing periods of absence and the inability of parents and teachers to hold their interest in school.

This is supported by Sheehan (1999). Fleming and Kenny (1998:8) argue that 'if there is a problem of early school leaving it cannot be located in either the individual student or the individual teachers. Systems, institutions and social understandings must be sought'.

In sum, young people overwhelmingly cite the breakdown in their relationship with teachers as causing their early leaving. But they also identify certain teachers as creating a positive learning environment and relationship. This is endorsed by researchers. So, it appears that individual teachers are indeed likely to cause a young person, or groups of young people, to leave school early, notwithstanding the positive influences of colleagues. Equally, individual teachers cannot be blamed for the general phenomenon of early school leaving and many contribute to retaining young people in school.

As to how and why the relationship between young people and teachers and schools breaks down, one major strand of explanation concerns *cultural bias and lowered expectations of pupils*, and this is the seventh theme regarding the school as a context. Two key concerns are identified in this regard, social class and the experience of minority groups (see Labov, 1972; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Rutter and Madge, 1977/1981; Lynch, 1989; Irish Travellers' Movement, 1993; Eurydice, 1994; National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group, 1996). This is a complex and controversial area and is beyond the scope of this enquiry, other than two precepts. The first of these is that neither teachers nor schools are culturally neutral. Neither is the curriculum. Eurydice summarises this perspective as follows (1994:55):

The teacher... is not culturally neutral. His professional experience and his socio-cultural background greatly influence his expectations and his image of the ideal pupil. Teachers will rate highest those pupils who come closest to these and penalise those who depart from them through gestures and verbal and written attitudes which are quickly internalised.

The second is that the consequent cultural bias lowers teacher expectations of pupils from different social or ethnic backgrounds and these lower expectations are fulfilled in lower academic performance and earlier exit from the education system. Brierley (1980:54) argues that if a child is socially or culturally deprived, or if s/he is underestimated by teachers at school, then s/he is likely to make poor progress. He cites a study, *Primary Education in England*, which found that children in the inner city were more likely to be underestimated by their teachers than other children and least likely to be given work that would fully meet their potential abilities. According to Budge et al (2000:31), 'the basic message that has emerged from many studies is that students expect to learn if their teachers expect them to learn'. How does this work? Brophy and Good (1974) note research findings that classroom teachers show patterns of highly differentiated behaviour, calling on low achievers less often to answer questions or perform demonstrations. The teachers also waited less time for them to answer questions, praised them less frequently after successful responses, criticised them more often for incorrect responses, and did not help them when they failed by providing clues or asking follow-up questions. Eurydice (1994:56) cites Becker, Geer and Hugues as arguing that the essence of classroom activity is the exchange of work for marks or status, and Perrenoud as asserting that assessment is traditionally associated, in school, with the establishment of hierarchies of excellence. Pupils are ranked according to a standard of excellence defined absolutely or personified by the teacher and the best pupils. These authors argue that assessment and the degree to which it reflects both class structures and the prejudices of the individual teacher may consequently be a cause of disillusionment, low self-esteem and early drop-out.

As against these views, two general points should be noted. The first is that there is a strong resistance to cultural bias within the teaching profession itself (Mac Ruairc, 1998) and there appears to be (in the Irish context at least) a clear policy

commitment to providing 'equal treatment' (National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group, 1996). That said, there is no evidence that this will overcome cultural bias. The second is that a counter-bias (sometimes identified as resistance) is also identified in communities and ethnic groups (Willis, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Riseborough, 1993; MacRuairc, 1998). Boldt and Devine (1998:18) cite O'Brien (1990) on the strong bonds within a community and within a person's group, and how it is not acceptable to deviate from the community even in minor ways. This would be seen as a threat to the group and met with sanctions. Schools, on the other hand, foster individual competition and success. In this regard, Lynch (1989) argues that, since academic skills are accorded primacy in determining status in the school's hierarchy, the non-academic child is less likely to be fulfilled in the school environment, and is at risk of leaving early. Stokes (1995) notes 'the degree to which schooling continues one's status as a child past an age when this is acceptable in working class culture' as being a factor for some young people.

So, there is a significant school of thought that holds that cultural bias and expectations (or lack thereof) on the part of teachers *and* communities may both generally influence *and* cause early school leaving.

The eighth theme occurring in the early school leaving literature regarding the school as a context is *language*. This is seen to be a key mechanism for the expression and application of cultural bias, and has been the subject of considerable research and debate. Indeed, Stubbs (1983) argues that all educational failure is linguistic failure. Language shapes the way in which we experience, understand and manage our lives. But language itself is shaped by social context (Richardson, 1991). There is an extensive literature on the interaction of language and schooling, and the role that language plays in social reproduction. Linguistic discontinuity between the home and the school is considered to be a major factors associated with educational failure (Mac Ruairc, 1998). Two general explanations are advanced for this, one to do with cultural capital, the other with environment.

The starting point for the first school of thought is the identification of different linguistic codes. The principal defining element in such a code is vocabulary, but it also includes syntax and grammar, usage and accent. Bernstein (1970)

identified two, a 'restricted code', and an 'elaborated code'. He associated the first of these with working class culture. Used to express sociability and narrate, it does not deal in abstractions or concepts, unlike an 'elaborated code', which utilises a larger vocabulary and addresses the ideational and conceptual as well as the concrete (Bernstein, 1970, 1971; Fonseca, 1996). In Bernstein's (1970: 183) view, 'As a child progresses through school it becomes critical for him to possess, or at least be oriented towards, an elaborated code if he is to succeed'. These codes are seen to represent a linguistic hierarchy. Some argue that this in turn reflects the structure of society. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that schools trade in the dominant cultural capital and that young people with access to such cultural capital do well in school. As Bourdieu (1991:55/6) comments, the competence necessary in order to speak the 'legitimate' language 'depends on social inheritance'. He adds that 'the education system demands what it does not teach. This is mainly a linguistic and cultural competence which can only be produced by one's background'.

In the foregoing view, the child lacks the cultural capital embodied by the legitimate language. The second school of thought holds that the child's relationship to language is contingent on the norms of her/his culture. This view is essentially ecological, and posits a different language relationship rather than linguistic hierarchies and handicaps (Eurydice 1994). Thus, for example, Labov's findings that the language of black children in American ghettos is as rich and varied as that of middle class children, notwithstanding a narrower vocabulary (Labov, 1972; Eurydice, 1994; see also Fonseca, 1996, for similar findings regarding Roma gypsies). However, both schools of thought accept that the elaborated code is the language of school. It is argued that of itself this prompts teachers to lower their expectations of socially and culturally different children (Rist, 1970; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). As Mac Ruairc (1998) comments,

There is a general long standing finding of researchers that teachers' perceptions of children's non-standard speech produces negative expectations about the children's personalities, social backgrounds and academic abilities (Giles, 1987 in Corson, 1994).

This in turn affects pupil performance and sense of belonging in school. Mac Ruairc (1998) reports that his research found 'a clear difference between the

experience of the middle class child and the working class child with the language expectations of the school'. He adds (1998:67) that

In general the working class children were corrected more for the words they used and the way they spoke while the children in the middle class school were corrected for issues relating to good manners and for using slang...

The young people are alive to this process and frequently resist. Mac Ruairc (1998) finds a 'remarkable' hostility among working class children to the language environment of the school and argues that policies of linguistic correction play a central role in forming negative attitudes towards school among the working classes. This view is endorsed by a considerable body of research, especially in the United Kingdom, for example Willis (1977) and Riseborough (1993). It is also consistent with research on the school experience of early school leavers in Ireland (Boldt, 1994; ESF, 1996). Some researchers have argued for the existence of 'covert prestige', where working class children choose not to use the language of school outside the school environment and discourage attempts at being 'posh' (Montgomery, 1995).

As the medium of exchange of knowledge and learning, language can be a powerful barrier to participation and success in education. If the school's language is that of the dominant class, those who do not speak this language are likely to fail, to feel excluded and to leave early. In this way, language can be both generally influential and individually causal on early school leaving. Many observers also argue that, just as there is a dominant language, there is a dominant way of learning. I will now address this question.

The ninth theme regarding the school as a context *concerns learning and thinking and individuals' different ways of learning*. The question of how people learn and how learning experiences should be organised to suit their various innate or accrued learning style is a complex one and is the subject of a substantial theoretical literature. Three broad schools of thought are identified, cognitive, behaviourist and experiential. Each of these theoretical frameworks looks at the individual's development through various phases. It is also acknowledged that different individuals have different learning styles, such as activist, reflective, theoretical and so on. The prospect that a child's way of learning might be linked with her/his early school leaving is raised by Stokes

(1996:10). Arising from the experience of the YOUTHREACH programme, he argues that 'different individuals have different ways of thinking and different gateways to learning'. He suggests that most early school leavers are naturally inclined towards the experiential rather than the academic, and proposes a simple 'learning circle' with three gateways or entry points:

A: theory/reading/representation

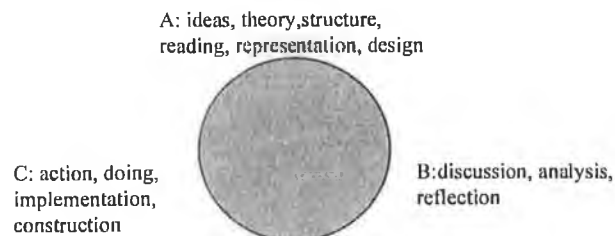
B: discussion/analysis/reflection

C: action/implementation/construction

Stokes argues that academic learning, and hence schooling, tends to follow the sequence ABC. Hence, for example, the classic sequence of 'knowledge – comprehension – application'. He then proposes that 'most early school leavers learn in the reverse order, CBA'. The implication is that if a young person's gateway into a learning experience or process is experiential or action-based, and if their orientation is not accommodated in school, this may influence their continued participation. The model is crude and simplistic, and does not incorporate the role of processes such as *feedback*. However, it is consistent with many experiential learning models, the closest being Lewin's model of action research in which learning is conceived as a four-stage cycle – concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and testing the implications in new situations (Kolb 1984, 1993).

Gateways to learning

different people have different ways of learning



This 'learning gateways' model also echoes Piaget's view that experience and concept, reflection and action are the elements forming the basic continua for the development of adult thought (for example, see Piaget 1978; Kolb, 1993). In its very basic rendition of three 'learning gateway' stereotypes, it suggests Kolb's identification of three views of the learning process, cognitive, behavioural and experiential. In describing the last of these, Kolb (1993:138) argues that it offers

a fundamentally different view of the learning process from that of the behavioural theories of learning based on an empirical epistemology or the more implicit theories of learning that underlie traditional educational methods, methods that for the most part are based on a rationalist, idealist epistemology.

In suggesting a cycle, the model also echoes Lewin and Piaget. That said, its derivation is anecdotal and its central premise is untested. Subjecting the proposition to structured observation is among the objectives of the present research.

The tenth theme regarding the school as a context is to do *with 'learned inhibitions'*. As I have noted in preceding paragraphs, many young people leave school early with negative perceptions of their abilities, for example having been in remedial classes (McDevitt, 1998). However, some authors argue that their poor self-deprecation is results from a deeper malaise, that, as the European Commission (2000:6) puts it,

Having spent perhaps ten unsuccessful years in school, their abiding sense is one of failure. Many have *learned inhibitions* – a belief that they cannot do certain things.

These learned inhibitions are then described as 'related to the phenomenon identified by psychologists as learned helplessness'. This latter term is used to characterise a learned state of helplessness produced by exposure to 'unpleasant situations in which there is no possibility of escape or avoidance' (Reber, 1985). A learned inhibition is associated with early school leaving and may, indeed, be a watermark of the failure of the school's relationship with the young person. But causal processes are not suggested as such.

The final theme regarding the school as a context concerns *sense of control*. Post-primary schools are large and complex organisations and it is understandable that early school leavers might report that they felt they had 'no control' over their school lives (ESF, 1996; Smyth, 1998). It is clear from the assumptions underlying a vast bank of action research programmes and compensatory projects in mainstream and non-mainstream education that a variety of factors are thought to be involved in this to some degree. For example, Smyth (1998) suggests that such control may be achieved either through involvement in the school or in relation to subject take-up. But whatever the derivation, the feeling by a child that s/he has lost control of her/his school life appears to be important in triggering her/his disengagement from school.

I will now turn to the wider local ecosystem, the neighbourhood and community.

2.5.5 Neighbourhood and community

There is a substantial literature on the association between the young person's neighbourhood of residence and its community with early school leaving. Neighbourhood is defined by Andrews (1997) as a 'relatively small geographic area where people reside and with which they have an identity'. 'Community' is a more problematic term. It is common in political, research and polemical literature on education, labour market and sociology in Ireland. But as O'Cinnéide (1985) points out, 'the term community can mean different things to different people'. For our purposes, it is defined as the population of the subject's neighbourhood.

The association between early school leaving and neighbourhood is well accepted internationally (Mac Gréil 1974; Datcher, 1982; Archer and O'Flaherty, 1984; Clancy, 1995; Andrews, 1997; Peters and Mullis, 1997; Furlong and Biggart, 1997; Boldt and Devine, 1998; Mayock, 2000). Indeed, early school leaving is one of the indicators of poverty and disadvantage used in Ireland to calculate the 'overall deprivation score'. This is a measure of the general level of deprivation in a district and is used by Area-based Partnerships² to identify

² These Partnerships were established under the Local Development Operational Programme of the 1992-1996 National Plan, which was developed to guide expenditure of European and national resources.

priority areas for support and investment (National Anti-Poverty Strategy, 1997; Area Development Management, 1998; Ireland, 1994; 1999).

The area-based strategy to alleviating poverty has been the subject of considerable debate (Stokes, 1996; Nolan et al, 1998; Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1999; Cullen, 2000a). A key reservation is that up to 50 per cent of the poorest households, as well as many early school leavers, are not found in areas of concentrated disadvantage (Nolan et al, 1998; Boldt and Devine, 1998). Of itself, this would seem to undermine the case for a causal relationship between early school leaving and neighbourhood and community factors. On the other hand, it is undeniable that high levels of early school leaving are a feature of certain geographical areas (Area Development Management, 1998). But in this, where lie the causes and where the effects?

One school of thought concerns social capital. This is defined as the aggregate value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (Putnam, 1995). Networks that enhance community productivity and cohesion are seen as positive social capital assets, but exclusive cliques and hierarchies that work against community interests are thought of as negative social capital (See also NESF, 2003). Low levels of social capital among the communities of disadvantaged neighbourhoods are manifest in fewer and weaker interpersonal networks and levels of social trust and control than are found in middle and upper class communities (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Eurydice, 1994; Andrews, 1997; Putnam, 2000; OECD, 2001). Early school leaving is a consequence.

Many writers cite the effects of poverty, often linked with low levels of social capital. Having surveyed the extensive research literature on the subject, Brooks-Gunn et al (1997:2) comment that

Poor families are more likely to live in neighbourhoods with other poor families, and their children are more likely to attend schools with fewer resources and more poor classmates than more affluent families are. Poor children may not fare very well in large part because of their communities of residence, not just because of their family situations.

In this view, school failure and early school leaving are broadly predictable outcomes of social exclusion that is concentrated in certain neighbourhoods. A

bleaker view is that when the number of people employed in regular full-time work in a neighbourhood drops below a certain threshold, then its community life becomes 'disrupted', the fabric of the area breaks down, the community becomes socially disorganised and family and personal relationships become strained. This generates anti-social behaviour and pessimism that becomes the norm for the area (Rutter and Madge, 1981; O'Neill, 1992; Harvey, 1994; Haase et al, 1996). Early school leaving is seen to be an outcome.

Not everyone accepts the premise. Andrews (1997) argues that research connecting community environment and a child's well-being is inconclusive and Weissbourd (1995) describes the idea of a traditional community as a myth, claiming that 'the community' can mean stressful networks for some. Whereas some of the above views suggest a 'community' that is both static and passive (or 'acted upon'), the reality is considerably more dynamic. Four key factors are involved.

The first is *the spatial distribution of poverty* and the *local authority housing effect*. In their examination of the spatial distribution of poverty in Ireland, Nolan et al (1998:xxxii-xxxiv) find poverty and unemployment to be 'spatially pervasive', that is 'not concentrated in any particular type of area, whether it be rural areas, villages, small or large towns or cities'. However, they also find a relatively high risk of poverty facing local authority tenants. Having explored a number of possible reasons for this, they suggest that

it is not so much that those in urban rented housing are more likely to be poor than other similar households, but that the poor are more likely to be selected into local authority housing or that the non-poor are selected out.

This is a significant hypothesis which they suggest should be tested in future research. It is consistent with suggestions in the literature of low levels of social capital among the communities of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. If true, and given the influential role of poverty and unemployment in early school leaving, it would enhance the case that neighbourhood and community factors are influential and potentially causal in early school leaving.

The second is *the community's perception of itself*. Furlong and Biggart (1997) note that while low labour market demand may prompt young people to 'park' in

education, this can be offset by neighbourhood factors such as 'communal relationships within which young people develop assumptive worlds and contemplate future events'. Walther et al (2004) and Blasco et al (2003) address the same idea in their discussion of participation as 'biographical self-determination'. In this regard, Stokes (1996b:4) introduces the concept of 'narrative', proposing that young people have a *narrative foretold* (or a *projected narrative*). The concept derives both from oral history (Humphries, 1984; Tonkin, 1992; Burnett, 1994a, 1994b) and from the narrative approach (sometimes known as narratology) used in medicine and psychology (Young, 1989; see also Banks et al, 1992; Bates and Reiseborough, 1993; Quigley, 2001). By way of illustration, Stokes refers to 'a miner, or a shipyard worker', and says that, although 'they might actually become doctors... the accepted narrative gave unfolding lives a structure at key points'. He sees these personal narratives aggregating into a community narrative and argues that the collapse of both is 'far more acute in urban, and especially sub-urban areas, than rural areas'. Many people in disadvantaged areas, he claims, do not see themselves as having a biography or a personal narrative: 'In other words, when asked, they do not consider their experience to be of any significance'. (On this topic see also Tonkin, 1992; Bruner, 1995; Quigley, 2001). According to Weissbourd (1995) teenagers are influenced not only by present conditions, but by their perceptions of the future. In his view, a child who doesn't see any meaningful or real opportunities in her/his future will be less likely to fear the consequences of destructive behaviour. Thus, getting expelled from school does not matter because, as they see it, they have no real future to jeopardise. In turn, young people in these communities, many of them early school leavers, do not envisage a future, 'only an extension of the present' (European Commission 2000a).

This hypothesis is consistent both with Nolan et al's findings as indicated above and with the concepts of both low social capital and low cultural capital. Certainly, the lack of confidence, identity and sense of purpose in many disadvantaged communities in Ireland is acknowledged in a wide range of research and policy initiatives (Harvey, 1994; Cullen, 2000a).

The third is *the way the community perceives itself in relation to others*. Caprara and Rutter (1995: 41) cite research by Dunn & Plomin (1990) to the effect that

'perceived disparities may be as important (perhaps more important) than absolute levels of deprivation or risk exposure'. Thus (Caprara and Rutter, 1995:35-6) argue that

psychosocial risks are just as likely to stem from the experience of being worse off, and becoming progressively less well treated as compared with other segments of the population, than from any absolute low level of income or housing conditions.

So, socially excluded communities may not accept that their disadvantaged status is an inevitable part of the social system and argue that their circumstances are not only worse than those of others but could and should be better. If so, they may suffer psychologically, even though in absolute terms their circumstances are improving.

Finally, there is *the question of loyalty to, and identification with, one's neighbourhood and community*. Naturally, there are advantages accruing from membership of a supportive local community. But there are disadvantages too. There are strong bonds within the community, and frequently it is not acceptable to deviate even in minor ways (Boldt and Devine, 1998, citing O'Brien, 1990). Also, neighbourhood loyalty can act as a disincentive to take up opportunities outside the neighbourhood. Doran and Quilty (1998:23) note that their respondents 'simply do not consider travelling beyond... their immediate environment as an option'.

Reviewing the foregoing, it is unlikely that the neighbourhood or community *as such* causes either a child to leave school early, or the general phenomenon of early school leaving. However, the literature suggests that they predispose or encourage both. Factors such as poor resources, the capacity of a community to support its children in school, the value a community puts on education, the opportunities for education, the prospects of employment on completion of that education and the influence of peers and other significant individuals are all potentially influential.

2.5.6 Social class

The ecological influence I will explore is that of social class. As noted in earlier sections, there is a very strong relationship between social background and

educational attainment (Roseingrave, 1971; Tussing, 1981; Rottman et al 1982; Breen, 1984a; Sexton et al, 1988; Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; ESF, 1996; Hannan, 1997; NESF, 1997; Morgan 1998; Boldt and Devine, 1998; Smyth and McCabe, 2001). McCoy et al (1999:13) point out that ‘class origins have a significant impact on a leaver’s probability of continuing to further study after school, as well as their labour market success’. This is part of a broader picture of entrenched educational disadvantage. Having studied 4000 students in almost 100 primary schools, Fontes and Kelleghan (1977) concluded that children from lower socio-economic groups were more likely to have literacy problems. Swan (1978) published similar findings at post-primary level, concluding (in the language of the time) that 30 per cent of children of unskilled manual workers were ‘retarded in reading’ compared to 5 per cent of children from upper middle class groups (see also Rutter and Madge 1981; MacRuairc, 1998). Eurydice (1994:56) cites research showing ‘the withdrawn and “wait-and-see” behaviour of working class children, but adds that these children ‘do not lack interest in what is going on in the classroom’. The children of lower management ‘are better integrated’, and ‘those of upper management participate well’.

Various explanations are advanced for this social class effect. It is consistent with the idea of social reproduction as already described. It also echoes observations on class differences regarding the experience of schooling. Some authors refer to other ecological aspects, either singly or in combination. For example, Banks (1968:67) locates the explanation in ‘the experience and attitudes of the working class home’. Other explanations point to economic circumstances that are inextricable from social class (Roseingrave, 1971; Drudy and Lynch, 1993; O’Neill, 1992; Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; Eurydice, 1994). Introducing a study of social class and family cycle inequalities, Rottman et al (1982:1) comment that

Resource differences between families become reinforced by highly structured social processes that create closed social groupings: by infrequency of inter-class mobility, by residential segregation by social class, and by shared life experiences within a class. Social class differences... tend to be reproduced from generation to generation.

It is also suggested (Breen, 1998:292) that 'following more ambitious educational pathways is not only relatively more costly but is also riskier for working class than for middle class pupils and their families in the sense that the costs of failure are greater'. In other words, while the relative costs of education have decreased, leading to increased continuation in education, 'the relative riskiness has remained unchanged'.

Of itself, social class is unlikely to be causal. Yet, bound up as it is with myriad other factors, many of them identified in these sections, the association between social class and early school leaving is undeniable.

Having explored the given and ecological factors involved in the matrix of influences associated with early school leaving, I will now turn to the role played by disruptions in the child's development, and particularly her/his transition to adolescence and subsequently to adulthood.

2.6 Developmental factors

Disruptions in a child's development and failure to make key transitions are frequently cited in the literature on early school leaving (Hannan and O'Riain, 1993; Ryan, 1998). Before discussing these, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by 'child development'. The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a shift from studying the child in isolation to studying the child in context (Kellaghan et al, 1995; Greene and Moane, 2000). Development is no longer seen as linear and sequential. Rather, it is seen as a series of concentric rings surrounding the growing child and as a complex process, comprehending 'proximal and distal layers of influences' (Greene and Moane, 2000:123, citing Brofenbrenner, 1979).

The study of child development comprehends many areas. They include physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. They also include personality formation, the development of a self-image and the development and incorporation of values and beliefs. As the present research did not have access to the subjects' early childhood experience except in general terms, this section will focus on the key transitions associated with adolescence. However, two aspects of early childhood are associated with early school leaving and should be noted *en passant*. The first of these is early attachment experiences with parents,

Attachment theory argues that these are internalised as a model of attachment which in turn regulates and predicts how a person will behave in relationships, especially with her/his own children (Bowlby, 1969). A number of patterns of attachment are identified, for example *secure*, *secure-avoidant*, *secure-resistant* and *disorganised/disoriented*. Similarly, four analogous patterns of adult attachment are identified: *secure*, *dismissing*, *preoccupied*³ and *unresolved*. A ‘transmission gap’ is also identified – some secure parents have insecure children, and vice versa (Gaffney et al, 2000). The adversities associated with the category ‘insecure mother with insecure infant’ suggest a possible link with early school leaving. Some researchers support this view (Eurydice, 1994). Such a link between early attachment experiences and early school leaving is potentially a rich field of enquiry, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The second aspect concerns children’s early learning experiences. It is widely argued that future early school leavers are already disadvantaged by the time they enter primary school for the first time (Kellaghan et al, 1995; CORI Justice Commission, 1996; National Youth Federation, 1998; Hayes, 1995, 2000). This view underpins the Early Start Programme of pre-school education (ESF, 1997; Rourke, 1999, Fleming and Murphy, 2000). In addition to school-preparedness, various benefits accrue to children from disadvantaged backgrounds from such early education. These include the development of *aspiration*, *task commitment*, *social skills*, *responsibility* (including control of one’s own behaviour), *being able to wait*, *to follow directions*, *and to turn to teachers for help* and *feelings of efficacy* or *self-assurance* (Sylvia and Wiltshire, 1993; Goleman, 1996; Hayes, 2000). These help the children maximise the return from schooling and may be seen as supplementary cultural capital and as building emotional experience. A direct link between their absence and early school leaving cannot be proven. Yet, their very identification as benefits and the striking concordance between the factors identified in this section with those identified earlier in the discussion of ecological influences associated with early school leaving suggests such a link.

I will now discuss transitions and turning points.

³ Preoccupied with parent’s own issues and relationships.

2.6.1 Transitions and turning points

Various key developmental stages are identified in the literature. Transition theories each (for example adolescence) covers 'one or two major transitions in the child's life that involve role changes: school entrances, moves and exits; biological maturation; possible cognitive reorganisations; or some combination' (Brooks-Gunn et al, 1996:9). 'Turning points', that is 'events that might alter behaviours or contexts in which children operate' are also identified, sometimes linked to transitions (Rutter 1994). The underlying premise is that 'transitional periods are characterised by developmental challenges that are relatively universal; that most individuals navigate transitional periods; and [that] these periods require new models of adaptation to biological, psychological or social changes' (Graber and Brooks-Gunn 1996:769). Many of these transitions are reflected in schooling (Eurydice, 1994). Each transition necessitates an adjustment to new circumstances. Children do not all react in the same way and some encounter difficulties which can manifest themselves in behavioural or learning difficulties, or vulnerability to dropping out of school (Eurydice 1994; Mannoni 1979; CORI, 1996; Boldt, 1997). There is a broad consensus that difficulties with transitions, for example that between primary and post-primary schooling, are a direct cause of early school leaving (Boldt, 1994; Stokes, 1995; Boldt et al, 1998, Ryan, 1998). Indeed, this view underpins the Department of Education and Science's 8-15 Early School Leavers' Measure (Ryan, 1998) and its successor, the School Completion Programme (Department of Education and Science, 2002).

I will now discuss adolescent turmoil.

2.6.2 Adolescent turmoil

Early school leaving is principally a phenomenon of adolescence. Brooks-Gunn et al (1996) identify two 'epochs', the early and late adolescent periods. The first of these covers the transition from primary to post-primary school as well as pubertal and family transitions. Key issues during this period include school engagement and performance, peer relationships, juvenile delinquency, self-esteem and, especially for girls, the physical changes associated with puberty. The late adolescent period focuses on the transition to physical maturity and senior secondary school. Other themes include the transition to sexual

intercourse, drug and alcohol use, smoking, pregnancy, childbirth, and school dropout. Generally, adolescence is seen as a process of *adaptation* to puberty and sexual maturation, *exploration* of self, identity and values and beliefs and *accommodation* of the personal, social and economic changes attending the transition from child to adult status (Esman, 1990; Pines, 1993; Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; Rutter and Smith, 1995; Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, eds. 1997). However, each of these is itself contingent on levels of choice that are unavailable in many cultures. Esman (1990:16) notes that adolescence in modern Western society is seen to be protracted, indeterminate, troubled and ‘marked by gross dyssynchrony between sexual and social maturity’. He concludes that this model ‘is our own cultural property and is by no means intrinsic to human biological nature or necessary for adaptation across the broad span of human social organisation’. The notion of adolescent turmoil is intrinsic to this model (Esman, 1990; Rutter and Smith, 1995).

During adolescence young people must deal with the physical changes arising from puberty, learn to deal with new patterns of social relationships, make decisions about careers and transpose their principal attachments from parents to their peers (Esman, 1990; Eurydice, 1994; Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; Brooks-Gunn et al, 1997). Yet, the conclusion from research is that most young people complete their transition to adulthood with relatively little turmoil. In this regard, Offer et al’s (1975) findings are apposite. Their work is described by Esman (1990: 24) as ‘probably the most extensive and certainly the most psychoanalytically informed’ of the studies of normative populations of adolescents. They find three main patterns of male adolescent development:

- *Continuous* – this group made up 23 per cent of the sample. These youths enjoyed a smooth unruffled progression through adolescence, enjoyed good relationships with families and peers, and were generally satisfied with themselves and their lives. They had no psychiatric illness;
- *Surgent* – this group comprised 35 per cent of the sample. They featured a generally sound pattern of adaptation, but with more emotional conflict, some progression and regression, and occasional turmoil. Some conflict with parents was found as well as self-questioning and sexual anxiety. However, in general they adapted successfully. Thirty six per cent of clinical syndromes from the general population came from this group;

- *Tumultuous growth* – this group represented 21 per cent of the sample. They displayed behaviour problems, inter-generational conflict and wide mood swings, etc. Fifty per cent of clinical cases came from this group.

A mixed group was also identified. Patterns for females are broadly similar. As Esman (1990:25) notes, ‘at least two thirds of the total group developed in a manner inconsistent with the idea of “adolescent turmoil”’. So, how is adolescence associated with early school leaving, other than that it is the stage of development when most young people leave school? The answers to this question are for the most part threaded through this thesis. But the categories identified by Offer et al resonate with other aspects of the literature already discussed. It is legitimate to ask whether early school leavers are more likely to show a pattern of ‘tumultuous growth’. Such enquiry has not taken place.

I will now turn to a number of issues relating to adolescent development.

2.6.3 Early school leavers, sexuality and gender

Puberty is a universal experience. Sexual capacities develop, accompanied by rapid physical growth. It demands adaptation and incorporation as well as assimilation into the new body image and physique (Laufer and Laufer, 1984; Esman, 1990; Pines 1993). Many young people make this transition with ease. However, as Fleming and Kenny (1998:41) comment, sexuality is ‘an issue of importance’ for the early school leavers they studied and those who worked with them. They note that ‘In frequent meal-time conversations with staff there was a sense of humour which leaned towards the sexually explicit too frequently’.

The complexities (and indeed terrors) of the transition to an adult sexual identity are clear from observations of early school leavers. For example, Fleming and Kenny (1998:41) found that ‘a high percentage of girls were pregnant. There were stories of abuse regularly told and incidents of girls being severely abused were not uncommon’. As in other areas, gender differences are apparent (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; Ryan, 1997), for example in their divergent understanding of an idea such as *reputation*. For girls, ‘reputation’ is essentially sexual. For boys, it comprehends other domains as well, including sport, music and ability. So, a boy’s reputation is enhanced by sexual activity, whereas a girl’s is diminished. As a result, ‘Girls spend a good deal of energy defending their “reputation” in

conversations with boys' (Fleming and Kenny, 1998:14). Differences of perspective are not merely semantic. According to Quinn (1995:191-3) girls claim that pregnancy occurs because they won't use contraceptives, because if they did, they would be seen to be sexually active and 'loose'. She also finds (Quinn, 1995:5) that the young men are perceived by the young women to be irresponsible, with regard to both sexual activity and childcare.

But are they, or are they ignorant and fearful? The reduction of teenage pregnancies in the greater Dublin area was one objective of the Teenage Health Initiative. One trainer's comments on the boys on the programme are cited (Acton and Hynes, 1998:53/4):

It is not a matter of not being interested. The boys come into the group each time with such a burden of pressure, macho behaviour, confusion, induced hate, fear, aggression and inability to cope and express emotions that any issue and method involving trust, intimacy, sensitiveness and expression of feeling is extremely intimidating to them. It was necessary for me to stand back and realise the amount of baggage brought in every time by the males and begin to find ways to deal with it.

These gender differences are part of a wider picture. The pressure to conform to idealised body images may underpin the finding by Friel et al (1999) that one young female in five is on a weight reducing diet, as opposed to one in forty males.

So, early school leavers are often vulnerable, sexually precocious, yet also uninformed. This may be a cause of lone parenthood for some, and consequently of early school leaving (see 2.4.1). It also appears that many encounter considerable peer pressures, confusion and emotional inarticulacy. Apart from those experiencing pregnancy or sexual abuse, of itself this is unlikely to cause them to leave school early. However, it seems of a piece with other problems and may be indicative of both ecological and personal influences.

2.6.4 Identity and self-esteem

The ideal end point of a child's development is summarised by Greene and Moane (2000) as 'a comfortable and authentic identity for themselves in an increasingly complex world'. However, this is not always a smooth progression, and these authors note the need for 'more effort...to understand the difficulties

young people of both sexes confront' in its achievement. The establishment of an independent adult identity and self-esteem also feature strongly in the literature on early school leaving. For example, White (1996:6) argues that 'teenagers who drop out of school prematurely have pronounced identity difficulties when compared to the normative adolescent population'. It is unclear as to whether these difficulties are thought to influence early school leaving, or vice versa. It is also argued that young people who leave school early have low self-esteem and less sense of control over their own lives (Ekstrom et al 1986, cited by Morgan, 1998a). Axinn et al (1997:521) define self-esteem as 'the central evaluative component of the self and reflects the extent to which individuals believe they are worthwhile and merit respect'. They add that children with high self-esteem have higher levels of well-being than those who view themselves as inadequate, unworthy or seriously deficient. The role of contextual factors in creating and developing self-esteem is increasingly acknowledged. Pines (1993:80) comments that in adolescence 'feelings of self-esteem are particularly related to physical appearance and to the image of the self mirrored in positive or negative response from peer figures'. Axinn et al (1997) cite a wide range of research in their contention that the most important element in the development of self-esteem is the family, especially the quality of relationship between mothers and fathers and between parents and children. Self-esteem is also related to other dimensions of young people's lives, such as their success in school and the work force. Certain gender differences are found prompting Axinn et al (1997:538) to comment that 'the processes of self-esteem formation may be quite different for young women than for young men'.

These views support the association between low self-esteem and early school leaving. But is there a causal connection? The answer from the literature appears to be yes – for example, Axinn et al (1997) cite a range of studies to the effect that young people's self-esteem is a determining force in subsequent achievement (including school completion).

2.6.5 The transition to adulthood

The successful achievement of a 'comfortable and authentic identity' is a complex undertaking. Reporting on their research with early school leavers, Fleming and Kenny (1998:12) note how their subjects were 'rushing towards

adulthood at an accelerated pace'. The hurdles negotiated in a 'normal' or 'successful' pattern of transition to adulthood are summarised by Hannan and O'Riain (1993:7). They identify four stages:

- i. Entrance to employment directly upon finishing education;
- ii. The establishment of an independent residence;
- iii. Marriage only after employment stability has been achieved;
- iv. Starting a family of one's own only after marriage.

Synthesising other research, Hannan and O'Riain (1993:9) describe three main patterns, each related to social class:

1. Those from middle class homes go to higher education and professional training and have developed a long-term career orientation. They tend to delay marriage and childbearing, mainly in their late 20s or early 30s.
2. Children of skilled manual and clerical workers tend to do quite well out of second level education, mainly entering apprenticeships and clerical training. They have developed a 'short-term career orientation', tending to marry and start a family at a younger age, typically from 21 onwards.
3. Lower working class children tend to do worst at school, generally leaving at the minimum age and entering 'careerless' manual or lower service occupations. They tend to marry and start a family at a relatively young age – at any time from school-leaving age onwards.

Finally, additional pressures arise from a new transition model identified in post-industrial societies (du Bois-Reymond & Blasco, 2003). This refers to 'yo-yo' transitions, in which young people's transitions are no longer 'linear', that is, progressing in sequence through education, employment, marriage and children but are synchronised (for example, education + employment) or reversible. Disadvantaged young people are seen to be at risk in this model as in others.

I will now examine the role of disruptions.

2.6.6 Disruptions

The developmental disruptions identified in the literature on early school leaving include events, influences and processes such as illness (of the child or of family members), conflict and separation, bereavement and periods of poverty and/or

parental unemployment. It is argued that the timing and persistence of these disruptions are relevant (Rutter, 1994; Rutter and Smith 1995). Brooks-Gunn et al (1997) cite the work of Haveman, Wolfe and Spaulding (1991) and Brooks-Gunn, Guo and Furstenberg (1993) who have built 'models for predicting high school completion and dropout based on events that occurred in various periods of childhood'. Different patterns are identified in the literature. For example, poverty in early childhood is strongly associated with poor schoolwork and early school leaving. Poverty in late childhood and early adolescent years is significantly less influential (Brooks-Gunn et al, 1997, citing the Baltimore Study of Teenage Parenthood; Lipman & Offord, 1997). Reviewing the literature in this area, Smith et al (1997:165) suggest that 'family household factors may become more salient with age, in that they influence the outcomes of youths even with controls for income'.

These and other similar disruptions are at the familial or local level. Disruptions are also identified at wider levels. For example, mass youth unemployment of the kind encountered in Ireland between 1980 and 1997 is seen to have undermined the normal model of transition to adulthood as described above (Hannan and O'Riain, 1993). These authors also point out that teenage pregnancies and young marriages where the resources are poor create 'serious transitional blockages' and that the experience (of disrupted transition to adulthood) is 'likely to be highly distressing for most young people'. Hannan and O'Riain comment (1993:237) 'youth may well be a time of freedom and self-indulgence in some ways', but 'it is a highly structured and regulated experience'. They add that 'success or failure in early transitions can have quite distressing consequences, and these outcomes affect the course of their lives in very important ways'. Fleming and Kenny (1998:11) reflect on the experience of the lone parents among their sample of early school leavers:

Active sexually from a young age; family experiences of a deeply troubling nature, unmonitored and unmediated exposure to media influences, all come together to produce young women and men sexually active and becoming parents at an early age.

In the next section I will examine the question of susceptibility and resilience.

2.7 Mediating factors – the role of susceptibility and resilience

The discussion so far has explored the matrix of influences and causes of early school leaving. We have explored the given, the ecological and the developmental. Their roles vary – some simply predispose a child to school difficulties while others are more direct in their effects. One final area of discussion remains and it concerns the role of mediating factors and processes. These can be characterised as susceptibility and resilience or as risk factors and protective mechanisms (Rutter, 1990). There is a substantial literature on this topic. It shows that young people encountering the same influences and processes react in different ways. It also finds that some children are resilient to the negative effects of adverse conditions (Garmezy and Rutter, 1983; Furstenberg et al, 1987; Rolf et al (eds.), 1990; Charlot et al 1993, cited in Eurydice, 1994; Boldt, 1994; Bagley and Pritchard, 1998; Mayock, 2000).

Why is this? The answer is that there are factors and processes that alleviate or magnify the impact of other influences and causes. This is sometimes known as the ‘accentuation principle’ (Elder and Caspi, 1990, cited by Rutter and Smith, 1995). On the one hand there is a mix of individual susceptibility, vulnerability and adversity that increases the likelihood of a child leaving school early. On the other there is personal resilience and a variety of protective mechanisms that assist her/him to counter adversity and influence and remain in school (Rutter, 1990; Rutter and Smith, 1995). In discussing these mediating factors, I will begin with those factors that place an individual risk, that is, with *susceptibility*.

2.7.1 Susceptibility

According to Caprara and Rutter (1995), ‘There is a wealth of evidence from biology, medicine and social sciences that there are major differences in people’s susceptibility or vulnerability to almost every type of environmental risk’. A number of key themes recur in the research literature regarding the factors that *increase* the likelihood of early school leaving, by multiplying the influence of other factors (Axinn et al, 1997; Smyth and McCabe: 2001).

The first and most important negative multiplier is poverty and its harmful effects on children’s educational development and participation are extensively documented (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993; Fleming and Kenny, 1998). This is a

complex influence. I have already addressed it in a number of sections, for example 2.5.1 on the family's financial situation. Many researchers have found that negative effects disappear when they allow for income, suggesting that poverty is a fundamental influence and multiplier. It appears to inhibit the capacity of families to achieve informal social control, which in turn increases the likelihood of academic difficulties and adolescent delinquency, especially if linked to coercive parenting (Pagani et al, 1997; Conger et al 1997). As Hanson et al (1997) comment:

Economic hardship, income loss and unemployment have been found to reduce parental responsiveness, warmth and supervision and to increase inconsistent discipline practices and the use of harsh punishments...

The second negative multiplier is the 'draw' from the labour market. Early school leaving increases in line with increased labour market demand (Bynner, 1997). According to the OECD 'a high drop-out rate, as in Iceland, may be partly attributable to the ready availability of jobs for teenagers and the knowledge that secondary education can be completed at a later stage' (Budge et al, 2000:21). Young people are attracted to employment – as noted in foregoing sections, it marks a key watershed in the transition to adulthood – and parents with scarce resources may be loath to persuade them to do otherwise (Boldt, 1994). As Fleming and Kenny (1998:10) comment, 'Young people experience pressure from their own needs and from the needs of the home to have money. Poverty appears to be a major factor'. Hannan et al (1995) point out that from an economic rational choice perspective, there is no wage advantage in choosing to leave school early (1995:336). They conclude that the decision to leave school early is a result of the interaction of supply and demand-side factors.

A third set of multipliers, is identified in the literature, this time in the affective domain. It comprehends worry, anxiety and fear. Goleman (1996:83-5) points to worry and anxiety's 'damaging effect on mental performance of all kind'. He claims that '126 different studies of more than 36,000 people found that the more prone to worries a person is, the poorer their academic performance, no matter how measured' (see also Budge et al, 2000). But where might this anxiety and fear originate? O'Mahony (1993) points out that, measured by indictable offences, Ireland is safe by comparison with most European countries and vastly

safer than most countries elsewhere. It is therefore not surprising that the numbers of young people directly encountering domestic abuse are small. Regan and Kelly (2001) report on the outcomes of a year-long Irish research project surveying a representative sample of the general youth population. They find less than one young person in ten expresses concerns about safety in the home. Indeed, most of their fears refer to local property crime rather than that perpetrated within the home. Bearing in mind earlier discussion of arbitrary and violent discipline when parents are under stress, it is interesting that only small percentages (1-2%) cited fears of parent's temper and of sexual abuse. However, young women were four times more likely to be fearful of violence than were young men. Outside the domestic arena many young people perceive violence to be a routine presence in their lives. But is it? Given the widespread attention given to the subject in the popular media, it is noteworthy that bullying at school was only cited as a fear by a small number of Regan and Kelly's respondents. This is consistent with O'Sullivan's (1998) survey of a cohort of early school leavers in Dublin, of whom 4 per cent cited it as their reason for leaving school. Violence may also be a feature of many of the areas in which the young people live. As Regan and Kelly (2001) comment, 'Most young people know someone in their family/friendship group/community who has suffered harassment, abuse or violence'. Of itself, this environmental violence is unlikely to cause early school leaving, but it enhances the effect of other influences.

Alcohol and drugs and their consequences constitute the fourth group of adverse multipliers. Two broad themes emerge from the literature, the effects of parental abuse of drugs and alcohol and the abuse of drugs and alcohol by young people themselves. As regards the first of these, there is little disagreement with the premise that alcohol and drug abuse is a cause of family dysfunction and poverty (Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, 2002). Substance abuse by parents, relatives and members of the local community is often cited in polemical literature as a negative influence on young people's participation in education (for example, see McCarthy, 2000). It is also seen to be a central and causal element of a matrix of difficulties faced by disadvantaged families and communities. However, inter-generational effects are contested. Some researchers maintain that children who drink and use illicit drugs are more likely to have parents who drink heavily and

that, as Silbersein et al (1996:517) put it, 'offspring of alcoholics are approximately five times more likely to develop alcohol-related problems than offspring of non-alcoholics'. But research in the United Kingdom suggests that both abstainers and heavy drinkers are more likely to have heavy drinking children (Velleman, 1992; Velleman and Orford, 1999). As regards drug use, Farrell (2001:165) points out that 'little is known about the social and psychological effects on children of parental drug use'. Farrell refers to research on the social and psychological effects on young children of parental opiate use which found that only a few children showed evidence of social-emotional problems, but the majority were experiencing difficulties in school. This research is ongoing.

Turning to young people's abuse of drugs and alcohol, this is a highly political question in Ireland and is the subject of considerable levels of attention in the popular media. Regrettably, as Mayock (2000) and others point out, research has been almost entirely epidemiological. As such it is useful, but should be treated with considerable caution. One of the few uncontested aspects of this question is that use of alcohol (as reflected in both frequency of drinking and the quantity consumed per occasion) increases steeply during adolescence and then declines sharply in early adulthood (Rutter and Smith, 1995, Friel et al, 1998). As to gender effects, while it may once have been the case that boys drank more heavily, took more drugs and generally engaged in more risky behaviour than girls (Silbersein et al, 1995) this is no longer true, especially in Ireland. Successive surveys conducted by the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD) reveal that 16-year old girls in Ireland binge-drink as frequently as boys do. They also reveal similar use of inhalants. While there is no social class effect regarding the consumption of alcohol (Friel et al, 1998) the abuse of heroin is largely a working class phenomenon in Ireland (Mayock, 2000).

But does their use of alcohol and drugs influence young people's participation in school? The consensus view is summarised by Silbersein et al (1995) that 'poor school achievement, truancy and school drop-out are highly associated with substance use'. Mayock's (2000) research found that a high proportion of problem drugtakers was expelled from school (11 out of 18). At the same time,

only 2 of these individuals indicated that their drug abuse was a significant factor in the decision to leave school. But these young people started using drugs earlier than drugtakers and abstainers, the other groups identified by Mayock (2000) and it may be that their school difficulties and the drug-taking are indicative of broader, deeper difficulties. Mayock does not claim a causal link between early school leaving and problematic drug use. The young people were from the same area and, it may be inferred from the text, shared the same social and economic characteristics. Other susceptibilities may be in play, such as personal capacities, family structure, family functioning, and so on. There may also be unidentified coping mechanisms or resilience factors in the differing responses of the young people to drugs. This corresponds with the findings of Velleman and Orford (1999) who identify a number of resilience factors regarding alcohol. That said, the strong association between alcohol and drug abuse and early school leaving is incontrovertible, and the likelihood is that alcohol and drug abuse are both directly causal and greatly heighten the influence of other factors.

A fifth theme concerns the operation of multiple adversities and synergistic effects. Those influences that increase the effect of given individual, ecological or developmental factors rarely exist in isolation. That social problems cluster in families and neighbourhoods is also accepted (Rutter & Madge, 1981; Hannan and O'Riain, 1993; Bagley and Pritchard 1998). Synthesising research in the United Kingdom and the United States, Rutter & Madge (1981) conclude that '*at least one in twenty* families suffer from multiple problems' and that 'the proportion in inner city areas is certainly considerably in excess of this' (see also Rourke, 1994; Fleming and Murphy, 2000). This view forms the basis for a wide range of State interventions in Ireland. However Nolan et al (1998) express reservations. They accept that clustering of disadvantage exists, but question the case for cumulative disadvantage. They also argue that poverty is spatially dispersed, and is likely to be as severe in a dispersed rural setting as in an urban 'disadvantaged area'.

Multiple disadvantages are often characterised as a continuum or cycle of deprivation (Rutter and Madge, 1981). For the European Commission (1996:19) 'lack of qualifications, unemployment, dependence on social security, accommodation difficulties and health problems contribute to create a situation

in which various types and causes of disadvantage are mutually reinforced'. It is also argued and widely accepted (though not universally) that each element of the cycle is likely to renew, magnify or entrench the others. According to Rutter and Pickles (1991) 'synergistic effects' often occur, a view supported by Hannan and O'Riain (1993) and Stokes (1995). Caprara & Rutter (1995) point out that single stressful experiences that occur truly in isolation carry low risks, but that

Serious risks tend to derive from a combination of adversities or stresses occurring at the same time, from meaningful links between a current stress and a previous adversity, or from accumulations of stresses/adversities over time.

They add that 'the addition of an extra risk factor may have an overall effect that is greater than its effect on its own, if it increases the rate of multiple adversities'. Irish experience supports the view that adverse factors combine in the cases of many Irish early school leavers (O'Sullivan, 1994; Stokes, 1995)

Throughout the literature it is clear that this is a complex area, and that causal mechanisms and/or relationships operate in intricate ways. However Rutter and Madge (1981) argue that it is also necessary to recognise the possibility of protective as well as vulnerability mechanisms adding that the 'synergistic or catalytic effect can also work in the opposite direction. In other words, protective factors may also be in play. It is to these protective factors that I will now turn.

2.7.2 Resilience

The study of resilience attempts to identify factors and processes (or protective mechanisms) that might explain individual variations in response to risk factors and adversities (Rutter, 1990; Axinn et al, 1997). It has been the subject of considerable research across many disciplines (Rolf et al, 1990). In summarising the position, Rutter (1990:181/2) identifies the 'crucial role' played by three fields of research in establishing the importance of the concept. The first of these is *quantitative research with high-risk populations* such as the children of mentally ill parents and the consistency with which this research found marked variations in outcomes. The second is *research into temperament*, which confirmed that children's qualities influenced their responses to a variety of stress situations. The third is *research into the ways in which people meet key life changes and transitions*. This places emphasis on the importance of person-

environmental interactions at these key turning points. It also comprehends the study of *coping and mastery* which identified variations in the ways in which people deal with threat and challenge. In this, agency was emphasised – as Rutter (1990:182) puts it, ‘Resilience was not just a matter of constitutional strength, it was also a reflection of what one did about one’s plight’. But if we turn to early school leaving, what are the key protective mechanisms? Five key variables are identified in the literature.

The first of these concerns individual factors and personality features. These include temperament, intelligence and cognitive abilities, social and communication skills, autonomy, self-esteem and a positive social orientation; (Rutter, 1990 quoting Garmezy, 1985; Hess, 1995). Goleman (1996) argues that ‘emotional intelligence’ is such a factor. This is a relatively recent concept promulgated by Goleman (1996). It has spawned its own growing literature. As with Multiple Intelligence Theory, it attempts to synthesise outcomes of research and practice, and allows for cultural specificity and learned behaviours. Certainly, as argued by Goleman, a strong case can be made that low levels of emotional intelligence influence early school leaving. However, the present research does not have the appropriate access to address this possibility.

The second protective factor is family cohesion and parental warmth. According to Hanson et al (1997:191), ‘A substantial body of research has shown that parental warmth, involvement and moderate control facilitate children’s adjustment and achievement’. Children appear to benefit when they are raised in homes where the parents are warm, responsive and highly involved with their children; where parents monitor and direct children’s behaviour and punish misdeeds in a consistent and non-hostile manner; and where parents have high and clearly stated expectations. This includes close affectional ties to family members, including grandparents and siblings as well as family cultural resources (Rutter, 1990, quoting Garmezy, 1985; Hess, 1995).

The third protective factor consists of positive expectations (of and by self and family), hope and optimism and positive perceptions of the future. I have already dealt with the beneficial effects of positive expectations and future orientation in 2.5.1 above. According to Hanson et al (1997), ‘High and clearly stated parental expectations can provide a sense of direction and motivation to children’ (see

also Rutter, 1990; Morgan, 1998). Craft (1972) finds that higher levels of future orientation and activist values in mothers were associated with staying on in school, especially for girls. Expectations may be related to hope and optimism, which are cited by Goleman (1996) and Boldt (1997). As regards optimism, Goleman (1998:88) describes it as 'an attitude that buffers people against falling into apathy, hopelessness or depression in the face of tough going' (see also Seligman, 1991).

The fourth protective factor is the availability of external support systems that encourage and reinforce a child's coping efforts. A range of external supports is identified as pivotal in building resilience. Some are found in the extended family. For example, Young and Wilmott found (1968:58) that 'by being more easy-going' grandparents 'can supply the children with another model of what adults are like'. This relationship of 'friendly familiarity and almost of social equality' has been observed across a range of cultures and societies. They comment (1968:192) that 'in a three-generation family the old as well as the young both receive and give services; the aid is reciprocal' (See also Rutter, 1990, Boldt, 1994; Hess, 1995). Such external supports may also be found in school (Ryan, 1998) or in the community (European Commission, 2000a). There is also considerable support in the literature for the concept of mentoring as a protective mechanism. Mentoring is described by NICEC/NCGE (1998) as 'a one-to-one relationship, which essentially faces "inwards": the mentor's purpose is to offer motivation, non-judgemental support and a positive role model'. An advocate also qualifies as external support but here the purpose is to engage with other agents or agencies on the client's behalf' ((Rutter and Smith, 1995; NICEC/IGC 1998; Stokes, 1999b; Tallaght Partnership, 1999; Ryan, 2000a; Watts, 2002).

The final protective factor is the mediating impact of geographical factors on early school leaving. For example, Fleming and Kenny (1998:12) find rural school leavers different to their urban counterparts, being 'in general, more successful at school' and many having achieved 'excellent results in the Junior Certificate'. In a comment that endorses those made above on family cohesion as a protective mechanism, they add that 'Their families too were more frequently together as a unit offering support to the young person'. However, negative

effects are also apparent. For example, Rourke (1994) argues that the problems faced by disadvantaged young people in rural areas are often more extreme than their urban counterparts. They include issues of access such as transport. Indeed, Boldt (1997) found a higher degree of pessimism among his Edenderry and Kilkenny samples when compared to Dublin and Dundalk. In a comment that may explain these findings, Hannan and O'Riain (1993:106) comment as follows:

Looking at the lower working (and small farms) class, we find somewhat higher levels of educational failure or underachievement in Dublin and the larger cities... and greater educational success in the particularly remote area. However, the greatest problems of underachievement are amongst the lower working class of smaller rural towns...

2.8 Summary

In this chapter I have explored the elements that go to make up the matrix of influences and causes behind early school leaving. I began by examining the young people's perspective on early school leaving. They largely cite school-related factors for their decision to leave early. I then noted the general themes found in the literature, before proposing a framework for the matrix of factors as follows – given or individual factors, contextual factors, developmental factors and mediating factors. Using this framework, I examined the literature on early school leaving.

Among the given factors, I noted that gender is thought to be predictive, but not causal, apart from lone parenthood. I also noted that intelligence as represented by IQ is associated with early school leaving, but that it may be an indicator of school readiness and not a person's full range of capacities. However, learning difficulties such as Asperger's Syndrome are thought to be directly causal, unless identified and adequately addressed early in the child's life. Similarly, ethnicity, which is still largely identified in the Irish context with Travellers, is associated with early school leaving, with the culture of Travellers strongly prompting young people, especially males, to leave school early. Turning to ecosystems, I examined the literature on the family, the school, the neighbourhood, the peer group and social class. In each of these a range of factors are associated with early school leaving. Many are clearly influential, and they include family

functioning, the Irish school system, school organisation, curriculum, cultural bias and the lack of accommodation of different ways of learning in school. In a number of instances, for example teacher-pupil relationships, it is agreed that a direct causal process may be identified. These are few. Rather, it appears to be a combination of pragmatism and indifference regarding education, coupled with increased stress and diminished self-esteem and sense of control arising from such ecological factors as family conflict, poverty and parental depression that cause early school leaving.

I also explored developmental factors and the role of disruptions. There is general agreement that a young person experiencing difficulties in making a key transition (for example from primary to post-primary school) is significantly more likely to leave school early. However, adolescence of itself is rarely either influential or causal. This is not to understate the difficulties of finding a mature adult identity and problems regarding this transition, for example to do with sexuality, were noted.

Finally, I examined the role of mediating factors such as susceptibility and resilience. A number of factors may be identified that either increase the possibility of a morbid outcome or protect against the same. Many of these are contextual, such as family cohesion and parental warmth. Factors such as alcohol and drug abuse, either by the young person or her/his parent(s) increase the likelihood of difficulties in school. On the other hand, positive expectations and future orientation are powerful protections against early school leaving.

Through these explorations a number of other factors emerged that should be noted, for example the role of mothers and their relationship with the child from birth. Indeed, the question of relationships threads its way through the entire chapter and the breakdown of relationships, with teachers and schools, but possibly also with family and support networks, is particularly significant in early school leaving.

In the next chapter, I will outline and discuss the research context, methodology and rationale.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter one I set out the background to the present study, introducing the phenomenon of early school leaving and the reasons why it is and has been the focus of concern in Ireland and Europe. In Chapter two the matrix of influences identified as being either influential or causal in early school leaving was described and discussed. In this chapter I will describe and discuss the research methodology adopted.

3.2 The research context

The research is based in YOUTHREACH. This programme emerged from European funded project strands in the 1970s and 1980s (Stokes, 1988) and has itself been influential in shaping European policy and practice (European Commission, 2000a). Although it is a national programme, it is locally managed and delivered. Provision takes place in out-of-school centres. YOUTHREACH was originally envisaged as a response to the youth unemployment crisis of the 1980s, that is, as a labour market or training measure rather than education. However, the proportion of the programme delivered by the education system increased through the 1990s and its focus increasingly embraced individualised personal and educational objectives. This process and the inherent tension in the programme between economic goals and personal goals has been remarked by observers (O'Sullivan, 1994; Quinn, 1994; ESF, 1996). It has been the subject of extensive reportage. A brief general description is included in Appendix 3.

3.3 Towards an appropriate methodology

How are the guiding questions for the research to be answered? As we have seen, many factors are at play in early school leaving. The challenge for the researcher in testing such a complex explanatory framework is to construct an appropriate research methodology. As Blalock and Blalock (1982:5) point out, it is necessary to view social phenomena 'as complex problems to which equally complex methods must be applied'. As regards the present research, it is not necessary to

replicate the epidemiological research in which the Irish literature abounds. Neither is it appropriate to replicate qualitative (often localised ethnographic) studies, however much they have added to our understanding of the question of early school leaving. For the purposes of this research, other methods are called for. Accordingly, the present study is built around three elements:

1. A series of case study observations: these explore the operation of the matrix of influences on individual young people and were conducted by experienced practitioners (Observers). They generate biographical profiles and yield both qualitative and quantitative data;
2. A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the Observers who conducted the case study observations.
3. A number of triangulation interviews with expert practitioners.

In its pragmatic incorporation of elements from different research methodologies, this could be styled a qualitative approach, defined by Van Maanen (1983:9) as

an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.

However, Sugrue and Uí Thuama (1994) opt for the term 'interpretive' as more inclusive. This term includes 'ethnographic, qualitative, participant-observational, case study, symbolic interactionist, phenomenological and constructivist'. The approach is also influenced by a number of other methodologies such as grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and 'illuminative evaluation'. I will return to the former below. As regards the latter, in describing this approach Herbert (1990:36) emphasises that a subject should not be 'examined in isolation, but in context' adding that

observation, interviews with participants, questionnaires, analysis of documents, and background information are integrated to help 'illuminate' problems, issues and significant features of the programme.

Herbert adds that this methodology is practitioner-oriented, problem-centred, flexible and cross-disciplinary. It is also heuristically organised, that is, the research issues are progressively re-defined as the study goes on and new data

emerge. An observation phase occupies a central place in illuminative evaluation, of which Blalock & Blalock (1982:94) comment,

Its advantage is that it allows the researcher to document the behaviour of subjects as it occurs and events as they take place. It is not as dependent as other methods on the subject's ability or motivation to participate.

The overall approach exemplifies what Sugrue and Uí Thuama (1994) identify as 'mixed methods with an interpretive bias'. Typical of this is 'a combination of interview and/or observation' but also including 'further enquiry elements as a means of triangulation' (Sugrue and Uí Thuama, 1994:117). I will begin my description of the research process with the case study observations.

3.4 The case study observations

The foregoing paragraphs already suggest why case study observations are such a central part of the research. The question 'why does an individual child leave school early?' is only answerable in terms of the experience of that child. So, how is that experience to be captured, especially where it may involve incidents or influences that are not available to the researcher? Case study observations offer one way to resolve this conundrum. Of course, case study is not a single method but 'an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus an enquiry around an instance' (Adelman et al, 1980: 48). As O'Sullivan (1994:144) summarises, 'Research techniques typically used in case studies include participant observation, life histories, observation and interviews'. Stenhouse (1988:49) notes that case study is particularly appropriate to enquiry into the problems that arise in education, which

involve such a complex interaction of variables that they elude quantitative techniques which reduce disparate observed phenomena to the homogeneity of traits or types.

As to observation, it is widely used by researchers, and boasts a range of techniques. Nonetheless, as Blalock & Blalock comment (1982:94/5), as a scientific method it 'requires specialised expertise and strong adherence to procedures that yield reliable, accurate information about the phenomenon being studied.' This reservation was addressed by the structure and spatial distribution of the research, the choice and briefing of the Observers and by triangulation as

is described below. Fifty eight case study observations were conducted at ten sites. Towards this end, sites were chosen, experienced practitioners were identified as Observers and subjects were selected.

3.4.1 The sites

The choice of sites and identification of Observers were closely linked. As regards the selection of a research site, Burgess (1982:61) cites Spradley (1980) in identifying five criteria to be used. The first of these is simplicity – that is, a research site that allows researchers *to move from studying simple situations to those which are more complex*. The second is *accessibility*, that is the degree of access and entry that is given to the researcher. The third is *unobtrusiveness*. This is explained as situations that allow the researcher to take an unobtrusive role. Fourthly, there is *permissibility*. This is understood to refer to situations that allow the researcher free or limited or restricted entry. Fifth, there is *participation*. Becker (1970) suggests that one way to avoid the problems associated with the other procedures is for researchers to locate themselves in *natural settings where observation can occur*. Burgess (1982) notes that it is important that activities can be easily studied, that individuals who are representative of the group are present, that the setting remains ‘natural’ once an observer becomes involved and that the setting is ‘representative’.

The research was located in YOUTHREACH Centres. These offer a general environment that satisfies the foregoing conditions and criteria. Each is a natural setting, boundaries can be established and activities can be easily studied. All participants are early school leavers and representative of the group to be studied. As will be described below, the Observers are themselves members of the centre’s community, so the site remains ‘natural’. The Centres also satisfy the demand for simplicity, accessibility, unobtrusiveness, permissibility and participation. The particular sites for the present research were identified according to the following criteria:

- They should be broadly representative in geographical terms;
- They should be situated in a broadly representative range of socio-economic contexts (for example, inner city, county town and so on);

- Experienced and reflective practitioners should be available on the site to conduct observations, according to the criteria set out below;
- There should be sufficient flexibility for staff to fully engage with the research process.

Ten regions were identified across the country and one site was identified in each. At the time of the research, this constituted one centre in seven of the YOUTHREACH programme. There is little room for bias in the sites themselves. In the Dublin area there was an inner city site and a suburban site located in a large disadvantaged council housing area. Other sites were in the south (major city and regional capitol), the south-east (county town), the south-west (county town), the mid-west (small and isolated town), the east (small town), the border region (county town), the midlands (small town) and the west (small town with extensive rural catchment area). They offered a comprehensive sample of inner and outer urban, small town and rural contexts.

3.4.2 The Observers

The second question to be decided concerned those who would carry out the case study observations, the Observers. In addition to those already noted regarding the choice of sites, a number of factors were decisive in the decision to use experienced practitioners as the key actors and informants in the research. They include the scale of the undertaking. The study, in effect, is an aggregation or meta-analysis of ten site studies. The prospective Observers also embodied local and particular knowledge. As already noted above, they being members of the centre's community, the site remains 'natural'. Of particular significance was the high level of access and trust between the Observers and subjects. The author would not have been able to develop such a relationship. According to Blalock & Blalock (1982:95), the basic prerequisite of all participant observation is that the researcher must gain the confidence of the persons being studied:

The researcher's presence must not disrupt, or in any way interfere with, the natural course of the group's activities, and the subjects must give honest answers to questions and not conceal important activities from the researcher's view... Participant observation depends on the interpersonal skills of the investigator and on the ability to prevent personal biases from distorting interpretations.

The research approach, of involving individuals who have worked among the young people for a considerable length of time and have built up strong relationships with them and their communities recognises and incorporates this point of view. The Observers are also identified on the basis of *theoretical sensitivity*. This is an aspect of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:42-3). It refers to a personal quality of the researcher and indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. Among sources of theoretical sensitivity are professional experience and personal experience. The analytic process itself provides an additional resource. As to the identification of the particular practitioners, the research process also incorporates the approach known as *judgement sampling*. Burgess (1982:55) explains this as follows:

In judgement sampling informants may be selected for study according to a number of criteria established by the researcher such as their status... or previous experience that endows them with special knowledge...

In the light of the foregoing, the Observers were chosen according to a number of criteria:

- Their experience in working with early school leavers and the level of trust and confidence established between them and the participants in their Centres;
- Their professional profile, including qualifications;
- Their knowledge and understanding of the subject of early school leaving in general, in their Centres and in the communities they served;
- Their capacity and willingness to conduct and contribute to the research and maintain the integrity of the research project and process;
- Their location, to satisfy the need for appropriate geographical distribution as described above. In this sense, choice of site and choice of Observer were closely linked.

The Observers were identified by the author. Given the potential for bias in this, it is appropriate to discuss my own theoretical sensitivities. The national co-ordination of YOUTHREACH represented the third phase of my career in education, after five years of teaching in disadvantaged schools and ten years of curriculum development. As practitioner, researcher and National Co-ordinator, the focus of my work has been the alleviation of educational disadvantage and

the promotion of effective and responsive practice and policy towards that end. National co-ordination operates in both fields (policy and practice) and at a number of levels, Departmental, local (VECs and communities) and centre (Co-ordinators, staff and programme participants). The work of national co-ordination was closely intertwined with the pursuit of this doctoral study, each informing the other. The reflective processes involved in developing and executing the present research prompted engagement with, and in some cases publication of, a range of ideas, concepts and possible paradigm changes relating to my own work and that of the wider service framework addressing disadvantage. Amongst these were,

- Appropriate methodologies to address learning difficulties and early school leaving (Stokes; 1996b; 1999a);
- Processes of change in education in general and in programmes addressing early school leaving in particular (Stokes, 1995; Stokes, 2000a);
- The need for inter-agency collaboration and community-based approaches to service delivery in general and education and training in particular. This was adopted by the Department of Education and Science and FÁS as the ‘District Approach’ policy (Stokes, 1996a; Stokes 2002a, 2002b);
- New paradigms of service delivery involving formal and non-formal sectors, for example in guidance and counselling. This latter was adopted both by the European Commission and by the Department of Education and Science and FÁS as the so-called MAGIC approach, this acronym deriving from Mentoring, Advocacy, Guidance, Information and Counselling (Stokes, 1999a; European Commission, 2000b).

The foregoing informed the process of identifying and negotiating with the Observers. In addition to satisfying the criteria set out above, those identified were experienced, insightful and reflective practitioners, sensitive to research and professional parameters and their relationship of trust with the young people in their Centre had been observed by the author on visits to their Centres. Six were co-ordinators (managers) since their particular YOUTHREACH Centres had opened. Seven had qualifications in education or training practice (one with additional qualifications in adult education) and two in youth work (both with additional qualifications, one in counselling, the other in sports coaching). Nine had experience in second-level or adult education, training or youth work before

recruitment to YOUTHREACH and one had been recruited from industry. This individual had worked on YOUTHREACH since its inception. No Observer had less than five years experience in YOUTHREACH. All were known to the author as concerned and thoughtful professionals and in a number of cases, they had themselves contributed to the development of the conceptual framework for YOUTHREACH and the various ideas and models noted above.

Before agreeing to become involved in the research process, each Observer was briefed by the author on the purpose of the research, the approach to be adopted and their role. This included technical aspects (for example as regards the identification of subjects) and process. A short note on the process was then forwarded to those participating in the research, accompanied by a copy of the Observation record. Both are reproduced in Appendix 1. The author did not initiate contact while the Observation was in progress but was available to the Observers. Subsequent to the completion of the observations, the Observers were interviewed. I will return to these at 3.4.4 and 3.5 below.

Is there potential for bias in the observations? There is, and two factors are noted in particular. The first is the scope for personal bias on the Observers' part regarding particular subjects. However, the author argues that much of the Observation record leaves little room for such bias, being a straightforward record of what is known of, and told by, the subject. In addition, there is considerable cross-referencing in the record. For example, the question of the family's history, including its history of employment, is addressed in a succession of questions. These canvass the Observer's point of view (B.2 'Very briefly outline the family narrative if known') and that of the subject (C.2 'how does the young person see her/himself, particularly in relation to personal, family, community histories/narratives?'). The second factor concerns the author's professional role and status and the possibility that his relationship with his informants would compromise their independence in pursuing their role in the research. As against this, it was stressed to respondents that this was a private study and was being pursued in the author's own time and at his expense. As regards their independence, the Observers were employees of their respective Vocational Education Committees and the author had no supervisory function over their work nor indeed their employment. Consequently, there was no sense

in which their role was compromised. Indeed, the author argues that the contrary was the case. One of his functions in the overall YOUTHREACH programme was to provide a general support and 'listening post' for co-ordinators, explaining and mediating their general experience to national and local authorities. In this sense it is argued that, just as the Observers had established a relationship of trust with the participants in their Centres, so too had the author with them. As a result, it can be argued that their contribution to the research was more inquisitive, reflective, forthcoming and committed than would have been the case with another researcher.

3.4.3 The subjects

By definition, each subject is an early school leaver by virtue of participating in a YOUTHREACH programme. The choice of specific subjects was consequent upon the identification of sites. They were chosen from participants in the ten sites on a random basis, by month of birth. All young people born between January 1st and March 31st in any year were identified to yield a 25 per cent sample of programme participants. No other specification was made except that subjects should have been on the programme for at least three months, so that a relationship of trust would have had time to develop.

Two areas of potential bias are identified. The first is that subjects might present subjective accounts of certain of their experiences, for example in school, or with teachers: This has been acknowledged in the literature review and will again be acknowledged in the presentation of the research outcomes. The second concerns sampling. As Burgess (1984) notes, each strategy for sampling a group carries inherent problems of representation. For example, Becker (1970) refers to the study of incarcerated deviants as a mechanism for studying deviance and identifies that bias exists in such a group, for the deviants that are studied are unsuccessful – they have been caught. Similarly, those studied in the present research do not include young people who have also left school early, but have successfully entered the labour market. This may somewhat bias the outcomes of the research towards the problematic end of the spectrum. However, the purpose of the research is not to compile a quantitative study of early school leaving nor of the characteristics of early school leavers. Rather, it is to probe the matrix of influences and causes associated with early school leaving. While quantitative

outcomes from the sample are useful in their own right, their principal function is to illuminate consideration of the explanatory framework and they are best taken as indicative rather than conclusive. In many instances, as I will show, the outcomes suggest further fields of enquiry.

3.4.4 The case study observation process, instrument and analysis

So far, I have described where the study was conducted, who was observed and by whom. I will now describe the observation itself. This process took place between April and June 1997. It was guided and recorded by an *individual observation record*. This is in questionnaire format with both closed and open questions (Appendix 1). The function of such an instrument is explained by Blalock and Blalock (1982:97) as follows:

In most studies, even very exploratory ones, the goal of the investigator is to develop a specific format for observing and recording observations prior to data collection, based on previous knowledge of the phenomenon.

The observation record enquires into the various factors identified in the matrix of influences. It should be noted that the sequence in which the matrix is presented in Chapter 2 post-dates the circulation of the Observation record and reflects subsequent reorganisation of the author's analysis of the explanatory framework. However, the themes explored are the same. Observers were advised that the observation process should take at least a month and that the record should be completed over time and not as a single set piece. They were also told that the process was reflective and participatory rather than interrogative of the young people. They were encouraged to actively involve the subjects in the observation process on topics where such involvement was appropriate, for example in reflecting on their childhood or school experiences. It was accepted that Observers would exercise professional discretion as regards the discussion of certain areas of the young people's lives with them, such as possible incidence of sexual abuse. Where direct enquiry of the subjects was inappropriate, the Observers simply recorded what they knew from their work and observation. The individual subjects were not identifiable by the author.

The observation record generates biographical or narrative profiles of the subjects. It also yields general qualitative and quantitative data. While the

observation record provides a case-study framework within which to conduct the observations, it also prompts reflection by the observers as experienced practitioners, a process allowed for in the research through the follow-up interviews with Observers (Blalock and Blalock, 1982).

Subsequent to the completion of the observation phase of the research, the author collated the data contained in the 58 observation records for analysis. Firstly, biographical profiles were assembled for each individual, of which examples are included at the outset of Chapter four. In themselves, these vindicate the approach, presenting narratives and real life experiences to illustrate the operation of the matrix of influences. Secondly, the case study observations were analysed under the headings identified for the matrix to yield both qualitative and quantitative insights and outcomes. As to how this was done, Table 3 (page 127) presents part of the analysis of answers to question B.8 of the Observation record, 'Is there a history of violence in the family?' Those identified in the table are the subjects where the answer is yes. Similar data were compiled for each of the 75 questions of the observation record. These were then analysed under the various headings of the matrix of influences as set out in Chapter 2.

3.5 The interviews with the Observers

Subsequent to the completion of the observations, in-depth interviews were conducted with the Observers. According to Easterby-Smith et al (1991), in-depth interviews are 'the most fundamental of all qualitative methods'. Interviews have a range of advantages, according to Denscombe (1983), including the generation of 'hard data' if the interview is recorded and transcribed, as these were. The author requested and obtained permission to record the interviews. This was forthcoming in all cases.

Ten interviews with Observers were conducted, from 30 June 1997 to 28 July 1997. Each interview lasted approximately two hours and was subsequently transcribed. Notes were also taken during the interviews, firstly as a back-up record of the conversation in the event of technical mishap and secondly to note emerging themes and illuminations as they arose. This is consistent with the grounded theory concept of not only testing theory, but building it as well (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Table 3: Themes emerging from family narrative: Violence	
Name	
Catherine	Violent father – occasional separations
Carol	Clip on the ear type
Gerard	Would not think there was violence normally, but trainee came in with black eye, said he got it while arguing with his father – slipped and hit the radiator
Gemma	Family feuding in the area – has witnessed extreme violence – were shot out of their house – first daughter’s father was stabbed in the neck and died
Jason	Physical violence by Father and Mother’s new partner
Caitríona	Yes – the Father would have acted aggressively towards the Mother when he was living at home
Zuni	Yes – Mother’s partner has been involved in violence in last family
Francis	Yes – both Mother and Father
Bridget	Yes- Father to Mother and now eldest Brother is violent towards the women in the family
Joseph	Yes- including the kids – violent crime etc
Katie	Mother is the consistent one that holds the family together – father aggressive and violent toward him and his brother
Martha	Yes – Extended family and she presents as if afraid
David	Yes – extended family – children appear to be afraid of adults
Matthew	Yes (no comment)
Wayne	Yes (no comment)
Thomas	Unknown – but timid when approached
Kevin	Yes (no comment)
Margaret	Yes (no comment)
Jackie	Many difficulties – Jackie spent time in foster care – at one stage family attended family therapy, this helped but the situation is very unstable – some beatings... but only in the immediate family – the children were beaten when they were younger
Derek	Yes- father has a violent and feared temper
Yvonne	Very abusive father – violent to all members of the family – particularly this one
Graham	Family abuse, violence in home, joy riding
Tina	Yes – father beat mother
Karl	Yes – a clip around the ear now and then
Annette	Yes – fights and beatings when father was drunk
Grace	Parents married young – alcohol problem with father – mother physically abused – children suffered – little food care or space - Yes – children beaten when he was drunk

The interviews afforded the Observers an opportunity to reflect on the process and outcomes of the case study observations and to comment as experienced

practitioners on the subject of early school leaving in general and the matrix of influences in particular. As a result, they enlightened many aspects of the research and added breadth and depth to the outcomes of the case study observations. Although structured on the themes and questions of the observation record, the interviews themselves were open-ended and as the series progressed came to include questions prompted by earlier interviews. Where the record asked direct questions regarding the individual subjects, the interview posed general inquiries aimed at eliciting broader answers and reflections. A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix 2.

While the author already had a clear understanding of the views of the Observers (having conducted the interviews), nonetheless it was considered important to have what Denscombe (1983) describes as 'hard data' to hand, and so, the interviews were transcribed in their entirety. Comments were allocated under the different headings set out in Chapter two. They were then analysed in parallel with the analysis of the outcomes of the observation record.

As regards the potential for bias in this part of the process, points made regarding the potential for bias among the Observers apply to the interviews.

3.6 Triangulation

The final element of the research process is triangulation. As I have already noted, the present research is an example of an interpretive approach, or of 'mixed methods with an interpretive bias'. As Burgess (1984) notes, researchers use multiple strategies to overcome problems arising from, among other factors, a single method or single set of data. He adds that the most widely used term to be found in the literature is *triangulation*, a term 'borrowed from psychological reports' to refer to situations when a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing. Guba and Lincoln (1985) also note the use of such techniques to strengthen conclusions. In the present research the element of triangulation was incorporated to provide 'depth-of-field' to the outcomes of the observations. This is an example of what Burgess (1984) terms *multiple strategies* in which researchers use 'a range of methods, data, investigators and theories within any study' to overcome any problem of bias. In using the term, however, he espouses a further aim, not only to see different

approaches used alongside one another, 'but also to see them integrated within the course of an investigation' as was the case with the present research.

Triangulation was accomplished through a series of three interviews that took place on 21, 23 and 28 July 1997, after the observation case studies and the interviews with the Observers had been completed. This triangulation process involved five expert practitioners:

- a YOUTHREACH co-ordinator with 15 years experience in a variety of settings with the group being studied. This practitioner was qualified as a teacher, as a reality therapist and as a psychologist;
- two youth drama practitioners, both qualified to Master's degree level, who had concluded a one-year pilot programme with four YOUTHREACH centres exploring the young people's personal, family and community narratives and sense of place;
- two photography teachers specialising in youth work. These had worked in over thirty YOUTHREACH settings focusing on visual literacy, visual perception, sense of place and learning to learn.

These interviews followed the same interview schedule as those with the Observers, but with two changes of emphasis. Firstly, additional questions had been identified arising from other interviews. These questions reflected evolving perspectives and understandings of the issues and outcomes. Secondly, the process prompted these interviewees (based on their professional experience and knowledge of early school leaving) to reflect and comment on what appeared to be the outcomes to date of the research, rather than on the outcomes of the observation case studies. The analysis of these triangulation interviews followed the same pattern as those with the Observers. As their function was to comment on emerging outcomes and add depth of field rather than generate core data for the research, the issue of bias is not significant in these interviews.

3.7 Generalisation

Finally in this chapter, the question of generalisation arises. It is the case that 'interpretive' studies do not demand a strict representational base. Furthermore, the primary focus of the present research is to test, illustrate and illuminate rather than quantify the matrix of influences associated with early school leaving.

Nonetheless, as is clear from the foregoing, every effort was made to generate a representative sample and the process by which sites, subjects and respondents (Observers) were identified was such as to generate representative outcomes from which generalisations might be made. The research generated both qualitative and quantitative data of considerable significance and reliability due to the structured nature of the process, the numbers involved in the study and the range of information gathered. However, as O'Sullivan (1994) notes, the case will only yield to generalisation if it possesses its own internal coherence. In the present research, internal coherence is generated by

1. the common structure of the Observation Record
2. the selection of subjects from YOUTHREACH centres only
3. the choice of experienced co-ordinators as Observers.

In turn, generalisation is sustainable through

1. The national scale of the research and the distribution of the Centres from whose participants the subjects were drawn
2. the random selection of subjects
3. the expertise of the participating Observers as described
4. triangulation.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the research process. I have set out the research context and objective and discussed the development of an appropriate research methodology. Each element of the adopted methodology was described and discussed, including the case study observations, interviews with the Observers and triangulation interviews with expert practitioners. In the next chapter I will present a selection of the case study biographies.

Chapter 4: The young people

4.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I will profile the subjects of the research. I will follow this with an overview of the case study observations.

4.2 The subjects

A slight majority (51.72%) of the subjects is female. While out of line with early school leaving patterns in Ireland, in which males outnumber females by 2:1, this is consistent with recruitment to YOUTHREACH in the later 1990s (Stokes, 2000a). Of those observed, one young person was born in 1975, one in 1978. The majority were born between 1979 and 1982, with the largest number (36 per cent) born in 1981. These were 16 when the research was conducted. Two of the subjects are lone parents. Another is expecting her first child. This is lower than is true of YOUTHREACH nationally. As for ethnicity, four of those surveyed were Travellers, and two were of mixed ethnic background. Subjects are identified by forenames in the text. These are not their given names. I will now give an overview of the young people's profiles.

4.3 The subjects' profiles – an overview

As outlined in Chapter 3 the case study observations generated a broad range of quantitative and qualitative data. But it is with the short biographical profiles that we begin. In these, we find a wide range of circumstances and conditions. Each of the so-called 'risk factors' is found, often in abundance. However, while elements of the matrix recur throughout, their occurrence is not uniform. Six profiles are presented below, and the other 53 are summarised. Each observation is numbered from O1 - O58, hence the number beside each name below.

Gerard (O5)

Gerard is sixteen. His parents are married and the family has 'a good lifestyle' living in a rural setting near the Shannon. He has a 'very caring father', but a 'very critical mother who blames outside forces and A.D.D. for his problems'. He has a 'perfect' younger sister who is 'doing well in school', and has 'no faults'. His father lives with the family and is employed in a bank. His mother also works, making wedding dresses, but 'resents time taken off to sort out

problems'. According to the Observer, his mother 'sees no good' in her son. He 'can't please her', gets 'no praise', and 'doesn't bring anything home'. There was dialogue at home, and 'middle class values' were discussed. He received affection from his father, of whom 'he speaks warmly'. His mother's affection was and is 'limited' and he seems to have accepted her rejection. He has little time for his sister. He 'does not see himself as an active part of the family'. He appears to have been left a lot as a child, though he says he was happy. Play was part of his childhood, but his mother says he showed no emotion as a child. The family lives in an isolated area, and Gerard has 'no community feelings'. There are 'strong family ties' but 'no contact with neighbours'. Instead, he 'looks to others for leadership'. Friends are very important to him, he is 'very influenced by his peers and wants to please them'. He 'likes to conform with the group despite family feelings'.

Gerard 'did well in primary school' but there was 'a difficulty with a teacher' about which he is not forthcoming. This is his main reason for leaving school. He did not adapt to secondary, was disruptive and left, or was expelled, in 1st year. His family was resigned to him leaving school. He left with no qualifications. He fitted in to YOUTHREACH but 'tagged' along with others. He has poor communication skills. The Observer comments that he is 'capable of much more' but Gerard 'can't see the need to put in the work'. He sees himself as very intelligent and as having no difficulty learning. He may be right. He sat and passed two subjects in the Junior Certificate last year and two this year, 'despite no work being done outside class'. He also gained a First Aid Certificate.

His learning path sequence is theory-action-discussion (ACB). In multiple intelligences, he is 'stronger than average' in *mathematical/logical*, 'average' in *bodily/kinaesthetic* and *intrapersonal*, and 'weak' in the rest. The Observer comments that he 'never reads, only speaks when spoken to, never offers opinions and listens to music non-stop on breaks'. He is 'a follower'. He 'seems content with his own company and will work on his own but will only do the minimum'. He 'thrives on competition', for example quizzes, but 'backs off if noticed (and) needs to be challenged'. Gerard has seen several psychiatrists with no clear result, and he has refused to see another. His mother is convinced he has

ADD and wants a prescription for it, from Dublin if necessary. She 'wants a label for his problems'.

Gerard is passive and apathetic. He sees himself as very employable and expects to find employment, as is normal in his family. He 'feels his father will get him a job'. Meanwhile, YOUTHREACH fills the time. He 'wants a proper job, wants to do an apprenticeship' but he is 'not prepared to do the work at the moment'. He 'has put the future on hold. (He is) aware of the need to learn/work but (is) not doing anything about it'. He is ambivalent and apathetic.

Gerard was 'caught stealing fortified wine'. He has been connected to 'a knife incident that sounds worse than it actually was'. He stole and sold an angle grinder from a local shop (he added it to an order form) and was responsible for selling it. However, he 'fears the law' and claims he was 'led into trouble'. He feels his father can get him out of trouble. He sees nothing wrong with drugs. He is angry with the Gardaí for 'wrongly accusing him'. He has 'little capacity to change (and) no interaction with society'. He is 'not able to say things despite the want to'. He also has 'no appreciation of (his) relative comfort compared to (the) group – his home life (is) taken for granted'. As to what he might do in terms of a career, the Observer suggests computers. He is 'very quick to learn if he can apply himself academically'.

Asked to identify potential barriers to learning, the Observer cites '(his) Mother's attitude, his immaturity and lack of vision. He also has little motivation to learn and poor concentration. His self-esteem is very low. He is 'afraid of failure, (and) needs to be same as his peers, so (he) won't perform to his ability. Success (is) slagged by his peers'. His inhibitions are learned – 'success (was) not rewarded as a child'. However, he has a 'logical mind (and) enjoys competition'. He is good at soccer, a quick learner, especially with computers. 'Academically, if he put his mind to it, (he) could achieve much more than he is doing'. (He) likes his own company, and has had no experience of a mentor.

Joseph (O15)

Joseph is an eighteen year old Traveller. His parents are married. They are 'respected prominent members of the Travelling community'. They have many children. His father lives with the family. 'Though regularly unemployed, the

family members are very successful in terms of Traveller economics' and 'would be considered wealthy'. There is 'lots of physical' abuse in the family, and a general history of violence and violent crime, including the children. The Observer quotes Joseph:

I've been dragged into the office of every school I've attended to be given out to (for bullying/extortion)... the only difference now is that my father isn't here ready to give me a beating I'd never forget when we got home.

Home relationships are the foundation for all his outside relationships, yet he played on the streets as a child. There is 'no evidence of mirthful anything. (The) the only fun is to hurt or put down somebody'. There was no affection. However there was dialogue and conversation, between father and male children, about 'horses, scrap, money, cars, drink, family (extended), fights, strength, weddings and funerals and England'. Values and morality were imposed rather than discussed. 'His family believe the police beat their grandfather to death. They are all very angry and aggressive personalities. They are good business people, respected and feared Travellers'. He has 'definite knowledge and understanding of family identity and pride'. In this milieu, he sees himself as 'hardworker and leader'. He defines friendship in terms of loyalty'.

Joseph left school after primary, and is described as school refuser, truant and disruptive. He 'attended the Junior Secondary Education Centre'. His main reason for leaving school was 'frustration'. 'He was told to colour in colouring books and not to bother with regular class subjects'. He was expelled and the school's attitude was 'relief'. He left with no qualifications and illiterate. His ability to learn is 'not great', but he is 'very intelligent'. As far as he is concerned, learning is for settled people who have the opportunity to get paid jobs. No Traveller he knows ever had one. However, he now regards literacy is important for passing a Driving Test. His learning path follows the sequence action-theory-discussion (CAB). The Observer comments that it is 'mostly C, some A, very little B'. In terms of multiple intelligences, he is regarded as 'stronger than average' in *linguistic, mathematical/logical, spatial, intrapersonal* and *environmental/naturalistic*. He is 'average' in *bodily/kinaesthetic*, 'weak' in *interpersonal* and 'very weak' in *musical*. He 'responds to personal attention'.

According to the Observer, 'he is a perfectly formed misogynist, as his father has shaped him. He is hardworking and skilled in the art of blaming, and abrogating any personal responsibility for his own growth. (He is) closed to challenge and change'. He is definite, not ambivalent, and in terms of Belenky et al's five levels of knowledge, he is at 'subjective knowledge'. He 'believes he has the franchise on truth. (He has been) brought up with strong Traveller cultural beliefs and abides by them. He respects those (who are) physically stronger'. As regards voice, 'he has too much to say and no respect for anyone else's opinion except his father's'. He accords women no respect, and in his view, no woman's opinion is valid. He can do no wrong in the eyes of his father.

Joseph sees himself as a leader who controls his friends' behaviour, as crafty, a good dealer, loyal friend and hard worker. In his own eyes, he is a useful, hardworking, intelligent Traveller, 'one who looks out for friends, defends family values and image, and contributes financially to his home'. He regards drugs as evil, but petty theft is fine if you get away with it. In his view, 'only Mogs get caught'. Crime is acceptable, violence is justifiable and the Gardaí are only 'pigs' who have it in for him. (He) can't understand why this is. His family believe the Gardaí 'bet his grandfather to death'. He has been served with 'four summonses this week alone for stealing metal ("collecting scrap"), resisting arrest and trespassing'. He has been previously cautioned for physically assaulting a female neighbour in her own doorway. Joseph is described by the Observer (who has worked with him for seven months) as a 'potential criminal (with) no propensity for, or interest in, changing or taking responsibility for negative behaviour'. As for authority figures, 'he gets on with hard-workers except women and Gardaí'. He has difficulty in making transitions and a recurring pattern of attending places only frequented by other Travellers. He 'assumes the same dominance in each place'. Thus he was a member of the Surlas Traveller club, but was 'thrown out for bullying'. He is described as having a 'huge, well dressed presence'. For him, love is 'purely physical domination'. In terms of expectations, he is described as 'negative' and 'pessimistic'. He has no expectations of education or training. He views YOUTHREACH as work – 'it keeps him from being arrested'. He does not expect to be employed, but is expected to be a prominent community leader and

entrepreneurial Traveller like his father. This is likely and realistic. As far as he sees it, manual work is the only real work. His ultimate goal is to own his own truck as soon as possible.

Joseph is contending with multiple adversities. These include his anger and aggression, his criminal activity and his learning needs. They also encompass his difficulties with 'parental control and aggression' and his 'inability to express positive emotions'. He also contends with family interference and a range of personal hang-ups. For example, he thinks that expressing positive emotions suggests homosexuality towards which he is very bigoted. Personal insecurity is his most significant adversity. On the other hand, he also has virtues, for example his intelligence and perception. He has 'good business skills', he is capable of 'abstract thought', he 'can read any social/personal situation' and he has diplomacy skills.

Lisa (O25)

Lisa is sixteen. Her parents are farmers who receive social welfare. They are married and have four children. Her father lives with the family. He farms, but has not been otherwise employed. Two sisters work, and a brother is at school. She experienced play, affection and dialogue as a child - she is well adjusted and very articulate, and her family is described as 'very loving and supportive'. The Observer suggests that values and morals were discussed, and were 'very high'. She is 'very close' to her mother, father and grandfather. They are 'a close family who seem to worry and care for her'. She knows this, and 'feels they will be there to support her'. She herself 'feels responsible to (her) parents and won't do anything to worry them, e.g. miss the bus home'. As to her self in relation to family and community, 'she's still finding herself, so she needs her family'. She 'has close friends, who are important to her'. She was a member of a club, in which she 'learned to be a part of team'.

She left school in 2nd year, with no qualifications. She 'couldn't cope' and was 'disinterested'. Her family did not mind, 'as long as money is earned'. She had no 'nasty experiences' in school, and 'found it quite pleasant'. Her learning path is theory-discussion-action (ABC). In multiple intelligences, she is 'above average' in *interpersonal*, and 'average' in the other seven. As regards the organisation of learning, she is best suited by 'small groups' - she 'feels lost in

large groups'. She 'feels she is a good learner', but 'doesn't think she is very good/smart in the school sense'. 'At this moment she needs a lot of rebuilding of confidence. She's very capable but has suffered a knock back'. She was employed after leaving school, but 'had a bad experience' (she was 'let go'). As a result, she is 'disappointed' and 'has a battered self-image'.

She regards herself as 'too young and is waiting for something to happen'. She is 'open to suggestion'. She is 'well-voiced but also quiet and unassuming yet given the chance, she can shine brighter than any of them'. Education is of moderate importance to her. 'She is clever and well capable of surviving on what she has so far'. She also regards 'doing things right, progressing, completion' as important. She has 'good social skills – (is) positive about society and thinks she'll fit'. She 'stays out of trouble'. She shows disappointment and a sense of failure more than anger. This is due to her bad experience at work. She has a 'strong concept of right and wrong' and can be objective. 'Crime is repugnant to her'. On physique, she is very clear, positive and conscious of weight'. As regards love, she 'has a boyfriend and seems to have a good relationship'.

Lisa is positive and hopeful in outlook. She has no strong opinions on what constitutes 'real' learning, other than 'learning how to do things or to get qualifications'. She expects that 'YOUTHREACH will direct her in the most suitable direction' and sees it a place that will give her the 'chance'. She feels she's too young to know what 'real' work is just yet, but 'hairdressing is an ideal choice'. Work also means 'earning a living or contributing'. She wants and expects to find a job, and 'when she finds the direction she's going, she'll be very employable'. So, she is 'keen to learn and please, doesn't look for bother'.

Lisa has few significant adversities. She has some reservations regarding authority, 'due to experiences at school and work' lacks self-confidence, but she is working on these. Any inhibitions she has are 'learned inhibitions'. Her most pressing needs are for 'confidence building' and 'to get adequate training to enable her to find a suitable direction'. However, 'she has common sense and is very willing to be a good person'. She is very well supported by her family and is keen to learn and make progress.

Beth (O35)

Beth is sixteen years of age. Her parents are unmarried new age travellers. There are three children. Her mother is in a second relationship. There is no known history of violence or other similar difficulties. She has lived with her father as well as her mother. She experienced play, affection and dialogue. She is 'quite stimulated' and conversation at home 'developed thoughts (and) ideas'. The family's values are 'atypical'. She 'is well-oriented' regarding family and community and 'has a strong sense of self and how she interacts at this level'. She accepts that relationships exist at different levels. She 'understands what being "different" means' and is 'very socialised'. She 'likes to have special friendships'. Insofar as she had a mentor, it was her 'mother and other interested adults'. She left school in 2nd year, with no qualifications. She had no difficulty in making transitions, nor had she any learning problems. Beth left school because she was 'too bright and emotionally advanced for her class group (having been) placed in the wrong year grouping following return from England'. Schooling was a negative experience for her – she 'lacked stimulation and emotional support'. Her family was 'supportive' of this decision, but the school was 'not happy'. She is described as 'open' and she 'finds learning easy'. Her learning path follows the sequence theory-discussion-action/experience (ABC). In multiple intelligences, she is 'stronger than average' in all areas. The Observer comments that she 'needs imaginative, creative areas' and is best taught through 'discovery, self learning and stimulation'. She is also a 'medal winner in swimming'. Beth is 'definite' rather than ambivalent. She has adopted a particular image and style, for example a Mohican haircut, and has a clear sense of what she wants to do – writing as a career. She is well able to express her thoughts and 'can rationalise and verbalise (her) point of view'. As to what she considers 'really important', the answer is 'socialising in a general sense (and) having work published'. In terms of social responsibility, she is 'very developed', 'open to change and dances with it'. She has 'quite (a) well developed sense' on crime and drugs, and 'can see all the grey areas'. She has no great difficulties with authority – she 'understands bureaucracy and dealing with blockages'. On a personal level, she has 'strong day-to-day skills ie cooking, sewing, etc.' She is 'secure' with her intelligence. Physically, she is 'at ease

swimming, unlike female peers, who dislike and feel vulnerable in bathing costumes'. She 'isn't afraid to show anger' and 'likes to be "in love", (and) understands different types of love, maternal, sexual'.

Her expectations are characterised as 'positive/hopeful'. She 'wants a degree and to be a writer'. She 'accepts that different people have values that are different to hers' as regards work. She expects to be self-employed (as a writer) – this is not a common expectation in her family or community. The Observer suggests that she 'will work in the artistic field', and acknowledges that writing is a realistic goal, noting that Beth is a 'gifted poet'. In this regard, it is unsurprising that Beth regards YOUTHREACH as 'something to do' rather than education. She needs a 'more stimulating environment'... Her ability level is 'way beyond Foundation level'. Indeed, the Observer argues that she is 'ready for (a) 3rd level type learning environment', but will require 'creative supports, imagination and a means of credentialising ability that will reflect that ability'. Her most pressing general needs are for 'focus and energy from committed adults'.

Other than her lack of educational credentials and the minority lifestyle of her family, Beth has no blockages. No learning or personal difficulties are known, nor are any weaknesses, inhibitions or hostilities. Her most significant adversity is the 'inflexibility of (the) system'. She is described as a 'gifted poet, self starter, imaginative, drawn to artistic types' who is likely to be a writer.

Samantha (O45)

Samantha is sixteen years of age. Her parents were not married and are now separated. Her mother is living with her present partner, with whom she has two young sons. All three children live in the house. Her father 'is presently serving a prison sentence in England'. Her mother is working part time and her partner 'has not worked for a number of years'.

There is a history of sexual abuse (by her mother's partner) in the family, centring on Samantha. 'The reason given for leaving England is a report given to social services'. The sexual abuse 'has apparently carried on recently'. 'When pressure from advances has become too much' Samantha will stay with her aunt. 'On occasions (she) has spent up to three nights sleeping in car parks'. There was no play in her childhood, and 'all affection seems to have come from her father'.

While values and morality were not discussed, at present 'there seems to be a lover' and her mother has accused her of being a 'slag' or 'tramp'. She is 'in fear in her own home and even when sick will not go there' (during the day). Because of the family's moving she has no sense of community history or visible ties. She sees herself as 'very much on her own' in family and community, and 'feels she has been isolated by her mother's lack of attention'. In her family, peer group and community, she 'is seen as a kind of loud-mouth who is constantly drawing attention to herself'. Any friendship is always of an intense nature.

She left school in third year with no qualifications. She encountered difficulties with transitions, was seen as very disruptive, with a short attention span. Her main reason for leaving school was her 'inability to conform to school structures' and she 'was asked not to return to school'. Her family's attitude to her leaving school was 'ambivalent'. Because of her short attention span 'and need to be noticed', she has difficulty learning, but she is 'an extremely intelligent person'. Asked if particular learning/teaching approaches suited her, the Observer answers that she 'has to feel safe and unthreatened. (She) is very capable but craves 1:1 attention'. Her learning path sequence is discussion-theory-action/experience (BAC). In multiple intelligences, she is 'stronger than average' in *environmental/naturalistic*, 'average' in *linguistic*, *mathematical/logical*, *musical* and *bodily/kinaesthetic*, 'weak' in *interpersonal* and 'very weak' in *spatial* and *intrapersonal*. Although she 'has had a very poor experience of school system both here and in England', she now 'feels she wants to return to school in an effort to prove "everybody" wrong', and this is a priority for her. While acknowledging that the Leaving Certificate Applied would be a realistic objective for her, the Observer does not feel that she 'has the capacity to fit into the formal system'.

Samantha is generally apathetic, fatalistic and needy. She 'has developed a number of strategies in trying to make her the centre of attention which in turn gives her more time with individuals'. As regards engagement with society, employability, hostilities and anger, the Observer comments that she 'will have difficulties until wider issues are resolved'. These issues are rooted in sexual abuse. That said, she 'will always have something to say, which is part of her strategy'. She 'has difficulties' with authority, 'but if approached in a caring way

will respond'. She is becoming involved in petty crime, and is presently under JLO¹ and probation. Physically, she is bulimic at present, but regards herself as 'well turned out'. 'Her demeanour towards males is very animated'. She 'would have major problems with relationships and would always be at extreme ends'. As regards a place of reflection or refuge, she goes to her bedroom, 'constantly behind a locked door' and care professionals (for example the Garda JLO) have expressed concern about this.

Her expectations are characterised as 'negative/pessimistic'. She sees learning only 'as a way of proving people wrong'. So, 'she has set a lot on returning to formal education'. She sees YOUTHREACH as education, and 'has achieved all targets which have been set and now has a positive view of her intelligence'. As regards work, she 'has no opinions, and is unable to focus on anything in the future'. She does not expect to find work. This is the prevailing expectation in both family and community. But the Observer challenges this self-perception as unrealistic, 'because she is too talented/smart not to get a job'. As to predicting a possible career path, the Observer comments 'not at this time'.

Although she is personally able, Samantha is dealing with both ecological adversities and personal susceptibilities. Sexual abuse in the home is predominant among the former, and has generated blockages – 'having to deal with the issues both physical and mental' and behaviours, possibly including bulimia. Outwardly, she exhibits no inhibitions, but the Observer suspects she conceals them in order to fit in to her peer group. The Observer also feels her blockages and inhibitions are learned – she 'needed to survive'. Her short attention span also poses difficulties for learning. Her most pressing education need is 'to remain within YOUTHREACH as headway is now being made with personal problems'. Her most pressing general needs are for ongoing 'contact with social services and counselling... to enable her to deal with issues that are there at present'.

Pádraig (O55)

Pádraig is seventeen years of age. He lives with his widowed mother. His parents married in their twenties. His late father was very interested in football and

¹ Garda Juvenile Liaison Officer

worked for the county council. His mother is involved in part-time work. She was a factory worker prior to marriage. The family is large and sensitive, and 'all experienced difficulties at school after (their) father's death' (following a short illness of three weeks). After this, the 'children would have benefited from counselling'. His mother suffered from depression. There is a 'good work ethic on both sides of the family'. Pádraig experienced play as a child in a 'big family'. There was a 'sharing atmosphere – happy – simple living style – lots of fun'. There was also affection, and it is 'very evident from the way (he) describes family relationships and this extended to grandparents'. So too with dialogue – there was 'open communication (and) good rapport'. Sport was a major topic of conversation, especially the GAA, in which the family was 'very important - there were visitors and gatherings'. Values and morality were discussed in terms of 'honesty, respect for other people, property (and) responsible behaviour'. Pádraig is 'proud of his family (but) not too interested in community's history and location'. This is developing. That said, he is 'lost in (his) family at times'. His mother is in a new relationship. He 'generally gets on well with his family (but is) intolerant of other young people being irresponsible. On friendship, he is a 'good friend, pleasant, fun to be with', but not when a bad mood 'arrives'. He has not known a mentor.

He left school having failed English in the Junior Certificate. He had no particular difficulties with transitions. He lost interest after his father's sudden death. He was 'not interested in following the academic route', and 'did not like his former school or teachers'. Pádraig is 'moody and depressed due to family bereavement'. His mother agreed with the decision to leave school and was 'quite pleased that YOUTHREACH was an option and that her son could prepare for a trade and possibly apprenticeship'. The school was agreeable, as Pádraig was not progressing. He was a member of a club (rugby), but is not now.

Pádraig has 'no learning difficulty' and his 'intelligence' is 'average'. His learning path is action/experience-theory-discussion (CAB). He is 'capable of judging, analysing'. As regards multiple intelligences, he is 'stronger than average' in interpersonal ('good with group, but not necessarily with authority figures'), intrapersonal and environmental/naturalistic, 'average-to-stronger than average' in spatial and bodily/kinaesthetic, and 'average' in linguistic and

mathematical/logical. He is 'easily bored' and suffers from mood swings. He 'needs to be constantly challenged', having 'good mathematical reasoning', and he needs a new direction. Pádraig 'requires motivation, encouragement'. He 'thrives on recognition and praise' and 'has ability, but does not always use it'. As to whether particular learning/teaching approaches suit him, the answer is yes, '50% practical, 50% theory (and) room for own artistic creative ability'.

At present he is beginning to work out his experience, but he lacked support in this area due to the burdens placed on his mother after his father's death. In terms of Belenky et al's levels of knowledge, he is at *subjective knowledge*. According to the Observer,

He is very concerned with "self" – likes special attention and to "stand out". He has a quiet disposition. (He) relates well within group, (but) can be disruptive when moody.

Pádraig is active and curious and likes to grab the limelight when he has success. He is a thinker and poses questions but likes black and white answers. He can be both very definite and ambivalent – 'it depends on his mood'. He is not apathetic. As to social responsibility, he is 'very conscious in this area'. He 'has something say (but) at times (finds it) difficult to express his "true" feelings' and how to relate his fears. He 'tends to ponder a lot'. His sense of position in society is 'mediocre'. But he has the capacity to change and experience in employment will be significant. He 'needs to be fulfilled'. He has not been involved in any anti-social activity. However, his relationships with authority are 'difficult – this has been apparent with some tutors'. He expresses 'very strong opinions against crime, drugs or petty theft'. He has 'no time for anyone who gets involved'. He tends to use alcohol as a weekend escape. He is 'neat/clean cut (and) interested in his appearance. He is 'capable of love; is loved and aware of mother's and family's feelings towards him'.

His long-term goal is to be a skilled worker after finishing training in engineering or metalwork, or as a mature student changing direction. He recognises that it is 'important to have (the) necessary skills for a worthwhile job'. He 'expects to be successful (and is) willing to give time to training'. He is 'definitely' employable, being 'intelligent (and a) good methodical worker (who) will eventually find his niche'. In this, he is not unusual in his immediate and

extended family, amongst whom there is a 'good work ethic'. 'YOUTHREACH has been beneficial in that it is paving the first step in his career path'.

Pádraig is dealing with a number of ecological adversities. The principal one is the death of his father. This generated 'resentment (and) sorrow'. He also 'has to get on with and respect the person he is working with. He can build up dislikes without reason and 'needs to mature'. He is 'not willing to express feelings or inhibitions, eg fears. Pádraig has a number of 'weaknesses and hostilities'. There are 'mood swings' and he was 'intolerant of other people. He resents authority at times. Pádraig is 'angry at losing (his) father (and) would like to have his career path sorted out'.

Asked if his inhibitions are learned or otherwise, the Observer answers 'practised'. He 'keeps things to himself after losing (his) father whom he considered a close friend and confidante'. He 'relates to his mother, but not in the same way'. He 'often feels she has "enough on her plate" to deal with other family members'. He 'requires time', and 'would benefit from counselling and moving from home'. Apart from time, his most pressing education needs are for 'a job he likes (and) a good holiday'. His most pressing general need is 'to feel and experience success'. As to which supports might best assist him, the Observer suggests 'a period away from home; further training; relationship with girl (long-tem); trust building; meeting adults to listen and relate to'.

The other case studies

The six foregoing profiles were chosen as the 5th, 15th, 25th, 35th, 45th and 55th of the series, in order to gain an appropriate spread. The many different strands of the study are evident in them. Other young people's stories are equally complex, for example Gemma. She is sixteen, and lives in foster care, in a small town, west of the Shannon, where she moved from a disadvantaged area in L-----.

Her mother was 14 when Gemma was born and a grandmother at 31. She (mother) has seven children, 5 girls and 2 boys, by three separate fathers. Gemma is the 2nd child. There are different fathers for the first two children and the next five have the same father. This man occasionally lives with the family. She does not see much of her birth father. A grandmother plays a strong role in the family but rejects Gemma as she is not her birth granddaughter. She feels unaccepted by her 'grandmother' and, in turn,

doesn't consider her mother's partner to her 'father'. Her eldest sister has a baby. All the children are in different foster homes at present. The family was threatened and had to move house. She has few happy memories of childhood 'except day trips with others'. She 'seems to have looked after the younger children'.

Her mother's present partner is unemployed on a long-term basis. The family has 'no history of employment'. There is a history of violence in the family, but 'not towards (the) children'. There has been 'family feuding in the area. She has witnessed extreme violence and (the family) were shot out of their home. Her mother's first daughter's father was knifed in the neck and died'. She is related to disreputable families in L----- who are feuding. She is 'very aware of her family and extended family's reputation in the area' and distances herself and her part of her family from them.

The various elements identified for the matrix of influences in Chapter 2 recur throughout the case studies. If we take given factors, there are young people with learning difficulties such as Sheila, who 'finds learning difficult – her concentration is poor, and she was identified in school as having ADD'. Ethnicity also features. There is Zuni, whose father is Asian and who felt discriminated against in school. There is also Bridget, whose family live in extreme poverty and social exclusion and who has a 'huge sense of Traveller culture and hostilities from the settled community' in the town she lives outside of. All her siblings have been early school leavers. Ecological factors also feature, for example in Francis' life. He is a Traveller. His parents are separated. There are three children in the family. All live in care, as he has since he was five years old, due to his parents' inability to provide proper care. We also find examples of developmental disruptions and difficulties with transitions, for example, Jason, and susceptibility and resilience, such as Robert.

In these case studies, we can see the matrix at work. In all cases, one or more causal factors can be identified. Yet, there are substantial variations in exposure and response to risk factors.

In the next Chapter I will examine the research findings regarding the matrix of influences.

Chapter 5: The Research Findings

In this chapter I will describe the outcomes of the research regarding the matrix of influences identified in chapter two under four major headings, the given, the ecological, the developmental and mediating factors, that is, susceptibility and resilience. Before doing so, I will note the young people's given reasons for leaving school.

5.1 Leaving School

A small but significant proportion of the subjects (over 5 per cent) left straight from primary school. Twenty per cent left in or after 1st year in post-primary, almost 36 per cent left in or after 2nd year and 34 per cent in or after 3rd year. These figures are consistent with national patterns (see 1.4 above). Only 12 per cent had Junior Certificate qualifications. This accords with the report of the ESF Evaluation Unit (1996) which found that 71 per cent of YOUTHREACH respondents had no formal qualification whatsoever.

As to their reasons for leaving school, the outcomes are consistent with research described at 2.2 above. The responses are summarised in Table 4.

RESPONSE	N	%
NR	4	7
Disliked Teachers/ felt picked on by teachers	12	21
Disliked school / system did not suit him /her	10	17
Couldn't keep up:	8	14
Couldn't Cope with pressure:	4	7
Expelled/suspended:	7	12
Financial reasons:	4	7
Felt that didn't fit in:	2	3
Miscellaneous	7	12

School-based factors predominate. In three cases out of four, dysfunction between the young person and the school was the primary reason for leaving. These include interpersonal problems with a particular teacher or teachers (21 per cent), problems with schooling and the organisation of learning (17 per cent), problems with learning (14 per cent) and problems with discipline and behaviour

leading to exclusion from school (12 per cent). Others 'couldn't cope' (7 per cent), 'didn't fit in' (3 per cent). Only 7 per cent left for financial reasons. These then are the reasons the young people cite for leaving school. But what of the influences behind these perceptions and decisions? What of the matrix of influences described in Chapter two? I will now examine the findings of the research in this regard, beginning with 'given' factors.

5.2 Given (individual) factors

5.2.1 Gender

There are few differences between males and females observed in this study as regards reasons for leaving school. However, females are twice as likely to dislike teachers or to feel picked upon by teachers than males. Conversely, males are twice as likely to dislike school or to find that the system did not suit them. This may indicate that girls personalise school and its structures more than boys. Also, no differences are apparent regarding discipline or expulsion nor indeed to making transitions. However, if we turn to the school's attitude to the subjects' leaving early, we find that all of those whom the schools wanted to continue are female. Where the response is 'agreed with decision to join YOUTHREACH', or 'relieved' (that the subject left school), four out of five are male. As for families' attitudes to their child leaving school early, there is little to suggest that parents are more unhappy about females dropping out of school early than males. However, females are 2.5 times more likely to have experience of a mentor than males, this function being fulfilled by older sisters, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts, cousins and 'other interested adults'. It is not clear why this function would be fulfilled with young women and not with young men.

Of the twelve subjects (20 per cent of the total) who regard themselves as intelligent (rightly or wrongly), seven are female. At the opposite end of the spectrum, of the eleven who see themselves as 'not intelligent', eight are female. Differences are also apparent with regard to values and what the subjects regard as 'really important'. Of the seven who favour education or qualifications, six are female. Of the eleven prioritising recreation and socialising, nine are female. Conversely, of the thirteen who favour a job or employment, nine are male. Females have more positive expectations of training than males, but males are

more optimistic regarding employment. Paradoxically, females appear to have a more positive view of their own usefulness. Of the 19 identified as having no sense, or a conditional view, of their own usefulness, 14 are males.

Turning to perceptions of the future, females are more likely than males either to have no projected narrative *or* to envisage marriage, starting a family and settling down. Of the eight who foresee this scenario, seven are female. Males are more likely to envisage employment. With few exceptions, both male and female early school leavers appreciate the importance of work and envisage being employed. However, their projected occupations are stereotypical. Of the eleven for whom 'catering, chef or bar work' is suggested, ten are female. Of the eleven for whom 'construction, wood, metal' is suggested, all are male. Of the five possible 'factory operatives', four are females and of the three for whom office work is suggested, all are female. Females appear to have a stronger sense of family and family ties and males to have a significantly lower sense of their own status in their family, peer group or community. They also seem more susceptible to inhibitions and low self-esteem. Generally females look after themselves better and are significantly more satisfied with their appearance (1.5 to 1). Amongst those reported to value friendship, or to be popular, females outnumber males by 26:20. Six young people (10 per cent of the sample) are described as 'loners', of whom four are male. Those with few friends (of whom there are 4) and those with difficulties in making friends (also 4) are all male.

Turning to the issue of social responsibility, 14 of the 21 who are described as 'very responsible' are female. Of the 14 who have 'no sense of social responsibility', 10 are males. Females are less likely to have been involved in anti-social activity, with males significantly more likely to have been involved in theft, assault and vandalism though the proportions are small. A triangulation interviewee suggests that these differences may be explained by 'norms and values' and that roles are 'quite traditional' within the peer group. She adds:

I have never met any female joy-riders. They are all males. It is the males who are... action orientated. The girls may well be drinking cans on the side and urging on the guys but they are not the ones doing that bit.

On the other hand, females are reported to be more likely to show anger, including anger against family and injustice. Perhaps surprisingly, they also have

a more distant relationship with authority. Most of those reported to ‘respect but fear’ authority are female. Within the family, four of the five of those where sexual abuse is reported or suspected are female. Of the thirteen subjects identified as positive about or capable of love, eleven are female. Of the seven who are negative or have no appreciation of love, five are male.

Additional issues arise in the case of young female Travellers. For example, while interested in work, having a ‘strong vision of the future’, being clever and well able to learn, Catherine also carries the ‘cultural inhibitions of a female Traveller’. Similarly, it is reported of Bridget that ‘she dresses and looks well – especially considering the lack of facilities in the halting site (no hot water/toilets etc)’. Given the importance of appearance to adolescents, this is an additional problem for a young woman to deal with. I will return to the experience of Travellers in 5.2.4.

5.2.2 Intelligence

The second ‘given’ factor identified in Chapter 2 is intelligence, comprehending such concepts as IQ and multiple intelligences. As regards the first of these, only two Observations specifically mention ‘low IQ’. The absence of such references is consistent with the scarcity of educational support services in Ireland at the time of the study. Participants are not assessed in YOUTHREACH and it is beyond the scope of the present research to carry out such an exercise. Accordingly, the outcomes are indicative rather than conclusive.

David is ‘slow’, Josephine has ‘general comprehension difficulties with ideas and theories’ and Aoife has a ‘mental age of 12’. In a similar vein, ‘inability to keep up with academic work in school’ is recorded for six subjects, that is, ten per cent of the sample. In Karen’s case, it is cited as the reason for leaving school early. There are frequent references to ‘slow learners’, for example Francis who is described as an ‘academically slow-learner (with) lots of negative experience of past learning’. In the Irish education system, this usually means a child has been assigned to a class for ‘slow learners’. The assessment on which such assignment is based is usually carried out by a remedial (or ‘learning support’) teacher, a guidance counsellor or educational psychologist.

Over 40 per cent of the subjects have negative perceptions of their intelligence. Many confuse intelligence and learning difficulties and see themselves as 'not intelligent' or not *academically* intelligent. Of itself, this may be instrumental in their early school leaving. On the other hand, even greater numbers (50 per cent) see themselves as intelligent and capable of learning, and many are justified in this view. The observations frequently note intelligence and ability to learn as with Gerard, Tina and Grace. Samantha is 'extremely intelligent'. Beth is 'open and finds learning easy' and is 'secure about this'. According to the Observer,

She came to us as gifted and actually left school because she was emotionally far more mature and...intellectually far more mature than her peer group and simply couldn't hack it any more.

She is not alone in this. As another Observer comments, 'There's a good percentage of extremely bright kids in here that the academic system didn't suit...but (who) have high IQs'. There is reference to the 'huge general knowledge' these young people possess.

They'd have hobbies like remembering the size of all the ships out on the Irish Sea, and trains. They'd have factual information, very detailed stuff that would be their hobby outside of here...football scores...and be able to keep recalling them. And be interested in the world around them.

It is not possible to establish if any of the subjects have conditions such as impaired frontal cortex functioning.

Turning to 'multiple intelligence', Observers were asked for their impressions of the subjects against the eight 'intelligences' identified in the literature on the concept. As multiple intelligences are not readily tested empirically, it was accepted that this would be a matter of opinion based on the Observers' professional experience. The findings are shown in Table 5. Notwithstanding the reservations expressed above, the exercise yielded useful indicative outcomes. A normal distribution is clear in the 'Total' row. Less than 10% of the total is described as 'very weak' and even fewer as 'exceptional'. Patterns emerge within the various categories, for example an apparent weakness in 'mathematical' intelligence. By contrast, few are described as 'very weak' (and none as 'exceptional') in bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence. The scores for 'interpersonal' are high, though a number of Observers comment that this could

be attributed to the emphasis given to this area in YOUTHREACH, that is, after the young person left school. Even so, the fact that early school leavers, who would have been assumed to be weak in this area, have average or strong capacity in this area, however and whenever it developed, is significant. Similarly, the scores for 'naturalist' are also high. The Observers particularly cited Travellers in this regard.

	No Response	V weak	Weak	Average for age	Stronger than average	Exceptional	Total
Linguistic	-	4	13	34	4	3	58
Mathematical	-	7	24	21	5	1	58
Spatial	-	9	15	21	13	-	58
Musical	9	6	12	19	10	2	58
Bodily/ Kinaesthetic	-	1	16	27	14	-	58
Interpersonal	-	3	17	15	20	3	58
Intrapersonal	-	8	20	21	9	-	58
'Naturalist'	-	2	13	26	17	-	58
Total	9	40	130	184	92	9	464

In general, the Observers acknowledge the value of Multiple Intelligence Theory as an idea, a way of explaining and understanding the young people they work with and a prompt to teaching or training. But they also express reservations and worry in particular about assessment, standards and norms in these new fields. One Observer comments that 'you can be relatively brilliant in here but in actual and real terms it (might be) only average'.

Two other themes emerged from the research under this heading. The first is to do with the wide variations evident across individual capacities and the second with contextuality. It is clear from the case studies that individuals can display wide variations across their own skills or capacities, and to a greater extent than is allowed for in the curricular organisation of schools. Some are outside the norms both in terms of high and low achievement and in terms of the range of their abilities. In addition, certain young people are significantly more able in

some areas (for example, wood) than others (for example literacy). By way of example, Sheila is *very weak* in mathematical/logical, intrapersonal and environmental/naturalistic intelligences, *weak* in linguistic and spatial intelligences, *average* in musical and bodily/kinaesthetic intelligences and *stronger than average* in interpersonal. The second theme is to do with contextual learning. Interviewees suggest that the speech of many early school leavers becomes more complex when they are speaking about a subject they are interested in or deem important or relevant. This includes vocabulary *and* sentence construction. This supports the premise that conventional measures of vocabulary are both culturally and technically inadequate to accurately measure the capacities of many young people. I will return to this theme in 5.3.4.

5.2.3 Learning difficulties and conditions

As I have already noted, intelligence and learning difficulties are closely linked in the minds of the subjects. The case studies reveal that three subjects in five have one or more learning difficulties or conditions. Another one in five is able but restricted by problems of motivation or confidence, and the other one in five has no significant learning difficulties. Some learning difficulties are to do with literacy (for example Laura and Thomas), or numeracy, or both, as with Emmet and Derek. Some young people are identified as ‘slow learners’, either explicitly, as with Francis and David, or implicitly, as with Bridget, who is ‘unable to understand certain words (and) would be too embarrassed to ask for help’.

Dyslexia is also mentioned, for example with Gemma, Martha and Lorraine, for whom it is severe. Caitriona has a ‘severe mental block re numeracy – refuses to do it’. Poor concentration is frequently cited (for example Gerard). Some of the subjects have more than one difficulty to deal with, such as Joseph who is ‘almost illiterate – poor concentration’. Much the same is said of Alan who has ‘poor retention, concentration and co-ordination’. Others lack confidence or motivation as a result of a literacy problem. For example, Majella is ‘great at expressing herself verbally emotionally and intellectually in speech but not in writing’ and ‘lacks confidence because she can’t spell’.

Poor concentration is occasionally linked with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), as with Sheila whose ‘concentration levels are poor’ and who has been ‘identified as being ADD’. In several cases there are also indications of

hyperactivity. However, not all Observers espouse this designation. While identifying individuals like Trevor ‘who can’t, just *can not*, sit down, but who excels at canoeing’, some just see their participants as ‘kinaesthetic’ or ‘hyper’. As one of these Observers puts it,

They have to keep moving... and they don’t fit into school. Like Lorraine... she’s a great girl. Apart from the bad language and short temper, but she’s a good kid. Very bright. She should be in school. And she couldn’t sit. She couldn’t stop talking and she couldn’t stop moving. She thinks too quickly. She says you have to sit quietly in school...and you can’t be talking and interrupting and she said I could never stop doing that, so she left for that

Those subjects who have learning difficulties are conscious of them. For example, Gemma ‘knows she has real problems with reading and writing’ and Jackie ‘sees herself as needing a lot of help’. And, as predicted in the literature, the experience of being in a slow class appears to increase the young person’s pessimism regarding her or his intelligence, as with Bridget who, feeling that she is a slow learner, ‘puts herself down re learning’. Overall, the high proportion of subjects with such difficulties and the apparent correlation with pessimism regarding academic intelligence may be linked with a young person becoming detached from schooling. I will return to this in 5.3.4 below.

5.2.4 Ethnicity

As I noted in Chapter 2, while it is not suggested in the literature that ethnicity itself causes early school leaving, attendant factors, such as culture, oppression and economic circumstance, contribute to a child’s detachment from school. Four of the subjects are Travellers and two (Zuni and Karen) are of mixed ethnic background. Seven themes emerge from the present research – identity, culture, their different living circumstances, employment histories, anger, how they came to leave school and their perceptions of the future.

As regards the first of these, identity, the research shows that, whatever their various family histories and economic circumstances, each of the young Travellers has a strong sense of identity and pride in being a Traveller whether settled, as Catherine is, or not. For example, Francis has a ‘detailed knowledge’ of family and community narratives and, while ‘always questioning these areas’ has ‘tremendous ownership of his family, culture and community as to his own

personal identity'. The same is true of Bridget, whose sense of being a Traveller has been entrenched by 'hostilities from the settled community' in the adjacent town and 'being moved to the side of the road'. Identity is more complex for Karen and Zuni – the former and her mother are 'sensitive about colour issues' and the latter has changed her surname three times. According to the Observer, identity is a major issue for her.

She has no other people of her own culture here in town. As a result she's very independent, autonomous and very strong. She is quite capable of facing up to the challenges and adversity and confronting people who challenge her as being different.

Turning to the question of culture, Traveller culture is dynamic and evolving. In particular, the interest in and effects of education among Traveller women is mentioned by the Observers. That said, certain fundamentals remain. A triangulation interviewee comments:

For females there is a very tight cultural norm... and very strict rules vis-à-vis their sexuality. Even drunken fathers... are quite concerned about their Traveller girls and will call to the centre if they think they're going out with guys or being met after the centre. They try to look after their virtue and... there is still a culture about marrying off young Travellers quite early.

Similarly, there are many references to the strength, strictness and clarity of moral codes and religious observance among Travellers. Catherine has a 'very strong sense of morality' and is 'strongly against any sort of drug abuse or petty crime'. Of course, there are exceptions. Bridget's family is described by her Observer as 'very disadvantaged and very oppressed and yet... very hard working'. At the same time, the children are involved in 'petty crime', being expected to contribute to the family's resources. So, 'she should bring home something from here if she can, a bottle of Mr. Sheen, some soap, washing up liquid. Those things go missing. Everyone should bring home something every day'. It is not, he says, 'major stealing... it contributes to the household economy'. Zuni and Karen have strong, law-abiding views.

The third theme concerns the range of domestic circumstances in which these particular young people live. Catherine's family is settled and lives in a highly disadvantaged Dublin suburb. Her parents live together, but there are occasional

separations. Her father is violent. Bridget's family lives in considerable poverty in 'an unofficial halting site, which is to be moved'. They have '2 trailers and 12 children' and may be evicted 'onto the side of the road'. Francis lives in foster care, as do his brother and sister. His father lives in a caravan in Limerick. His mother is 'unstable and verbally aggressive' and lives in council housing. He 'has the option to move home (and live with his mother) but doesn't think his mother can mind herself'. Joseph's family are 'respected prominent members of the travelling community', and his father 'would be considered very wealthy'. Zuni lives with her mother and her mother's fiancé. Her father is Asian, but she rarely discusses him. Karen lives with her mother. The latter is divorced and formerly lived in England, where she met Karen's father, who is of Middle Eastern extraction.

The fourth theme is employment history. None of the parents of the young Traveller subjects are employed in the formal economy. This does not mean that they do not work. Bridget and Joseph's fathers are 'held in high regard as hard workers among the Traveller economy'. The former is 'a mash picker'¹ who combs 'through the dump'. He is described as 'a poor quality scrap dealer and wouldn't be as committed to the work ethic but would tick over'. Joseph's parents 'do well at all the fairs and horse race meetings with flags and banners and also in terms of scrap dealing'. Catherine's father does not work and the family history of employment is 'erratic'. Francis's father 'just about ticks over on social welfare'.

The fifth theme is *anger*. The subjects are acutely aware of their relative disadvantage, and anger, frustration and fatalism are palpable in the case studies. For example, Bridget is 'angry towards injustices and unfairness', and Joseph's family 'are all very angry and aggressive personalities'.

The sixth theme refers to leaving school. transition from primary to secondary school is especially problematic for Travellers. Catherine 'failed to make the transition' from primary to post-primary. Francis 'didn't feel included' and the school's attitude to his leaving was 'relief'. Joseph was 'thrown out' of school, which was 'relieved that no further trouble would come from this quarter'.

¹ 'Mash' refers to the rubbish that is crushed in a council tip-head.

According to the Observer, young Travellers have difficulty with this transition 'because generally, they are not encouraged'. He also claims that young Travellers in his centre had no knowledge of an entrance examination for the local secondary school. 'They weren't even told it was on' he says, 'yet, most of them make a very successful transition to the Junior Secondary Education Centre for Travellers. They make very good transitions to places where their peers are'.

Karen left school because she felt unable to keep up with the academic work, and while ethnicity shaped much of her life, it was of little significance to her schooling. By contrast, Zuni left school because she 'felt that she was discriminated against'. She alleges that the school principal had made racist remarks, that she was 'victimised and bullied' by other students 'because she is coloured' and that, 'instead of dealing with the bullying... the school asked her to leave or victimised her even further'. According to the Observer, "When she... stood up for herself she was asked to leave even though she's very intelligent and capable of a good Leaving Cert and university degree. And she is now in YOUTHREACH".

The seventh theme is to do with their views on learning and perceptions of the future. As regards their views on learning, the key influences are general family experience and personal and familial aspirations for the future. For some, education is an access pathway to employment and integration. For example, of all participants in her YOUTHREACH Centre, Catherine is 'the one most concerned about her literacy'. While others take a short-term view of their priorities, 'she's more concerned about her career. She's very definite about what she wants to get a job in but the others aren't'. Zuni is described as highly intelligent, creative and knowledgeable – 'analytical and critical'. However, she 'seems to have given up' and 'wants to prove that she can get on in life without qualifications'.

As to the subjects' perceptions of the future, Catherine has a strong sense of the future and wants to work in the settled economy in catering. Francis's family presumes that he is going to be part of the local Traveller economy, but he himself has ambitions to be a tradesman and a qualified lifeguard. Bridget 'will always be connected with the Traveller culture... but doesn't want to be the wife of a Traveller man'. She very much wants to work, 'but feels that as a Traveller,

this is out of the question'. Joseph is 'expected to be a prominent community leader and entrepreneurial Traveller dealer – like his father'. Zuni is described as 'very musical' and has ambitions to work in this area. She is also interested in receptionist work, 'to fall back on'.

Reviewing the foregoing, the research outcomes support the association between ethnicity and early school leaving. However, ethnicity itself is not causal. Rather, as with many other factors, it appears that the many social and economic factors attending ethnic diversity are more influential.

5.3 Ecological factors

As we have seen in Chapter 2, ecological or contextual influences form a substantial part of the matrix of influences and causal processes identified in the literature. I will begin with the outcomes on the family.

5.3.1 The family

The case studies reveal a range of functional and structural characteristics in the subjects' families. For example, there is considerable violence. Indeed, it is a dominant influence for ten per cent. Also, one in ten has siblings with a different father. One family in ten lives in very significant poverty. One subject in three has parents who are separated.

Instability in the subjects' families is found throughout the country. However, it appears that the closer a family is to the major urban centres, the more likely it is to break down under pressure. It also appears that extra-familial relationships are common, though less so in the west of Ireland, and such activities are often public knowledge. Some parents have different families. As one Observer notes, 'we've had students here whose mother is living with so-and-so's father. So you're actually talking about a very incestuous community'. Family histories are also significant. For example, Joseph's family believes 'the police bet their grandfather to death'. Sheila comes from a 'comfortable well off home' and lives with her parents and two brothers. But another brother committed suicide. There is also conflict with the mother of the deceased brother's children.

How do the subjects perceive themselves in relation to their families? One in four has strong links with her/his family and community and feels included and positive about it but the rest do not. The outcomes are summarised in Table 6

below. Those grouped in the positive categories include individuals whose positive is qualified. For example, Josephine ‘fits into (her) family history strongly (but is) somewhat fearful of the wider community’. Among the ‘negative’ categories, Gerard ‘does not see himself as an active part of the family’. Martin ‘sees himself as being only one of many children. (He) realises that resources are limited and that he may be helping by “leaving home”’. Embarrassment and rejection are evident in some cases. For example, while Ronan is quite comfortable in his community, he ‘denies his mother’s history’. She is from Armagh and holds ‘very republican views’.

Response	N	%
Strong links with family/community – feels sense of inclusion	10	17
Happy/positive aspects identified	6	10
Wants to get away	4	7
Feels an outsider/sense of exclusion	6	10
Embarrassed about some aspect	5	9
Difficult aspects to family life	4	7
Miscellaneous (largely negative)	15	26
NR	8	14

I will now examine the findings on the family under the two broad headings of family structure and family functioning.

(i) Family Structure

As regards family structure, three out of four subjects live in a two-parent family, the majority with married parents. The findings are shown in Table 7 below.

RESPONSE	N	%
Parents married	36	62
Parents separated	9	15
Parents separated, new partners	8	14
Other – Unmarried parent (2); Widow (2); Parents separated – has lived in care since he was 5	5	9

The interviewees strongly suggest that this is unrepresentative of their experience of early school leavers and may be a quirk of the sample. One, working in a west Dublin suburb, says it is 'most unusual' in her experience of early school leavers in the Dublin area where 'there's a high rate of one parent families. The majority would be mothers with the children but I do have a family here at the moment where the father is with the children'. Indeed, such is the case with Anita. Another Observer comments that 'instability rather than security' characterises many families. Her views are supported by the case studies, and are echoed by respondents throughout the interviews. It also appears that marital stability increases as one moves west from Dublin. So, in a centre 20 km from Dublin, it is reported that 'the four (subjects) all have separated parents', adding that 'maybe 80 per cent of our trainees have separated parents. There are very few who come from a two parent family'. West of the Shannon, by contrast there were four whose parents were separated out of forty course participants.

The first family structural theme identified in Chapter 2 is *number of siblings*. This only emerged as a significant issue in 3 per cent of cases. The largest group was those with three children in the family. Few came from very large families. As with marital stability, there is a geographical variation. Subjects' families appear larger in west Dublin and in the west of Ireland than elsewhere. In west Dublin, the average in the group under observation was 7, and one of the families had 9 children. In general, according to the Observer, 'there would be five or six in the family'. The largest family of those living west of the Shannon has 15 children. That said, two subjects from the same area are only children.

Disruptions and separations such as marital breakdown, parental remarriage, living in a single parent family and bereavement are the second family structural theme identified in Chapter 2. These are evident in one third of cases. Separations are frequently part of a general pattern of familial instability or the outcome of other intra-family factors such as alcoholism. But does the experience of family disruption or separation *as such* directly influence young person's early school leaving? In a number of cases, the answer appears to be yes. Rory's parents separated when he was three. He 'experienced sadness, bitterness and resentment in the first few years after this' and did not understand why his father left – the latter was involved in another relationship. He is

withdrawn, and was affected by the impact on his mother of his parents' separation. In school, he was bored and disruptive and absented himself when he did not like the teacher or subject. There were 'too many students and he didn't fit in'. School was 'glad to see him leave'. It is possible that lack of money (arising from parental separation) may have made the YOUTHREACH allowance attractive. Yvonne is another example. Her parents separated after five children – her father was alcoholic, violent and abusive. Like Rory, she is very angry with her father, but is also very resilient. Needing money 'to help with family support', she left school to take up employment and was encouraged to do so by her family. In this case, it was the consequent impoverishment rather than the parental separation that caused her to leave school early. Yvonne is highly intelligent, and the Observer comments that 'if she had been born into a different environment there's no doubt...that she'd excel at her chosen profession'. The Observers broadly agree that family breakdown has significant psychosocial effects. One refers to the 'hurt and the pain' it causes and another describes its attendant difficulties as 'highly significant' in contributing to the process of early school leaving. He asked one subject where he would be if his father hadn't left when he was 12 and was told 'I'd be in school'. However, it is also argued that not all young people are so affected and in some cases, such as Tina's, there are too many other family dysfunctions for parental separation to be seen as the cause of early school leaving.

Bereavement also features. Lorraine is 15 years of age. She left school in 2nd year. Her father died a year ago. He was a roofer. To that point, the family was a happy one, with no apparent problems and well respected in the neighbourhood. She has two significant problems. The first of these is the death of her father, which triggered coping difficulties at home – 'her own grief and feeling her mother's grief and rebelling against it'. The second is her school experience and problems with the Garda Síochána. As the Observer comments, these came together 'all at once'. Combined with her weakness in writing, her short fuse and bad language, not to mention low community expectations of education, they triggered her early school leaving. Similarly, Pádraig's father died over a year ago after short illness of three weeks. The Observer comments that the children 'would have benefited from counselling and (the) mother suffered from

depression'. To that point it had been a very happy household, very well known and involved in sporting circles. Coming to terms with bereavement and consequent burdens on his mother are central problems for Pádraig.

The third family structural factor identified in Chapter 2 is *living in a single parent family*. Almost one subject in six lives in a female-headed household. Most live with their mother, though Tina lives with her father. Two of the subjects live with widowed mothers. Families occasionally separate for periods of time, for example Catherine's. Two of the subjects, Beth and Gemma, were born to young lone parents. Beth is a new age traveller. Gemma's mother is a very important figure to her but 'she yearns for a father'. In some cases, the observation profile indicates more complex situations. For example, Majella's mother 'would have always had men living with her'. She is 'a very impractical person but has a good relationship with her children' The Observer suggests that 'this stems from her looking for sympathy for her mistakes'. She has six children to three different fathers and is expecting a seventh. While the proportion of these early school leavers living in a single-parent or female-headed household is high, there is no evidence, either in the case studies or the interviews, that living in such circumstances actually *causes* early school leaving. Rather, it seems of a piece with other factors.

The fourth family structural factor noted in Chapter 2 is the '*step-parent effect*'. As I have already noted, the parents of three in ten of the subjects are separated. In most of these cases, either or both parents are in new relationships, often with children. In 10 per cent of cases the young people are living in a family situation with siblings who have a different father. In one case, the subject's own father is unknown. Some of the situations are complex, such as Majella's and Gemma's. However, the only example of a problematic 'step-parent effect' is Samantha, who has been the subject of sexual abuse by her mother's partner. That said, interviewees identified two issues related to step-parents. The first is that in some cases the step-parent is seen to be overly protective in an effort to win the young person over. It is also suggested that young people compete with the new partner for the attention of their parent. The second concerns the consequences of the parent having a child with the second partner which, as one interviewee puts it,

'breaks up the old roles and throws into sharp relief any tensions that may already exist between (the) step-father and the partner's child (i.e. the subject)'.

Summarising the above, the parents of seven in ten of the subjects are married. Granted, some of those relationships are unstable but overall, while the evidence supports the association between early school leaving and family disruption and separation, it does not establish that such separation is itself causal. Rather, it suggests that all are part of a wider set of instabilities and associations. I will return to this under family functioning below. In addition, while there may be a general association between family size and early school leaving, the research findings do not support the view that family size is a causal factor in early school leaving. Finally, the observations offer no direct evidence that a step-parent effect causes early school leaving. I will now turn to family functioning.

(ii) Family functioning

As I noted in 2.5.1 above, family functioning is identified in the literature as a major influence on children's well-being. While some of the subjects' family histories are quite normal, such as Lisa's, overall the case studies present a catalogue of family dysfunctions. Violence is a major factor for one in ten, as is poverty. There is a history of trouble with the law for one in ten. Drug or alcohol abuse features in the family backgrounds of one in eight. All told, three out of five of the sample contends with at least one family dysfunction. One Observer summarises that whether functional or dysfunctional, 'they're all families under pressure, financially or in terms of ability to cope...' By way of example, Margaret's mother is 'in ill-health'. Her parents have a 'poor relationship' and her mother is 'involved in an extra-marital affair'. In Kevin's case, his mother is dominant and violent. There is poor hygiene in the home, his father lives with the family 'in a minor role' and is 'terrorised by the mother'. Two older brothers are in trouble with the law. Some of the subjects have themselves assumed quasi-parental responsibilities, even towards their own parents. For example, Francis is a young Traveller whose mother is unstable and verbally aggressive. According to the Observer, he lives in care and 'has the option to move home but doesn't think the mother can mind herself'. In a similar vein, four cases of a submissive mother and authoritarian father are identified. This is 7 per cent of the sample. For example, Derek's mother 'has a nerve problem' and his father 'seems to

dominate'. Indeed, the Observers point out repeatedly that one of the attractions of a programme like YOUTHREACH is that it offers what one Observer calls 'a safe and secure environment, which they don't have at home'.

I identified a number of family functional influences in 2.5.1 above. Of these, levels of parental education were not established across the sample in the present research, although levels of education may be inferred from occupational status (or otherwise). These suggest that levels of parental education and training are generally low. I will now discuss the remaining influences.

The second family functional influence identified in Chapter 2 is *a lack of esteem for education*. It is thought that many parents of early school leavers emphasise the 'purely functional' aspects of education and that the absence of significant involvement, positive influence or encouragement on the part of parents is of central importance in early school leaving. Certainly, with the exception of Padraig, whose family is well known in GAA circles, there are few examples of supportive networks other than the extended family in the research findings. As to the value placed on education, a spectrum of parental attitude is identifiable. Parents wanted their child to stay in school in only one case in six. A similar number of parents accepted the decision (to leave) but are disappointed. Almost half the parents 'don't mind' or 'don't care' that their child left school. The remainder, another sixth, actually supports the decision to leave. Boldt's view that when young people reach a certain age the decision is seen as theirs to make is generally endorsed. For the young people and their families 'adulthood begins at 15', says one Observer, who adds that 'many of the parents were out working at that stage'. Another points to 'the value system within the family'. She cites 'someone who has his own business, who left school when he was 14' who might ask 'why does my son have to go for five years to do a Leaving Cert when he could have his own business a few years down the road?'

While school experience is significant in shaping perceptions of learning, parental support is central. As the Observer in the west of Ireland argues, motivating young people in education and training is 'very difficult if it's not coming from the parents or from one parent anyway'. In effect, early school leaving can be 'a family tradition' in which schooling is 'something you do' and education, of itself, is 'not hugely important'.

The third family functional influence identified in Chapter 2 is *lack of interest, low motivation and expectations and fatalism* among parents. The research outcomes support the literature in this regard. For example, in Tony's family, there is a 'lack of parental control – little encouragement (and) no motivation from (the) family'. Dora has 'few expectations of education' and seems to view it as worthless, having received 'no praise or encouragement from home' when she passed her Junior Certificate'. The Observer in west Dublin compares this disinterest and lack of motivation with the interest and expectation of families with higher levels of cultural and social capital. These offer 'a lot more resistance' to the young person leaving school. Such parents visit her centre, asking to see around it. They usually have 'very specific aims and objectives' for their child and she instances requests to 'push him towards an apprenticeship or mainline training'. However, it is also argued that many parents 'don't have the confidence to come in and sit down and... attend a meeting or whatever, it would just be too daunting to do that'. According to the Observers, parents with low levels of education are likely to have low expectations of their children and in turn the subjects' long-term expectations are that 'they will end up like their parents, living in the area with a large family, perhaps unemployed'. For example, of Caitriona 'it would always have been presumed that she would have a baby at a young age', and so it proved. An Observer comments, 'on one level their expectations are realistic because they are...observing the world and seeing the pattern of employment and...how they fit that pattern or not'. Thus, Joseph has no expectations of education or training (he regards YOUTHREACH as 'work', since he receives an allowance). As far as he is concerned, education is for settled people who can get jobs and no Traveller he knows ever had one. Triangulation interviewee CM feels the young people are 'as limited by their perception of the world and of themselves as by any lack of abilities'.

The fourth functional factor identified in Chapter 2 is *parenting practices and styles*. Young people embedded in high-conflict families or whose parents are unable to provide adequate supervision, discipline or emotional support, are thought to be at increased risk of early school leaving. The factors identified were aggression, inconsistent discipline, harsh parenting and the level of involvement of the father. These themes also arise in the research findings. For

example, in Laura's family, 'violent language (is) always used and insults hurled at each other but (they) would die for each other at the same time'. It is also claimed that many of the families do not have the general coping skills required to deal with the routine problems that arise in daily life. One Observer says 'they would hit the young person, rather than try to solve the problem'. Also as predicted, inconsistent discipline features in the case studies and in the interviews – 'One day they get reprimanded for something and then the next day they don't get reprimanded for the same thing.' As a result, the subjects are said to take comfort in the consistency and security they find in YOUTHREACH.

Harsh parenting is also in evidence. In some cases both parents are involved. Tina's mother is 'very accusative' and her father 'threatening'. In other cases, for example Gerard, it is one parent. No affection is evident in over a quarter of the observations. Jackie 'at times feels that her mother had no love for her and does not show her kindness – at a case conference she said "you're not my mother" meaning she did not fill a mother's role'. That said, almost two in five show evidence of family affection and warmth. I will return to this in 5.5.2 below.

A related issue also arose in the course of the research, the respective roles of the mother and of the father in the subjects' families. While these were not addressed in the case studies as such, a broad consensus emerged in the interviews. It is claimed that 'there's a better relationship between the mother and the children than the father and the children' and that the subjects 'love their mothers a lot. The father figure is often the one who gets the brunt of...dislike or...bitterness'. This is certainly the case with Jason, who 'feels extreme anger towards his father and his actions' but 'has a lot of time for his mother and all she has been through'. One triangulation interviewee acknowledges that some fathers 'are very good to their kids' but says it is seen as the female role to nurture and parent the child. Mothers 'keep the house together (and) keep the family together, both physically and emotionally'. The mother 'does the housekeeping things, like the washing, the cooking', but is 'also the one who will get you a new pair of runners if you want a new pair of runners'. In turn, the subjects are more likely to speak of loving their mother. In contrast, while the father lives with the family in two out of three cases, many appear to be relatively insubstantial figures. Observers report that there is very little affection shown between fathers and

children whereas 'the mother would express it'. In some instances, such as Karen's, the father has no involvement with the family at all – he has 'not been seen for 10 years and (is) unwelcome at this stage'. It is felt that the negative effects of such paternal absence are clear and that, as one Observer says, 'They seem to be looking out for that father figure'. Pádraig and Gemma are cases in point. As against that, severe family dysfunction can result where the father is dominant. For example, Seán's father 'controls every aspect and element of family life'. His mother is not coping and the children are unable to make decisions. Much of Seán's self-image is shaped by this family experience of paternal dominance – 'he is shy and has been quite withdrawn' and is 'doubtful of his capacities'. Meanwhile, Joseph is 'a perfectly formed misogynist as his father has shaped him'.

The fifth family functional factor identified in Chapter 2 is *the availability and use of a family's economic resources in sustaining educational participation*. The research outcomes generally support the literature as regards family histories of employment. When mothers and siblings are included, there is a positive family history of employment in just over half the case studies. However, the subject's father is working in only one case in three, and there is no family history of employment for one family in five. For one in six, there is a history of intermittent engagement with the black economy and casual employment. The same proportions hold regarding employment 'in the last year'. So, over half the fathers are long-term unemployed. The father's employment status is unknown in a further 16 per cent of cases. This is generally due to his having left the family and in some cases, the country. For example, 'little is known' of Patricia's father. There has been 'no contact with him for many years'. Overall, parental unemployment is very significant in the lives of those observed, and where parents are employed, it is generally in low-skill activities. Of the one family in five for which there is no history of employment, one set of parents is described as 'unemployable' though 'the children are willing to work'. Financial pressures are likely in families characterised by long-term unemployment and in a number of cases the observers identify an inability to manage the family's financial affairs as the defining problem faced by the family. For Darren, there is 'inadequate parenting, shortage of money, separation'. In Thomas's case there is

a 'spiral of money lending' and the whole family is 'unable to get up in the mornings'.

The interviewees generally maintain that the research outcomes under-represent the level of paternal unemployment among early school leavers and suggest that it might be attributable to labour shortages at the time of the research. In a large Dublin suburb, the Observer comments that

The number of trainees where one or other, or both parents are in employment are few and far between in this area, particularly for the ones who come from a background where both parents are unemployed and for generations before that have been on social welfare. Their aim is to reach 18 to be part of that culture and to be on social welfare.

Circumstances are much the same elsewhere. 'I can't think of any parent... of the whole of our cohort who has a job' claims one Observer, but he adds that his Centre has also had early school leaver participants 'whose parents were very wealthy. They owned businesses and shops and so on'. Many families are clearly hardworking and sometimes both parents work. For example, Gerard's father works in a bank and his wife makes wedding dresses. A wide range of paternal occupations is evident, including welder and taxi-driver (Robert), mechanic (Trevor), farmer (15 per cent of cases), roofer (Yvonne) and bricklayer (Rory). Other occupations include factory work and catering. Five per cent of fathers are self-employed. A number of fathers are occupied in the Traveller economy. Although Joseph's parents are 'regularly unemployed', they are 'very successful in terms of Traveller economics' and 'wealthy'. Mothers work in over 20 per cent of cases. Their work is generally low-skilled. This experience ramifies into the lives of the young people and Observers identify a discernible difference between those whose fathers are working and those whose fathers are not. It is argued that their attitude to work is better and that they are more interested in work experience and progression. They also differentiate between urban and rural participants, the latter being more likely to have worked. Some fathers have intermittent engagement with the labour market. For example, some fathers collect the small farmer's dole.

Having discussed the findings regarding the family, I will now turn to kin.

5.3.2 Kin

The second major ecosystem identified in the literature is the kinship network or extended family and its influence is clear in this research. In many of the case studies the extended family provides a largely positive and mediating ecosystem for the child. For example, Karl often tells stories of play, games and jokes within his extended family. They are 'hugely loyal to each other' and are known as 'a tough family able to take care of their own'. They have imbued him with the message 'don't bring trouble to the door' and 'stand up for your family and friends'. The family keeps a watch on Karl having identified him as one who might get into trouble. This protectiveness can have an extensive reach. For example, George was sent to relatives in England, with court approval, to keep him out of trouble. The extended family also offers key role models. For example, the only member of Bridget's family who works is an aunt, about whom she talks a lot. 'She likes the fact that she's working'. Lorraine looked up to and was influenced by her cousin, who has 'a car, an apartment, a job and a fella'. However, other factors can override such positive influences – the strong tradition of work and shared love of music in Jackie's extended family did not prevent her from leaving school early. And not all subjects have positive experiences in their extended families. For example, Martha's extended family is 'very complicated'. There is a history of violence and one of her uncles has committed murder. Some protective factor seems to be at work here however, because she is keen to get away from this background, to receive training and to be employed, and is prepared to cycle a long way (to YOUTHREACH) each day towards this end. Alan also harbours ambitions to transcend a background that he identifies with the margins of society.

Particular mention is made in the literature of the largely positive central role played in the extended family by grandparents, and this also features in the present research. Rory has 'strong loving relationships with his extended family, especially his maternal grandmother'. The young people re reported to 'have a very strong affection for grandparents and talk an awful lot about them'. One Observer associates this with 'the time spent with grandparents and maybe staying with them or just being up in their house a lot. A lot of them would have felt a lot of security with grandparents'. The nature of dialogue with grandparents

is different from that with parents. One triangulation interviewee sets these interactions in what she calls 'that stormy time of adolescence where parents are the last people who kids want to speak to, because they don't have that objectivity and they're very quick to criticise'. She does not feel that this is particular to any social class. Grandparents are seen to have distance, perspective and time. They are also able to mediate.

Particular mention is made of the grandmother. For example, Matthew 'never talks about his childhood except for the short time spent with his Gran' and Margaret's Granny 'provided a listening ear away from the fights'. Majella's mother looks after her eldest daughter's child. Reflecting on the experience of working with young people in Dublin's inner city, one Observer recalls that 'the ones who would be close to their grannies would be much more trusting and much more involved in the centre'. Another Observer agrees, commenting that

Where there isn't a mother or a non-functioning mother figure, a good granny can't be beaten. I have found down the years where grannies have taken on the role of the mother and have made a brilliant job out of their son or daughter's children (where the son or daughter) simply wasn't capable of doing it.

It is also reported that 'kids will talk about when their granny died things were never as good' (for example Patricia) and that 'when the granny starts to fail, things go off the rails'. However, grandfathers also play an important role, particularly with young males. The case studies contain one clear exception to this general pattern of good relationships with grandparents. As we have read in 4.3 Gemma's family circumstances are complex. She is rejected by her siblings' grandmother who does not consider her part of the family. Gemma is 'hurt by this'. However, there are too many other adversities in Gemma's background for this to be seen to contribute to her early school leaving. Finally, a number of the Observers point out that the grandparents themselves are not necessarily old people. For example, Gemma's mother was a grandmother at 31. This is not uncommon. Instances are also identified of YOUTHREACH participants and their mothers having babies at the same time, though not among the present case studies.

Overall, the research substantiates the view that the extended family is important to the young people. On balance, it appears to operate as a protective mechanism rather than a direct influence. Where this is absent, as in Gemma's case, the young person is left exposed.

5.3.3 Peer groups

The third ecosystem identified in Chapter 2 is the peer group. This is one of the key sites of positive socialisation for young people. The research endorses the significance of the peer group in the subjects' lives. Three themes emerge in the research outcomes:

- The importance of belonging
- Peer group processes, including experience of play, friendship and status
- The peer group influence on early school leaving.

As regards the first of these, belonging is extremely important to the subjects and underpins many of the values that the young people associate with peer relations and friendship, such as loyalty. Thus, 'Friends are important' to Karen, and she is 'very influenced by peers and wants to please them. Being liked by her peers is the main focus of her life'. Yvonne too 'draws strength from her sense of belonging'. Triangulation interviewee SM argues that acceptability in their group is a key factor in the subjects' development of a persona adding 'there is always a fear... among all teenagers that if you are really yourself... (you) might not be included...' This, she argues, is connected to how the young people respond to approval and affection. A second triangulation interviewee adds that 'the greater the social exclusion, the more likely that kids will hang out with people who are like them and hang out with them exclusively'. She explains this as follows:

If you're out of school... you're going to be looking for people of your own type to hang around with. Because very often people are down on you... you're staying in bed, maybe you're not bringing in money or whatever and creating hassle with the Gardaí. You're not getting on with a whole lot of other people in the community. It's important to make sure that you're accepted by a group of like-minded people.

In the absence of networks of friends and a broad range of activities, the subjects often continue to associate with people they have known since primary school

and to adopt the norms of that group. Indeed, their exclusion from other groups (such as sporting groups and networks) increases the importance of their own group as a means of belonging and developing an identity and, as several respondents remark, it is 'very painful for them' when they are ostracised.

The second theme emerging in the research concerns peer group processes. Four factors are found: the subjects' experience of play, their understanding of friendship, their experience of peer friendship and their perception of their position in their peer group. As regards the first of these, fifty two per cent of cases experienced mirthful play. Many experienced happy childhoods. For example, Jason's mother worked in crèches when he was 3/4 years of age. He adjusted well and play was important in the crèche. Darren has a 'great sense of fun and his mother 'would seem to be a caring person who likes children'. Aidan has 'very vivid and pleasant memories of childhood and play'. He had a treehouse and toys. Having engaged in sporting activities seems to engender very positive memories of childhood (Ann-Marie, Ronan), as does participation in a shared family activity, such as music, as is the case with Jackie. In some cases, caveats are entered – Robert had a happy childhood, 'but was spoilt', and Majella experienced play 'until it became time for her to help with younger children in the home – she feels strong responsibility for them'. The general figures are as follows:

Response	N	%
Yes	30	52
Not much	5	9
No	12	21
Don't know/NR	11	19

However, one in five did *not* experience childhood play and one in ten experienced little. Josephine is among the latter – 'she probably had more adult/older company than playmates' and is 'lonely at times'. Gemma 'does not seem to have many happy memories except occasional day trips with others'. Joseph is

among the former. While he 'played on the streets', there is 'no evidence of mirthful anything – (his) only fun was to hurt or put down somebody'. Katie's father's tyranny prevented mirthful play, and there was no play for Seán, because 'children had to be productive from an early age'.

While not disputing these aggregate outcomes, nor that many of the young people have broadly positive recollections, the Observers question the nature of the play involved in many cases. One professes surprise at the subjects' pleasure in what she considers childish activities. She maintains that they hadn't experienced many of these in their childhood. For example, 'Most of them had never assembled a jigsaw'. Asked what *had* they done, she replied 'played on the streets, (that) seems to be the main thing...' She concludes that play was something that happened 'among the children, but not necessarily with the parents'. Lack of adult supervision of children at play is also identified by others.

The experience of two subsets of the target group also emerged in the research, that of young lone parents and Travellers. As regards the former, neither Patricia nor Caitríona experienced happy childhood play. They are members of a group of young lone parents (all female). Their Observer found that most of the group 'wouldn't have had experience of play and would find it very difficult to play with their own children'. She also cites work conducted with lone parents in her Centre by Barnardos and the Irish Playgroup Association. They were 'looking at play and playing with children'. It appears that 'the young mothers have a difficulty in playing as such with their children, in giving them the time'. She infers that they didn't experience play in their own childhoods. On the whole, it appears that young Travellers have more positive experience of play in childhood than other early school leavers. Catherine recollects childhood differently to the other subjects in her group. Bridget is very responsive to poetry and the Observer suggests that she had been 'encouraged to be creative'. But there are exceptions too. Both Francis and Joseph's childhoods were bleak and violent and lacking in play or affection.

Turning to the subjects' perceptions of friendship, it was noted in Chapter 2 that as children grow older their perception of friendship changes as they come to value emotional support such as intimacy and trust over physical aspects such as playing together. This distinction is a great deal less clear cut with the subjects.

In general, it appears that emotional support and physical aspects (for example associating in groups for social purposes) are closely connected. Loyalty, shared values and interests and neighbourhood or clique solidarity and belonging are central to their concepts of friendship. Thus, Dora 'would fight with her best friend but has shown great loyalty in the past - friends are important to her' and Karl 'will stand by his mates through anything except drug taking'. Friendship is 'very important' to Jason, he 'feels very awkward around new people - old friends would be where his loyalties lie and (he) would be in contact with them every weekend since he moved to new location'. Loyalty is 'absolutely huge' and loyalty and friendship are 'very closely intertwined'. 'They'll say a friend is somebody who'll stick by you no matter what', according to one Observer. Others agree - 'if that means giving a fella a black eye that's what you do, if that's what's necessary'. Thus, for example, Sheila is loyal to her friends despite their anti-social activities and the consequent 'censure from authority' for maintaining these friendships. The young people 'feel very let down if somebody strays away. Loyalty *is* important but they don't always get it... and they get very annoyed if somebody breaks ranks' and 'Never ratting on somebody is important'. However, this commitment can be equivocal. One Observer claims that

if it comes to a situation where it's group responsibility and they're all being punished unless somebody owns up for stealing something, they will land someone in it even though they've spoken about (that person) being their friend all week.

Almost without exception, the Observers also identify a concomitant sense that 'you stand up for yourself... and you teach your children to look after themselves and that means being able to give as good as they get'. In support, triangulation interviewee SM cites two YOUTHREACH participants she worked with commenting that 'you've got to get them before they get you'.

Shared values or interests also feature as a basis for friendship. Others suggest local or community aspects. Most of their friendships are formed in the young people's neighbourhoods and in school. One Observer notes that in 'working class local authority estates there is a particular approach to 'friendship and loyalty':

There's a sense of commonality of approach, commonality of friendships and the more friends that are around, the more one is able to cope with whatever the difficulty is. Then that applies also to enjoyment, not just problems. Enjoyment of all going out together and meeting so and so.

Others are more pessimistic. One Observer and her team feel that 'It would be for strength rather than anything else (such as confiding in someone) that they would see friendship as being important', this giving rise to association in cliques.

As regards the subjects' experience of peer friendship, 80 per cent of subjects have a generally positive outlook regarding friendship as is shown in Table 9. In 10 per cent of cases the person is described as a loner or an outsider, and in a further 7 per cent the subject struggles with regard to friendship.

Table 9: Subjects' experience of peer friendship		
Response	N	%
Popular/makes friends easily/important to subject	42	72
Few friends, but good friends	4	7
Has own clique (exclusive)	2	3
Can be lonely/loner/doesn't not have many friends among peers	6	10
Difficulties making friends/with close friendships	4	7

Regarding the subjects' experience of friendship, the observation records include words like 'caring', 'close', 'loyalty', 'friendly and outgoing', 'dependable'. Robert has 'no difficulty in making friends' and while Zuni 'trusts people a little too easily', she 'has deep friendships and often her friends would show concern for her and people seem to really care about what happens to her'. Reservations are expressed in certain cases. For example, Katie (who did not experience play as a child, and whose father is violent and aggressive towards her and her brother) is 'good at friendship - especially with girlfriends - (but) negative towards boys to avoid criticism'. Charlie is 'friendly if someone makes the first move' and Majella is 'loyal, trustworthy and giving - (friendship is) very important to her although she changes friends a lot'. With Samantha, 'any friendship is of an intense nature'.

There may be differences between patterns of friendship between males and females. Triangulation interviewee MS comments that

For lads there's very much a sense of belonging to the group and the group could be maybe a core of three or four people, (though it could be) up to a dozen or more people. With girls it's slightly different. There's a group but there's more of a sense of a best friend and there are endless falling-outs with their best friend...It's different. (And) very important.

The case studies also identify a number of 'outsiders', for example Thomas and Kevin who are described as loners. Similarly, friends are 'not really that important' to Emmet, 'as he depends on (his) family' and Seán is 'reliant on (his) younger brother to form relationships'. Ronan 'sees himself as fitting in well' but in fact 'struggles with close friendships'. Jackie 'seems rarely to have friends of her own age'. She is friendly with a separated man of 50. The Observer believes this friendship to be 'innocent though she was subjected to rumours over it'. It is difficult to identify the factors that make one child more likely to be an outsider than another. However, such individuals constitute 10 per cent of the sample. It is not possible to establish if this is a higher proportion than among the general population. Clearly, outsiders (those who feel they do not belong) have particular difficulties where belonging and peer group conformity are at a premium. While it is difficult to separate from other factors, this outsider status seems significant in their early school leaving. From the case studies, it also appears to be strongly associated with continuing difficulties.

Turning to the subjects' perceptions of their status in their peer group, almost four in ten of the young people see themselves as having mainly high status. By way of example, Patricia 'would feel very important in her own family and peer group outside the centre' and Bridget is 'extremely aware of her position in peer group'. But three in ten perceive themselves as having low status. For example, Karen 'blends in well with peers and is well liked – although own self-image is one of indecision and lacking in confidence'. The rest are mixed or ambivalent. Most of these are 'loners' or 'outsiders' or have problems in establishing close friendships. These include Glenn who 'doesn't have any (friends) and doesn't see the need to have any' and Francis, who 'sees himself as constantly having to

establish respect among fellow Travellers – though settled young people have more time for him’.

The third theme emerging in the research concerns the influence of the peer group on early school leaving. The research strongly suggests that the peer group is itself influential in early school leaving. Gerard ‘was slagged off for succeeding by peers’ and Glenn ‘was afraid to express an opinion in school in the fear of being laughed at by friends’. Indeed, he now ‘feels he could have done better if he had been more careful in his choice of friends’. Aidan ‘sees himself as popular but (is) an easy target for more sly and streetwise young people’ – he is ‘aware that he is easily manipulated by his peers’... Some subjects are part of problematic peer groups. For example, Margaret ‘has good friends, but all (are) very troubled’. Martin ‘has (a) confidence problem’ in relation to friendship with his peers, whom he tries to impress. The Observer surmises that this may explain ‘his criminal history’. Karl is ‘often used as the fall guy with peer group’ which engages in ‘joy riding’.

There are high levels of conformity and compliance within the group. As one triangulation interviewee notes, ‘if it’s perceived to be part of the culture of the group to throw shapes and be verbally aggressive and physically aggressive then they tend to comply with that’. Trevor is a case in point, having a history of conflict over the past two years, largely influenced by his peer group. One Observer comments that as the young person detaches himself or herself from the family, friends’ opinions become more important, even outweighing those of the parents. Another Observer adds that ‘They have to be seen to play the game, and if the game isn’t one that suits them as individuals, it’s very hard for them to play a different game’. She has met many young people who would be ‘very very hesitant in going along with the flow, but yet they do it, despite their feelings’. For example, Caitriona ‘needs to be popular’, so she ‘tends to go with the group consensus rather than stand on her own two feet’. Others recall young people ‘who have very good ability, and in many cases ability to go on to third level, but have allowed themselves to be overshadowed by the peer pressure stuff and ... have never really allowed themselves to blossom and emerge’.

To conclude this section, we have established that belonging is very important to the subjects and their need to belong influences their actions and in a number of

cases their participation in education and other activities. The research suggests that the peer group is an active and highly significant influence on young people's early school leaving and more so than is acknowledged in Irish research or policy literature. It is a topic worthy of further investigation.

5.3.4 Schools

In Chapter 2, I note the general finding in the literature that early school leavers overwhelmingly cite school-based factors as the cause of their early school leaving. As we have seen in Chapter 4, this is supported by the outcomes of the present research. The reasons cited include 'disinterest', 'hated school', 'classes too crowded', 'didn't want to do higher subjects the school wanted her to', 'too bright and emotionally advanced for class group' and 'school was a long distance away from her (25 miles)'. Bullying and being withdrawn by parents for home duties are also cited. Many of the subjects are described as having been, or been seen as, 'disruptive' in school, or 'school refusers'. One in five was a truant. However, one Observer summarises that 'They all put it down to hating school, hating the teachers, always being in trouble in the class'. She adds that while very few would say they found it too difficult, 'the vast majority would put it down to their relationships with the teachers'. On the other hand, a small number of subjects had positive experiences. For example, Yvonne 'had no difficulties in school at all' – she left because she needed money to help with family support. Gemma 'did not mind school' but left with her peer group – she was not expected to stay on. Patricia's main reason for leaving was that she did not want to do the higher subjects the school wanted. Some, like Zuni, enjoyed the peer contact. Francis 'believed it was important to have somewhere to go everyday – to have structure about your life even if you're not really involved' and that it was 'important to meet people your own age even if he didn't have any after school friends'.

The attitude of the schools to the young people leaving is equivocal – school authorities are as likely to have wanted a subject to remain in school as to have been relieved that s/he was leaving. Where the school wanted the subject to stay, the reason for leaving is usually ecological, as with Yvonne, who left because she needed to earn money for her family, and Annette, who left because of the distance she had to travel to school. These young people had no learning or

behavioural problems. Schools appear a great deal less tolerant of those who do. Thus, for example, Lorraine was 'politely asked' to leave by the school. The more troubled the subject, the greater the level of relief felt by the school, as with Joseph and Jackie, whom the school 'would not keep one day beyond her 15th birthday'. Some interviewees suggest that schools are achieving growing success in retaining 'the more committed young people' and that consequently those who come to YOUTHREACH are increasingly referred by probation and social workers. Others argue that most schools do their best to retain young people, but are limited by local factors, such as the age of the staff cohort and lack of resources.

The first key theme regarding school as a context identified in Chapter 2 concerns schooling and the reproduction of inequality. As might be expected from the literature, the majority of subjects hail from the rural and urban working class background associated with early school leaving. Over half the subjects' fathers are not in employment, many on a long-term basis. One sixth of fathers are involved in the black economy. This does not include the Traveller economy. There is no history of family employment in over 20 per cent of cases. On the other hand, three subjects in ten live in families with well-established patterns of employment. Where fathers work, the majority are involved in low-skilled work or in part-time farming. However, they include individuals engaged in skilled trades and self-employment, such as Trevor's father, who is a self-employed mechanic or Lorraine's late father who was a roofer. In two cases, the subject's father is in the army. In addition, five of the subjects hail from comfortable middle-class homes – Gerard, Sheila, Anita, Aoife and Dean. This represents almost nine per cent of the sample. It is pertinent to the issue of the reproduction of inequality that in four of these cases a learning need or disability has been identified or suggested by a parent. Sheila has been diagnosed with ADD and Gerard's mother claims he has ADD. Anita has dyslexia and Aoife is a slow learner. That these well-supported children left school early suggests that learning difficulties are themselves inherently socially and educationally excluding. But they also indicate that middle class parents are substantially more aware of such difficulties, more likely to press for a diagnosis of a child's

apparent learning problems and more prepared to try to find optimal solutions for their children.

Overall, the research does not add greatly to our knowledge in what is a well-researched area. In general, the data support the view that education is an engine of social reproduction. In this, the exceptions noted in the foregoing are significant.

The second theme identified in Chapter 2 regarding the school as a context concerns the Irish school system itself. The subjects attended all types of school, secondary, Community and vocational. This reflects changes in provision of second level education in Ireland and the increasing prevalence of Community Schools. However, the persistence of early school leaving despite widespread structural change in Irish education challenges the view that the system's structure and differentiation into school types *of itself* causes early school leaving or educational disadvantage. Rather, it suggests that the Irish school system reflects, reproduces and indeed reinforces the inequalities inherent in Irish society.

School organisation was the third factor identified in Chapter 2 and two aspects in particular – its general organisation into classes and the policy of streaming where implemented. The issue of a school's capacity or willingness to respond to those encountering difficulties in these regards was also raised.

As regards the general organisation into classes, I indicated in Chapter 2 that its contribution to early school leaving was to facilitate the detachment of children who are less motivated, less gifted or more troubled. The research broadly confirms this view, pointing to the difficulties posed for young people who find it difficult to make the transition from primary school. As one Observer comments, 'they move from one person's set of demands...across a range of different subject areas to eight or maybe ten people's demands'. These people, she adds, may or may not be interacting or relating with each other', will all have 'different sets of standards and expectations and personalities of their own and ways of tackling their subject'. The young people can get completely lost in that 'because of their frame of reference from primary school'. They 'see it as the teacher picking on them. They haven't understood that the system is different and

the teachers teach subjects'. Some of these young people have learning difficulties, but not all. Another Observer reports that she has encountered 'very intelligent, very creative, artistic' young people, who also 'do not fit into the academic, structured, organised second level'.

As regards streaming, the present research generally endorses its association with early school leaving and raises two issues. The first concerns the process whereby a young person is identified as being at a certain level for streaming or participation in a special needs class. One Observer refers to 'a special needs class in one of the secondary schools' through which some of her participants had come. She claims that whereas some children are in this class because they have 'genuine difficulties learning...others have ended up in it because they have so many problems that they're not learning'. She notes that those of her participants who have been psychologically assessed are often described as 'borderline mentally handicapped'. Having seen how these young people have developed subsequently, she challenges this diagnosis as 'quite misleading' and often 'totally inaccurate'. She explains this as follows:

They test their reading ability and because they haven't been attending or there are problems in the home and they are disturbed they will come out... at a reading age of seven when they should be 13 or 14. So they are put down as if that was their capacity to learn.

Often, she concludes, membership of a special class 'has nothing to do with their actual ability'. If such is the case, streaming and allocation to a special needs class is an outcome of personal and ecological factors and is likely to entrench existing social positions. It is also suggested that punitive streaming takes place. One respondent recalls that 'the boys very often start in the A class in school, but by the time they come to us they have invariably been put down to the D class'. She believes this has 'more to do with behaviour... than ability'. The subjects are reported to resent and react pessimistically to being put in both lower streams and special needs classes in school. Caitriona 'spent a lot of time in the slow class' and feels that 'this caused her literacy and numeracy difficulties to get worse'. In this regard, the associated lack of encouragement, support and expectations are seen to influence early leaving.

The second issue raised by streaming concerns self-perception. While there is general agreement regarding its impact, the Observers are divided as to whether membership of 'slow' or special needs classes is a positive or negative influence. Some argue that such a class gives encouragement whereas being in the bottom stream at school would not. Others disagree, arguing that participation in lower streams or classes usually convinces the young person that s/he is less intelligent, and this self-image is very common among early school leavers. As one Observer comments, 'there's no doubt that at a very early age they "know" they're "thick"'. I will return to this theme when discussing 'learned inhibitions' below. These differing opinions among the Observers may reflect differences between individual schools.

The third aspect of school organisation that is implicated in early school leaving is support and the lack thereof. This was not tested in this research. However, it is clear from the interviews that there is a lack of such supports and that it is an active element in the matrix. Of Emmet, who has a physical disability, we read that 'School didn't seem to have the capacity or interest in dealing with his special needs'. One Observer (in Dublin) cites individuals in her centre 'with a reading age of seven or eight... who haven't been part of a remedial group' and wonders

How have they got through? If they were part of a remedial class they might have been able to work on that but it seems to me they have just been ignored in a classroom situation and have just drifted from year to year.

In her view, 'the resources aren't there in the mainstream and they haven't had the opportunity for a one-to-one to improve literacy and numeracy skills'. Many Observers are sympathetic to the pressures faced by schools. They cite various difficulties, including lack of screening and assessment and large classes. But others identify 'those who have fallen behind and... aggressively find some system to cope with it' as a small but significant group. Samantha is an example. A second and more substantial group comprises 'the quieter ones who are just slowly left behind', such as Lisa.

Overall, the case studies indicate that school organisation and indeed a school's lack of organisational response to learning and other difficulties contributed to some of the subjects' early school leaving.

The fourth theme identified in Chapter 2 regarding the school as a context or ecosystem is school functioning. Of the characteristics noted relevant to this enquiry, the school's disciplinary climate emerges as most central. Learning problems or not, many of the subjects have, as one Observer puts it, 'a very strong basic inability' to conform to the school structures and rules. In his view,

They find it very hard to cope with the discipline end of it... and the results and attention they receive from individual teachers based on their academic results and their ability to achieve within that class.

Disruptive behaviour is recorded for twenty one subjects, that is, thirty six per cent of the sample. Twelve are male and nine female. In most cases, a pattern has been evident from the time the subject entered post-primary school, often associated with difficulties encountered in the transition from primary school. Different levels are evident. Some young people, for example Joseph and Jackie, pose enormous problems for a school. For many, however, disruption and detachment are closely linked, with the young people's attendance tailing away to the point where they are deemed to have left. A Dublin Observer comments that young teenagers have 'massive energy', 'yet they're sitting them all down all the time and insisting that they keep still... and if they give trouble you make them more still or get rid of them... which is presumably what's happening in schools'. Four patterns of exclusion are identifiable in the research findings:

Expulsion: four of the subjects were 'expelled', of whom three are male. These represent the more extreme behaviours encountered, bullying and extortion (Joseph) and 'a flame-throwing incident' (Glenn). The latter's parents were incensed at his expulsion for a first offence, but the school was adamant. He has settled well into YOUTHREACH and without further incident. Jackie is the female. Schools found it impossible to cater for her. One principal told the Observer that 'he had never come across anything' like her behaviour. Another school is said to be 'still reeling' from her time there.

Suspension: three were 'suspended', of whom two are female, Katie and Sheila. Trevor is the male. Katie and Trevor dropped out, the latter after a series of conflicts with teachers and pupils. Sheila was 'advised to move on', notwithstanding that she had been diagnosed as having ADD, and the school's learning support teacher was acting as a mentor to her.

A polite request: three were asked not to return to school. For example, according to Lorraine, she 'wasn't thrown out or kicked out'. The teacher's words were, 'I am asking you politely to leave and not to come back, I am not expelling you, I am asking you to leave'.

General indifference to the young person's drift from school: in most cases, the young people's disruption accompanied a more general disengagement from school. In effect, the relationship between the young person and the school broke down, and the school was unable or unwilling to retrieve it. In most cases where disruptive behaviour is identified, the school's reaction to the subject leaving was 'relief'.

Perspectives differ on this process of exclusion. One Observer notes a mismatch between 'the young people's perception of what they are and others' perception of what they are'. While 'they wouldn't see themselves as having been disruptive in school', principals and teachers in the schools 'who were delighted to see the back of them because they couldn't manage them at all would tell you awful stories about how disruptive they were'. It is also noted that teacher pressure (on principals and deputy-principals) can be a significant factor in expulsion.

The other characteristics of school functioning identified in Chapter 2 are *school ethos and expectations* and *inclusiveness*, that is the involvement of parents and young people in the organisation of school policies and activities. The case studies do not add to our knowledge in these regards.

The fifth theme identified in Chapter 2 regarding the school as a context or ecosystem is the curriculum. While the curriculum is not cited as a direct cause of early school leaving in the case studies, the subjects deprecate or resist the programmes on offer in the schools they attended. Sinéad found school 'okay, but not interesting' and Rory found it 'boring'. He absented himself when he did not like the teacher or subject. Yet, the subjects are not alienated from learning. Rather, they are realistic, pragmatic and utilitarian. Real learning is seen to be something that takes place in other domains, often closer to work or personal interest contexts. This is consistent with the views of Watt (1996) who maintains that children come to school with ideas about what is worth learning and what constitutes achievement. The overriding message regarding the curriculum from the research is to do with its relevance or otherwise. Observers claim that the

subjects are more likely to be engaged if the subject matter is 'relevant, useful and meaningful to them'. For example, Tina 'needs to be interested in the subject and motivated. She needs to be told the relevance of what she's doing'.

Literacy is a case in point. Observers agree that, regardless of ability, few of the subjects see literacy and numeracy as being important or relevant to their lives. One reports that 'You hear it time and time again – when are we going to use this? What are we doing this for?' However, if literacy and numeracy are linked to a clear goal such as employment or progression in education and training this attitude changes. The Observer in the south-west recalls,

Francis wasn't interested in literacy, and then he came along one day and said, 'I can get to this level of lifeguard and lifesaving (but) the last one I can't do, because I can't write a report. Can I leave that exam this year and do it next August instead and can I just learn to write up reports all year?' He came up here and he wouldn't miss the literacy class. When we went on holidays for a week, he wanted to know...(when) it would be made up. When they have something to aim at, literacy becomes important.

This pragmatism applies across the curriculum. For example, Gerard thinks that academic schooling is 'of no use' and feels that 'learning is in life skills, preparation for life' and Sinéad 'realises that to get a good job she must learn new skills'. However, other factors are also identified, such as the young person's interests and values and their emphasis on doing rather than learning. Thus, according to one respondent, 'people here (in this Centre) learn to *read* so that they can get the opportunity to *do*'. Another agrees, arguing that learning experiences such as learning to read and write, only make sense to the young person if they are set in a context s/he recognises or values because then 'they don't see that as learning, they see that as doing'. Participants in her Centre might be 'producing amazing stuff' in multimedia, but 'they wouldn't say to you, I've learned this or that...they'd show you what they had *done*'. This links with language and learning styles, which I will address below.

The sixth theme regarding school functioning identified in Chapter 2 is teachers. In this regard, the present research endorses the literature cited in 2.5.4. It is true that one in six of the subjects enjoyed school and, in general, got on well with teachers. For example, Lisa 'had no nasty experiences in school' and 'found it

quite pleasant'. But the sense of negative interaction between the subjects and their former teachers is pervasive. Thus, David 'hated school because he felt he was disliked by the teachers and was being picked on all the time'. This is a recurrent phrase and is expressly cited in over one third of cases. It is clearly implicit in many others. Sometimes this is to do with resentment rather than rejection. For example, Tony describes his vocational school experience as 'a real doss'. He was 'unhappy there'. He 'did not get on with teachers', and 'felt they were not interested in him at all, and did not spend any extra time with him' because, as he himself puts it, 'other lads were more intelligent'.

Experiences with individual teachers are also cited, but less often. For example, Gerard had 'a difficulty with a teacher' in primary school (about which he is not forthcoming). These appear to override otherwise positive experiences, as with Zuni, who 'enjoyed the friendships' associated with school, but 'especially disliked the principal', alleging racist remarks. In turn, the principal was 'relieved' when she left. Similarly, Ann-Marie was 'well liked at school', she 'got on with teachers' and the school 'would have liked her to stay on'. However she had 'one bad experience' as a result of which she felt 'victimised and bullied'. Effects are visible at both the individual and general level. One Observer recalls 'one particular teacher in a school in the town' who kept her centre full all the time. 'Kids were just dying to get out from him and would have gone anywhere to get there'. When this teacher took early retirement, 'our waiting list plummeted'.

The seventh theme regarding school functioning identified in Chapter 2 is teachers, cultural bias and expectation. Two precepts germane to the present enquiry were noted, that neither teachers nor the curriculum are culturally neutral and that consequent cultural bias lowers teacher expectations of pupils from different social or ethnic backgrounds, these expectations being fulfilled in lower academic performance and earlier exit. While a number of instances in the observation case studies suggest cultural bias – Zuni's complaint of racist remarks from the school principal, for example – it is unproven in the research.

The eighth theme identified in Chapter 2 concerns language and specifically the influential role thought to be played by linguistic discontinuity between home and school. Two broad schools of thought were noted. The first posits a

linguistic hierarchy. The second argues that the child's relationship to language is contingent on the norms of her/his culture. The research finds evidence to support both these lines of argument. There is little dialogue, if any, in one family in three. In some cases, it is limited by family numbers (for example, Gemma) or is with certain people only (7 per cent of the sample). Granted, some Observers argue that this is little different to the experience of young people in school, and family dialogue is reported in half the cases observed. Yet, the Observers' descriptions of the language used in subjects' families and amongst peers are consistent with the concepts of linguistic codes and cultural capital. 'Bread and butter' matters predominate. Conversations are largely to do with everyday matters and rarely with ideas, that is, with the currency of school. Thus, for Seán, family conversation is 'concerned with everyday work around the home – among the siblings about animals and machinery'. Some conversations (less than one in ten) are hostile or argumentative. These include discussion based on 'suspicion of outsiders, particularly authority' and an emphasis on rights' (Carol) and 'drink, family, fights, strength, weddings and funerals' (Joseph). A typical Observer comment is that the subjects have 'an inordinate interest in who's doing what on the street and who said what'. One individual recalls that 'they could spend a whole hour telling you she said and I said and he said and I said and he said and then I said to him and then he said to me'. Another respondent concurs that 'It doesn't seem to be about ideas at all. There are exceptions, and of course you get kids who are interested in (poetry), but generally their language is very concrete'. But with these exceptions conversation in the home extends beyond the routine and addresses issues of substance, with the Observers using terms such as 'openly discussed', 'developed thoughts and ideas', 'adult feelings', 'good rapport', 'vocabulary well beyond his years'. But in these cases other home factors are also at work. One Observer says that those who read books 'have a better understanding of things and ideas' and are more likely to generate their own ideas. But books are not the only source of ideas. Triangulation interviewee CM instances a drama exercise with YOUTHREACH participants:

It involved imaginary friends. You and I would be talking but my imaginary friend would be talking to me and your imaginary friend would be talking to

you and the two imaginary friends were talking to each other. But we were only aware of our own imaginary friend...and...they handled that convention, which is quite a difficult, strict, dramatic convention, extraordinarily well because of films like 'Ghost'...

That cultural factors might be in play is also supported. Peer and community pressures are seen to inhibit expression of ideas. In most (but not all) cases, the subjects do not demonstrate *or do not value* what Bourdieu (1991) describes as the 'linguistic and cultural competence' required by schooling. In general, their vocabulary is limited, but some Observers doubt if this is a true watermark of their linguistic or cultural competence, citing their use of technical or special interest languages and also of unofficial or auxiliary vocabularies. I have already noted the importance of learning being contextually appropriate or relevant. Observers noted that many young people speak in more complex patterns about activities or matters that they are personally very interested in or value highly than about something in which they have no interest, or do not value. Their sentences are more complex and their vocabulary extensive, technical and sometimes abstruse. This is encountered in everyday activities such as sport as well as more specialised activities, such as rearing pigeons. It is also clear that the young people have and use auxiliary languages. The vocabulary they use on a daily basis may appear limited in terms of the school and dominant culture, but with peers and in non-school settings they use a substantial additional range of words that are not recognised in the official or dominant vocabulary. These cover a broad spectrum of themes, but Observers specifically cited sports, drugs, guns and horses, areas for which, as CM comments, 'they have loads of words... and phrases... to describe things that we wouldn't have words and phrases for'.

The sophistication with which the subjects deploy their different repertoires of language is noted by a number of Observers, one of whom comments:

They present the language style and behavioural style that they perceive is appropriate to the occasion, so that talking to a priest, for example, or talking to somebody that they would respect, they would use a different language to talking with their friends or their parents.

This is, it is reported, less a matter of vocabulary than of tone and ‘how they say something’. Both ‘pitch’ and ‘tone’ are well chosen, it is argued and ‘They would still get the same message across’.

Overall, the research supports the argument regarding linguistic discontinuity between home and school, both because the language of the home is clearly not that of the school and family and peer cultural norms are at work. The outcomes on language also raise questions regarding the appropriateness of certain psychometric tests. The question of special interest languages and auxiliary merits further research

The ninth theme identified in Chapter 2 regarding the school as a context is to do with ways of learning and thinking. As we have seen, contextuality and relevance are important to the young people when it comes to learning and they differentiate between learning and doing. I noted the view that individuals have different learning styles and gateways to learning, and that it has been argued that early school leavers tend to be those who are inclined towards an experiential or active learning approach. So it proves. The Observers were asked to identify the subject’s learning paths, according to Stokes’ ‘learning circle’, itself derived from Kolb (1993). Readers will recall that this comprised three ‘gateways’, A: theory/representation, B: discussion, analysis, reflection and C: action, experience. Half the subjects enter this ‘learning path’ at C. One in three of these, that is 17 per cent of the sample, follow the sequence CAB. For the rest, the sequence is CBA. Furthermore, almost 30 per cent enter at B – they are discursive or reflective learners. Only one learner in five enters at A, of whom 7 per cent learn in the sequence ACB, rather than the classic academic sequence ABC. Individual variations are evident. For example, with Joseph, it is ‘mostly action, some theory, very little discussion’. Robert learns entirely through action. For Lorraine, the path is ‘BAC if she’s asked to do something on her own, and CBA if it’s a group task’. A small but possibly significant gender bias is also in evidence, with six females following the ABC sequence to two males. As against that, a small majority of those following a CBA path are male.

None of these findings can be regarded as conclusive, and this is clearly an area that demands further study. However, one outcome is unambiguous – the majority of early school leavers are experiential learners, at odds with the

academic path pursued in schools. Of itself, this demands further exploration, as it is of fundamental importance, not only to the reorganisation of school towards prevention of early school leaving, but also towards the provision of lifelong learning opportunities.

The tenth theme concerns the idea that early school leavers end their school careers with 'learned inhibitions', that is, having learned what they cannot do, rather than what they can do. There is considerable support for this view in the present research. Only a quarter of subjects see themselves as intelligent and half have negative perceptions of their ability to learn. For example, Jacinta 'thinks she is thick', Josephine 'regards herself as "stupid"'. Seán 'is aware of his limitations much more than his capacities' and while Bridget actually 'finds it easy to pick up things', she herself 'feels she is a slow learner and puts herself down'. However, these inhibitions are largely to do with academic or school subjects. One Observer claims that 'some of them particularly have blocks with maths' and she described how they were 'flabbergasted' when they passed NCVA assessments. Another makes similar remarks about literacy.

There is broad agreement that this negative self-perception is rooted in the young people's school experience. Those who were in slow classes see themselves as stupid – intelligence is measured in terms of performance in school and in examinations. Since the subjects have not passed examinations, they do not see themselves as intelligent. This view appears to be entrenched for those who attended slow classes in school, who see themselves as less intelligent than others. In addition, it appears that assignment to a 'slow class' convinces parents that their child is less intelligent. As already noted, peers are also influential. However, in keeping with previous comments on language, the young people are markedly more positive regarding specific areas of interest or ability, such as practical skills. Thus, while Carol 'thinks she is thick', she is 'confident in her abilities' in practical areas. This positive self-image is often linked to perceptions of personal usefulness. Over 70 per cent of subjects see themselves as 'useful' to a greater or lesser degree. For example, Aidan 'is aware of his problems with literacy' and 'doesn't see himself as intelligent'. However, he 'is very knowledgeable' and 'sees himself as very useful and helpful especially with his father on the farm and where the horses are concerned'. Young people from rural

backgrounds seem to have a more positive outlook on their ability to learn. So, even though a majority of the subjects do not regard themselves as academically intelligent, up to half the sample are positive or confident about their ability to learn. Patricia is an example – she ‘knows she learns quickly’ and ‘is open to learning’. Gerard ‘sees himself as very intelligent’. George ‘knows he’s not stupid’, but is an experiential learner. For him ‘real learning’ is ‘being shown and taught and being able to understand and ask questions’. He is ‘particularly suited to one-to-one small group settings’ where it is ‘safe to ask a question (and) admit to not understanding something’. Overall, the case that early school leavers carry ‘learned inhibitions’ is endorsed, but principally as regards academic subjects. It is not proven that such inhibitions cause early school leaving. It is more likely that detachment from school and the development of inhibitions regarding academic learning go hand-in-hand. This is another area that warrants further investigation.

The eleventh theme noted in Chapter 2 is early school leavers’ sense of control over their school lives. It was not examined in the research. I will now turn to the subjects’ wider local ecosystem.

5.3.5 Neighbourhood and community

As regards neighbourhood and community, various issues were identified in Chapter 2 such as social capital, the spatial distribution of poverty and community’s self-perceptions. There is some support in the outcomes for the association between early school leaving and low levels of social capital in a community. Certainly, some subjects have little contact with their local communities. Their perceptions of that community vary, as I will discuss below, some being positive and some not. Only one generalisation can be safely made on this subject from the research outcomes. It is that some communities have higher levels of social capital than others and where they do young people appear to have more positive outlooks as indicated by comments regarding the Mahon peninsula quoted below. But this does not mean that they are less likely to leave school early. Indeed, it may be that more positive outlooks, for example regarding employment, mean they are *more* likely to leave school early, but also *less* likely to be unemployed than other young people. This is a complex area and warrants further investigation.

Turning to the spatial distribution of early school leaving, the findings of the research are consistent with the literature cited at 2.5.5 above. Early school leaving appears to be 'spatially pervasive', that is, the subjects are not concentrated in any particular type of area or house. Many, like Catherine, Jacinta and Josephine, live in local authority housing and, as their Observer points out, 'even if they haven't lived in this immediate area...they come from a similar area somewhere else'. Others live in varying degrees of comfort or isolation in urban and rural settings. Sheila comes from a comfortable well-off home'. She is unusual, but not unique. Bridget's family live in two caravans in an unofficial halting site, Seán and Dora live on small farms and Gerard, Martha, David and Annette live in rural isolation.

The community's perception of itself, and the concept of projected narrative were also raised in Chapter 2. The subjects have complex and often contradictory perceptions of where and amongst whom they live and they variously despise, tolerate or embrace their wider ecologies. In some cases, they have no sense of neighbourhood or community. For example, Seán has a poor interaction with his neighbours. But others are, as one Observer asserts, 'very proud of where they're from'. For example, Tina has a strong positive sense of her inner city community and is part of a well-known and popular family. Community is 'important' to Jason, and 'to fit into a place is crucial'.

As to whether there is a local authority housing effect, it is the case that the majority of participants live in local authority housing or small farms. Those from local authority housing are as likely to have a positive outlook on their community as a negative one. So, for example, Lorraine is proud of her house and of her family's standing in the community. They are popular, and she has 'lots of friends' and is very secure in her peer group. A strong sense of belonging is exemplified by one anecdote from Cork:

We were coming back on the bus from our field trip last year and coming down the hill the Mahon peninsula was across the river and one young fella said 'look boy, there's paradise!'

However, as many have a negative view of their neighbourhood, some with a sense of relative inferiority. While Carol is loyal to her community, she regards it as 'a kip' and wants to emigrate. Two triangulation interviewees had worked

with early school leavers in a range of centres on a range of photographic projects and recounted how

generally they wouldn't want to photograph in their own area. They would say there's nothing to photograph here or, they would feel uncomfortable about photographing in their own area... They would nearly always choose to go away from their area.

On the subject of 'projected narrative', many Observers confirm that many early school leavers live in communities that have little sense of, or optimism about, the future. Additionally, they report that 'there is a distinct difference between areas about a sense of employability'. For example, people feel more employable on the south side of Cork. There, young people's employment prospects 'can always be measured against family members and family background and the history of employment' whereas on the other side of the city, 'it can be measured against *unemployment*, and past histories of *unemployment*'.

In Chapter 2 the question of how the community perceives itself in relation to others was also raised. There is little doubt that the subjects are aware of where they live and the relationship between their neighbourhood and others. For example, Jacinta lives in a large local authority estate in a suburb of Dublin. The area has high levels of unemployment and early school leaving. She contrasts her neighbourhood with others in terms of 'kip' versus 'posh/snobby'. Yvonne is much more positive, having 'great pride in her sense of place'. It is 'a very secure world, and unrelated to other more prosperous areas'. Yvonne's own ambitions for life are generic to her community. This sense of neighbourhood appears to predispose the subjects to a range of behaviours and expectations, both positive and negative. The Observer in one Dublin location comments that

You can actually see it from kids that might come in say from places like R----- G----. They would be hard nuts coming in because they've learned that's the way you survive and people from N-- Street, there's just a total difference in their personality because they hadn't to be as tough as the kids from R----- - G----. There's a marked difference. Without asking them their address you would nearly know where they're from.

The subjects have mixed feelings about their neighbourhoods and communities. I have already noted the pride that some feel in their neighbourhoods and

communities. For example, Karl comes from a tough family and sees the place he lives in as 'the toughest in the area, a good place to live'. Observers comments that many have a 'fairly strong sense of community', but not 'always in a healthy way, more in a sense of being hostile to anyone outside of it'. For example, Majella has a strong sense of her area being better than any other, but only sees this when comparing housing estates. This is associated with 'those who come from pockets of local authority housing' who have a 'distinct sense of where they come from'. It is asserted that 'they all come from housing estates so even though they give out about their housing estate they still wouldn't let another trainee give out about their estate'. One Observer summarises that some subjects 'find it difficult to envisage an identity *outside* the family and community'.

That community can be static. It is reported that 'a lot of the kids...in YOUTHREACH tend to stay in the same place all their lives'. This respondent adds that there is 'no sense of moving out or moving on' and one's 'whole life is played out on the very local community stage', a view endorsed by other interviewees and in the Observations. Thus, despite her very high intelligence and potential, Yvonne has no aspirations to become anything other than what is the norm for her community – 'she wants a little job, little flat, little baby'. As an Observer in the Border area comments, 'While they might be totally wild, in the sense of staying out all night and getting into trouble, when it comes to actually going beyond the housing estate frontiers or the town they feel totally lost. They really shy away from that, much more so than (say) the average one at school who might have led a much more sheltered life.'

Movement to another area can challenge the young people's association of self and community. Those who have closely identified with their community and area may find change difficult. Jason is a case in point. His having had to move home twice has 'affected him greatly'. He 'can't fit into (his) present environment' and he hates the area, which greatly distresses him.

Do the neighbourhood and community influence early school leaving? As I have noted above, the subjects live in a variety of contexts, but predominantly in local authority housing and rural isolation. In a general sense, neighbourhood and community may predispose to or support early school leaving, but there is no evidence in the study to suggest they are directly causal. Other influences are

also present, including peer influences, lack of facilities, and so on. It is also evident that resilience factors are at work. The research suggests that negative perceptions of neighbourhood and community are prejudicial to a young person's education. The degree to which this happens is directly proportional to the young person's sense of security and status in family and community and her/his family's standing in that community. In this their own perceptions and expectations and those of their neighbours tend to be fulfilled. Rural isolation appears even more prejudicial to the subjects' well-being. This prospect merits further inquiry.

I will now turn to social class.

5.3.6 Social Class

The final ecosystem noted in Chapter 2 is social class. As can be seen from foregoing sections, the vast majority of subjects grew up and now live in homes with few financial or other resources. Most live in households dependent on social welfare. Furthermore, perhaps as many as twenty per cent live in significantly impoverished circumstances. Over half the fathers are unemployed on a long-term basis. In addition, the father's employment status is unknown in a further 16 per cent. This is generally due to his having left the family and in some cases, the country. Few of the subjects live in middle class families. From this it appears that the single most important indicator of potential early school leaving appears to be social class. Indeed, social class is confirmed as an overarching pervasive influence. The ramifications of this central fact are explored elsewhere in this thesis.

5.4 Developmental factors

As outlined in 2.6 above, disruptions in a child's development and failure to make key transitions are frequently cited in the literature on early school leaving. Our interest here is not in child development as such, but those aspects of the child's development that might be linked to his/her early school leaving.

5.4.1 Early years

In general, the case studies do not examine the subjects' early years, except as regards general family factors and play. These are dealt with elsewhere. In a number of cases references are made to early health problems, for example

Margaret has a history of health problems. These are seen to link with other factors, but did not cause early school leaving. The Observers comment on the general experience of children in the subjects' families. This includes the feeding of infants, diet in early and late childhood, absence of touch, the provision or lack of early educational opportunities and the beneficial effects of the care of very young children by extended families. Particular mention is made of the lack of adult supervision of children playing in the street. Early attachment experience was not part of the study and any conclusions regarding links or processes are speculative. At face value, it appears that Gerard and Jacinta, and possibly Carol, experienced attachment difficulties. On the other hand, attachment is indicated in many more, such as Catherine, Robert, Gemma (despite her extraordinary domestic circumstances) and Darren. Some additional general insights emerge in the research. As regards emotional intelligence, many of the behaviours evident in the case studies are consistent with those described by Goleman (1996). While 'emotional intelligence' was not tested as such in the research, the case studies give general support to its operation as a meta-ability that determines how well or poorly individuals can use other abilities.

While little is revealed regarding the subjects' early learning experiences, some Observers point out that the subjects appear to have missed out on experiences they themselves would have thought central to childhood. One comments that when she plays quiz games with her communications group in YOUTHREACH, she finds young people who don't know 'the next line to *Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall*. They don't know nursery rhymes. They wouldn't answer a question about Goldilocks. They wouldn't know what happened to the three bears'. Another roots this in the area of the family's social *and* cultural capital. For her, 'there's a huge gap' between 'what we would do, read to our kids, talk to them and play' and the experience of many of her early school leavers – 'They never got that early learning and care and I see that as a huge gap in their education'.

5.4.2 Transitions and turning points

In Chapter 2, I noted the importance of transitions and turning points. Certainly, a significant number of the subjects have encountered difficulty in making transitions. Almost 40 per cent found the change to post-primary difficult and this, in itself, was sufficient to disengage them from schooling, despite having

liked primary school in many cases. Tina is a case in point. Although described as 'very bright' and with 'great potential', she liked primary school and 'hated secondary school'. Amongst the others who had difficulties with this transition are Catherine, Gerard, Darren and Trevor. One Observer recalls that

A lot of the parents would say (of their children that) they knew the minute they went into secondary school, they could see the change happening. They were great in primary school (but) the minute they went to secondary school...

Another agrees that some young people find this transition difficult, but associates the principal difficulty with puberty as a turning point:

The main problem seems to happen in second year and that coincides with the onset of puberty for boys in particular. A lot of them struggle through first year, be they in remedial or whatever class group they are in, because they are still children but they tend to hit puberty the summer at the end of first year and into second year and then all hell seems to break loose.

Two of the four Travellers in the sample have difficulties with transitions, Catherine and Joseph. There are cultural factors at work in the latter's case, specifically the tradition that a boy's education was complete on reaching Catholic confirmation. As I noted at 5.2.4 above, it is also suggested that many young Travellers find the transition from primary to secondary difficult because, as was claimed, 'generally, they are not encouraged...'

The subjects have also encountered problems with other transitions, such as moving home. Jason's parents separated when he was 12 and he has been 'affected greatly' by moving to a new home twice since the separation. He feels that 'to fit into a place is crucial' but he cannot fit into his present environment which he 'hates'. In his opinion, he was getting on well at school, had good friends and enjoyed living in the area. Since the move he has become withdrawn. His loyalties lie with old friends and he is in contact with them every weekend. He had no difficulties in making the transition from primary to post-primary, but moving area and school 'totally upset him'. In Jason's case, this difficulty undoubtedly contributed to his early school leaving. However, he is also 'academically weak' and his cannabis use is now a problem.

Transitions involve change but as one Observer explains, 'there isn't an expectation that you're going to go through different transitions and changes as you go along, particularly if there have been patterns of early school leaving in the family'. Consequently, the Observers emphasise the benefits of mentoring. They also note the contribution of ritual in assisting the young people to make transitions. Thus, while religion is not important in terms of spiritualism or faith, it provides what Observers calls 'a sense of order' and structure. Funerals are particularly significant, it is claimed, but so too are 'births, Holy Communion, birth of first child, christening, weddings'.

The research supports the view that many early school leavers have difficulties in making transitions and that this is causal in some cases. So, measures to support children in moving from primary to post-primary education are vindicated. But in many instances these difficulties are linked to other factors beyond the confines of the school, and to be effective, supports must follow.

5.4.3 Adolescent turmoil

As we have established in Chapter 2, one of the key transitional or developmental stages is adolescence. In 2.6.2 I noted Offer et al's (1975) identification of three main patterns of adolescent development and asked whether early school leavers were more likely to be drawn from one or other of these groups. The subjects' pattern may be inferred from the case studies. However, outcomes should be treated with caution for two reasons. The first is to do with the group – while they are representative of participation in YOUTHREACH, they are not representative of Irish adolescents nor do they necessarily represent all early school leavers. There are other early school leavers with even more difficult backgrounds and/or behaviours whom the programme is unable to accommodate. The second is that there is no meaningful benchmark against which to judge a given subject's pattern. It could be argued, perhaps, that by definition an early school leaver's pattern is surgent at best.

That said, it appears that thirty six per cent of the subjects have a 'tumultuous growth' pattern, 43 per cent have a surgent pattern and 21 per cent have a continuous pattern. Esman's figures were 21 per cent, 35 per cent and 23 per cent respectively, with a number of individuals in two sets. So, unsurprisingly, it appears that early school leavers are more likely to have a tumultuous pattern of

adolescent development than a normal distribution of young people. Gender differences are apparent. Males outnumber females by 2:1 amongst those with a 'tumultuous growth' pattern. Females outnumber males slightly for those with a surgent pattern, and by 3:1 amongst those with a continuous pattern. So, it appears that male early school leavers are more likely to have a more turbulent pattern of adolescent development than females.

Two key points emerge. The first is the degree to which clearly identifiable factors, usually but not exclusively ecological, are responsible for a child having a more problematic pattern than would otherwise have been the case. Key factors include family separation, bereavement, parental alcoholism and sexual abuse. The second is the remarkable degree of personal resilience demonstrated in a number of cases, particularly Matthew, Alan and Samantha, whose pattern of development has been continuous despite extreme ecological stresses. Others, however, demonstrate high levels of susceptibility, variously manifest as submissiveness, passivity and offending behaviour. I will now look at the key themes arising.

The first of these is involvement in anti-social activity which is consistent with the idea of tumultuous growth. The case studies show that 55 per cent of the subjects had no such involvement. Of the remainder, 14 per cent had been questioned or warned by the Garda Síochána and 12 per cent had been involved in theft. Smaller proportions have problems with vandalism, aggression, drugs and alcohol. For example, Gerard is involved in theft. He is now involved with the Garda Juvenile Liaison scheme as is Joseph, whose offences are more serious. Martin has been ordered to live in a Probation hostel and has been involved in 'many incidents ranging from vandalism, theft to disorderly behaviour'. Katie has handled stolen property. George engaged in 'house breaking and entering' and Graham has been involved in 'stealing, drinking, soft drugs and joy riding'. The latter's family did not engage in discussion of values and morality. He views his relationship with society as 'outlaw'. He has had a mentor, but in a negative sense – 'as regards stealing, drinking, drugs and joy riding'. He thinks money is really important and work 'is for horses'. As far as Charlie is concerned, 'if you don't get caught, then it isn't a crime'

If we turn to attitudes, as opposed to behaviour, a spectrum of values and beliefs is identified, along which different individuals situate their views and actions. A slight majority of the subjects (57 per cent) are opposed to crime and the use of drugs, 9 per cent are ambivalent and 21 per cent think that crime is acceptable. A further 12 per cent think that cannabis is acceptable, though not heroin. Of those who are opposed to crime, few exhibit any great depth or understanding, other than Beth, who 'can see all the grey areas'. Most are narrow and draconian like Josephine whose attitude is that criminals should be locked up – 'throw away the key'. Triangulation interviewee SM found the young people she worked with to be 'exceptionally conservative' and 'very Old Testament as well, an eye for an eye'. Fear is a motivating factor for a small number like Seán. He has a 'great fear of getting into trouble' and his opinions 'revolve around this fear'. Petty theft is tolerated but 'other things like rape, sexual assault, all those sort of things, abuse of children or crimes (against) children wouldn't be acceptable'.

Asked about the subjects' sense of social responsibility, the Observers report that 36 per cent are 'very responsible', 31 per cent are intermediate, most of them not developing, and 29 per cent are not responsible. Francis is amongst the 'very responsible' – he 'would consider himself very honest, reliable (incapable of lying) and looking out for others'. David is described as 'poor but improving in YOUTHREACH'. Many are not developing in this way, such as Simon, Lisa and Majella. Caitriona 'would be outspoken re social issues but how responsible she feels or how much she would put her thoughts into action would be limited'. Amongst those with no sense of social responsibility are Carol, Katie, Ronan and George. Robert believes 'he owes nothing to anyone'. Martin 'prides himself on being able to be socially irresponsible'.

Are values and morality are discussed in the subjects' homes, and if so, in what way? The answer is either a yes or a qualified yes for two in three. Clearly, many of the parents consciously try to transmit a set of values to their children. The observations feature statements such as 'strong sense of value and worth', 'mother discussed with her the difference between right and wrong...from a moral point of view'. In some cases, the religious ethos of the home defines this discussion, as in Emmet's case. Many parents are more directive. In Joseph's family, values are 'imposed rather than discussed'. Values and morality were not

discussed in 24 per cent of cases. However, according to some of the Observers, parents do not always practice what they preach, 'it's do as I say, not as I do. They would tell the kids, for example, don't get drunk but the Dad would be off his head that night'. Others report that parents often close ranks with their children, even to the point of lying, and ponder the example set by this amoral approach:

We would be amazed at the amount of parents who would, in the last two years, lie for their children. The trainees would tell you a story and they would back them up. You know that the parents are lying as well.

Perhaps as a consequence, ambiguity on right and wrong is reported on the part of some subjects like Darren. He knows the difference, but for him 'the crime is getting caught' and, while he has 'high morals and would not do anything to hurt another person' he is 'quite open to using the system'. For example, he pretended he was living with his grandmother to claim travel allowance'. One Observer adds that some of her group of young people feel that 'if they haven't enough hash for the weekend... then it's okay to go and steal to feed that habit'.

The second theme concerns the centrality of drugs and alcohol to many young people's experience. Having worked with early school leavers in four Dublin locations, triangulation interviewee CM noted how their lives are 'governed in some way by drugs'. Up to 12 years of age she says 'their whole lives are based around *I'm not going to do drugs and I'm not going to find myself in that situation, I'm better than that*'. She identifies the next phase as 12 to 15 years of age, 'where drugs are all around and...all of their decisions hinge around whether they are going to get involved in a drugs related scene or not'. Between 15 and 18 'they are more likely to have set their mind on some pattern which is related to drugs or not'. She thinks the drugs pathway ends at about 18:

If they haven't done drugs by the time they're 18, they've had to work so hard to get to that point that they probably have made alternative decisions that will lead them on to the possibility of employment. But drugs, more than anything else, seem to be at the core of the narrative for those years.

To date, and at the time the research was carried out, this experience has principally been a phenomenon of the east coast, and particularly of the greater Dublin area. Should drugs become more widely available throughout the

country, the same issues will certainly surface. In that regard, and from the same experience, SM highlights 'the whole set of morals around drugs':

Alcohol was absolutely fine and you were quite within your rights to try to encourage your pals to drink or to smoke hash. Hash is fine. It is not a drug. And then you get on to Es and they are fine if you only drop them once or twice a week. Heroin, well it's not so bad once you are smoking it but once you are shooting up, you are a loser.

I will return to this question in the section 5.5.

The third theme emerged strongly in the research. It concerns risk taking and the pursuit of excitement. Different terms are used by the Observers, amongst which is '*the buzz*'. In west Dublin, cannabis is not regarded as a drug, or 'as anything that's damaging. They would see it as what they'd get a buzz out of at the weekend'. The buzz comes in many ways, some legal and some not - sport, drugs, drinking, joy-riding. It also comes, as was pointed out in the Midlands and Cork, from riotous behaviour and fighting.

Apathy and passivity constitute a fourth theme arising regarding 'adolescent turmoil'. One subject in five is described as apathetic. One subject in six is or is not apathetic, depending on the issue or circumstance. Half those observed are not. Gerard is described as apathetic and passive. He has 'put the future on hold - knows certain things need to be done but is not willing to do anything about it yet'. In some cases, apathy arises from anger, as with Carol, who 'can have strong feelings but seems depressed/ angry a lot of the time but denies it and so is often apathetic'. It also arises from self-interest, as with Robert, for whom 'there must be something in it for him - if he sees no interest or reason in what is on offer then (he is) totally apathetic'. Alan is amongst those who are not apathetic - he is 'very determined'. So too is Glenn, who is 'very clear in his view of where he is going in the world' as is Joseph, though the latter is also pessimistic.

The fifth theme under this heading concerns anger and hostility. Observers were asked if the subjects displayed anger. The answer is yes in 60 per cent of cases, outnumbering those without anger by almost 2:1. Allowing for the 'miscellaneous' cases (primarily those where no response was recorded), this would suggest that two out of three early school leavers is carrying a significant level of anger. There is no meaningful comparison with others of the same age.

But this seems high and seems to suggest that early school leavers are more prone to anger and to situations or experiences that might generate it. It demands further research.

Table 10: Anger, hostility		
Response	N	%
Shows or expresses anger in general	15	26
Shows or expresses anger against family/member of family	8	14
Shows or expresses anger against authority figures	5	9
Shows or expresses anger against discrimination/injustice	4	7
No real anger/socially concerned anger	19	33
NR/Miscellaneous	7	12

The range of responses is set out in Table 10 (subjects are allocated on the basis of the principle anger). Of these, Darren 'gets angry when challenged' and is particularly hostile to his mother'. Pádraig is 'angry at losing (his) father'. Jason 'works out of the hurt and pain of 'what happened with his father' (who is alcoholic and whose drinking broke up the family). He has 'a lot of anger and contempt for his father because of the way he was treated by him' and he 'would like to do physical harm to his father'. Others who feel anger towards their father include Caitríona, Katie and Yvonne.

Others are angry against authority figures, for example Gerard, who is angry at the Gardaí 'for wrongly accusing him'. School is the focus of some subjects' anger, for example Ann-Marie and Tony. All of those who are angry at discrimination or injustice are Travellers or of mixed race, such as Catherine or Zuni. Bridget is very conscious of discrimination and is 'angry toward injustice and unfairness'. Francis is angry 'at not being accepted 100 per cent by other Travellers (and) at being treated like a child of caregivers'. He is 'especially angry at (his) mother for taking away his good character with anybody he tries to impress'.

Reviewing the foregoing paragraphs, adolescent turmoil appears strongly linked with early school leaving. But the research outcomes do not demonstrate causality. Rather, it seems that anti-social behaviour, risk-taking, apathy and

anger are of a piece with other factors. They are as likely to be signs of frustration and detachment as to be influences.

I will now turn to sexuality and relationships.

5.4.4 Sexuality and relationships

As I outlined in 2.7.4, aspects of sexuality and the young people's experience of transition to sexual maturity are thought to be of central importance in early school leaving. I will present the findings in three parts, the first dealing with sexualisation, the second with the development of sexual relationships and the last with other related issues that emerged in the research.

(i) Sexualisation

I have chosen to group three major themes emerging from the case studies and interviews under this heading. The first is early sexualisation, the second is sexual abuse and the third is inappropriate behaviour.

The Observers identify early sexualisation as a general phenomenon. One Observer comments that 'we have 15 year old girls who are just one step away from mothers, who are sexually active' adding that having children at a young age is 'respected and accepted' as is the fact that 'young girls are mothers earlier'. For example, Caitriona was 16 when her child was born. She is now 18. In her case, values and morality were discussed at home, 'especially re sex and getting pregnant' and it was stressed to her that 'she would always be supported'. Patricia's child was born when she was 17 – she is now 22 and according to the Observer, 'it would have been presumed that she'd have a baby at a young age'.

As against this, firstly some Observers argue that early sexualisation is a general phenomenon in Ireland and not one confined to urban and rural working classes. Secondly, it is clearly the case that many of the subjects are *not* sexually active, for example Sinéad, Charlie, Annette and Grace. Aidan has 'high morals' and 'does not engage in sexual talk'. In some cases the subject is influenced by family experience. For example, Ann-Marie's two sisters were thrown out of the family home because of pregnancy. She is 'very aware of her father's views on pregnancy' and is cautious regarding sexual activity. Cultural factors are also important. In Bridget's family, relationships and 'being careful around the opposite sex' were central to her conversations with her mother, as would be

traditional in a Traveller family. Martin is 'very inhibited towards involvement with members of the opposite sex'. But others are simply working their way through a normal process of discovery, like Matthew who is described as having 'mixed feelings towards male/female'. Darren is 'a little effeminate' and 'gets on better with girls than boys. He has been 'slagged for being gay'.

That said, significant levels of sexual activity are evident. Some young males lead what a Observer describes as 'far from sheltered sex lives'. In some cases this is part of their ecosystem. Majella is an example. She is 19, and expecting her first child. Her mother has six children to three separate fathers and is expecting her seventh. In Laura's case, her two sisters have babies and 'no apparent partners'. Zuni's mother, who is herself a single parent and 'is going to marry her fiancé' (who is not Zuni's father), is 'known to be having a relationship' with another young man. In others, however, overt sexuality is not a feature of the family ecosystem. Dora's family is stable and hard working and her mother is 'very concerned with issues of morality'. The family live in a rural area, and Dora spends as little time there as possible. Her own priorities are 'money, boys and socialising' and she indulges in a mix of 'alcohol and boys'.

In a number of cases, other features of the family ecology may explain the subjects' behaviour. For example, Grace's parents are married and separated. Her father is alcoholic. Her mother was physically abused, the children were beaten and 'there was little food, care or space'. The children are 'all affected in some way'. Grace lives with an aunt. She is intelligent, resilient and well thought of by her peers. But she also 'seeks attention... with her relationships'. She 'needs to feel wanted and is happiest when in a relationship'.

Finally, some Observers, while accepting that a significant proportion of young females are sexually active, question whether they actually consent to these activities, that is, whether they are proactive participants, or see themselves as having no choice. In other words, is their sexual activity simply what is expected, part of the everyday life of a teenager in their peer group and something they do not feel empowered to challenge? They think so.

The second major theme to emerge regarding the subjects' sexuality is sexual abuse. There are only two *reported* instances of sexual abuse among the subjects,

one of whom is Samantha. Suspicions are expressed in three other cases, or 5 per cent. This is consistent with the experience of Observers. One 'never had to deal with a case' and another had encountered it once. That said, a sense of unease permeates the observations and the interviews. In general, the Observers feel that the incidence is higher than reported and all acknowledged sexual abuse as a general background presence in the subjects' lives. In one Centre, while there was no case in the observed group, 'there are one or two...every year. There was a particularly bad year when we had five young people...'

But if the level of sexual abuse is higher than reported, why is it not disclosed by the victims or discovered by relevant professionals? There is a substantial literature on the subject of manipulation of victims to forestall disclosure. This aspect of the subjects' experience is beyond this enquiry. However, the Observers suggest two other reasons for non-disclosure. The first of these is that the victims are aware of the likely consequences. The probability of family separation consequent on allegations of sexual abuse is itself seen as a disincentive to disclosure and a cause of under-reporting – 'they know the social workers would be brought in and the family would be split up'. The second is that the experience is so intrinsic to some people's lives that they are unaware of it as abuse. One Observer argues that 'if they've grown up with it, it's part of their daily panorama'. She adds that 'I have kids here who carry big dark secrets and who will talk about secrets but won't divulge the secret'.

The Observers also cite difficulties with definitions and indicators. 'It depends on how you define sexual abuse', was one answer. In one site it was argued that 'if you look...at statutory rape as having sex with a girl under 16 years of age... then half the girls in this centre or more have been raped...because they're sexually active'. But is this sexual abuse? The Observers also suggest that accepted indicators are confusing, for example 'use of sexually explicit language'. By this criterion, the language and behaviour of certain trainees indicates the possibility of sexual abuse. But, they say, *all* teenagers use inappropriate language and that this indicator could lead to the conclusion that 'the working class is rampant with sexual abuse'. In general, Observers maintain that language should be taken with other indicators, referring to 'inappropriate

behaviour, their hang-ups about sexuality, hang-ups about touch...' As one of their number points out,

Bar the Travellers, most of the others would be very promiscuous and acting out sexually. There are no boundaries around that in terms of coming on to workers, things that would cause you concern.

Many of these themes converge in Martha's case. Her parents are married. There is a history of poverty and they live an isolated rural existence. Her father has been in trouble with the law and an uncle was convicted of murder. There has been no allegation of sexual abuse, but Martha 'alludes to experiences with relations'. She is 'unhappy in her family and community and is prepared to cycle a long way every day to get away'. Martha regards a number of things as important, amongst which are 'having a boyfriend (or several), creating an impression (and) getting praise'. She is described as 'hungry for love, hugging male staff, very physical with boyfriends. She is unaware of the parameters between sexual and non-sexual love'.

The third theme to emerge in the research regarding sexuality concerns inappropriate behaviour. This emerges in specific case studies as well as the general commentary of the Observers. It is one of the indicators of possible sexual abuse. One comment summarises other viewpoints already cited:

We notice this where they would sexually make up to instructors or to much older men. It's as though they don't have the normal-type barriers where they're sexually relating to the kids their own age.

This respondent adds that it is not only 'that they would be inviting or precipitating sexual interactions with older people but they also seem to be much more sexually active with a lot more people'. The case studies also feature other inappropriate behaviours. In Kevin's case, it is a 'history of touching up peers and women'. Kevin may be mildly mentally handicapped. Another is Jackie. Both her brothers are disruptive. She was 'literally stalking a man of about 30 years whom she already knew as he had given work to her brother'. She made obscene phone calls to him, which he eventually taped, and made threatening phone calls to his girlfriend. According to her, he shot at her after she put a stone through his window in the middle of the night'. While the Observer suspects she

may have been abused outside her family, this is not proven. So, any link between sexual abuse and her early school leaving is a matter of speculation.

(ii) The development of sexual relationships

So far in this section, I have addressed the question of sexuality. But how is this situated in the development of their relationships? Difficulties love are evident in half the case studies. These run the gamut from over-attachment – Majella ‘loves too much’ – to an apparent inability to love – for Joseph, love is ‘purely physical domination’. Jacinta is ‘cynical’ and Katie ‘sees love as a commodity’. Ronan does not fully understand love – ‘he feels that love is always conditional, especially at home, that is, he is only loved when he is sick or not there’.

Another Observer asserts that the young people ‘love’ their family and ‘love’ their boyfriend or girlfriend, but the word means different things in different contexts. ‘Sex’, she adds, ‘comes in the middle as something we have or do which doesn’t have to have any love attached to it’. It is also argued that ‘there is no development of relationships’ and that most of the boy-girl relationships are bound up with status in the peer group and with the young people detaching themselves from their families. Cynicism is also reported. One Observer comments that ‘love has meant very negative things sometimes...’ As evidence of physical affection, another Observer instances ‘love bites and black eyes’. On the other hand, many of the subjects have no difficulties in this regard. For example, Lisa’s family is ‘very loving and supportive’ and she ‘has a boyfriend and they seem to have a very good relationship’.

Turning to differences in attitudes between males and females, the case study observations do not tell a great deal in this regard. But the interviewees report that males and females have distinctly different perceptions of love and sexuality. ‘Love is never mentioned by the fellas in front of any person’ says one. It is ‘generally seen as sexual love’ by the young males, according to another. The girls see it quite differently – ‘It’s someone to think you’re wonderful and mind you and tell you nice things’, the Observers claim, and ‘relationships and love are the biggest subject of conversation between the workers here and the young girls when they meet individually once a week’. Males often engage in crude sexual talk and vigorously express aggression, but they have difficulty in expressing ‘inner feelings’, unlike females. That said,

triangulation interviewee CM points out that 'emotional support is all very well' but sometimes 'what you (really) need is to be able to move out of your gaff and move into somebody else's gaff'. This kind of practical support 'is really strong and admirable as well', she says, adding that for the subjects, 'love isn't something you say' or 'something you talk about, it is something you do'. It follows that 'it's not something you analyse either'.

Finally, young Travellers share many of the attitudes and experiences outlined above. In some cases they are more extreme. For example, as one Observer notes, in Traveller culture, 'a man touching a man is a homosexual and if you are a homosexual you are the scum of the earth, you are lower than a Traveller in their eyes, someone they can look down on'. That said, the young men 'all want to be perceived, like most young fellas, as studs and basically, all the talk is around that'. They 'talk crude and rough and disgust the girls with their talk but, if the truth were known, especially the Traveller fellas, they're leading very sheltered sex lives'. Traveller girls are reported to be 'saddened at the difference between what they perceive to be romantic love and the reality of what they're going to go into'. In this regard, Bridget 'knows what she wants from relationships with young men', yet 'she has inhibitions about developing deep relationships'. She 'doesn't want to be "the wife" of a Traveller man'. However, Catherine, who is settled, sees love clearly, 'especially in relation to her family and wouldn't have a problem expressing it'.

(iii) Other related issues emerging from the research

Finally, the research suggests two other factors that may be closely linked with early school leaving itself, 'neediness' and dependency. As regards the first of these, an Observer in the Border area notes that many of the young people she has worked with have been reared in circumstances where love was minimal or inconsistent, 'and they would be just grasping at straws'. These young people can be very needy, she says, and consequently very vulnerable in a variety of ways, for example to lone parenthood, and consequent early school leaving. Jackie is an example. Her inability to distinguish between sexual and non-sexual love has already been cited. 'Love' is very important to her, and she needs to feel loved. She 'is very affectionate and inclined to hug and touch adults a lot – some of her actions are like those of a young child. She will cling to love wherever it is

offered'. The Observer worries that 'this could lead her into trouble'. Many of the young people also appear to confuse love and dependency, a point made repeatedly by the Observers. Carol is an example. She is cynical about love, believes that 'nobody gives a shit', and 'confuses love with dependency'. An Observer referred to her group of lone parents:

The children are dependent on them, therefore their children love them, so they love them (back). They're dependent on their own mothers, so there is something around love there as well but not among each other or with their partners.

Are sexuality and sexual relationships implicated in early school leaving? Reviewing the foregoing section, while sexuality and relationships in themselves do not influence early school leaving, it is clear that many subjects have encountered a sexually active culture either in the home or in wider society. Coupled with personal neediness, this may place individuals at risk of early sexual activity and possible lone parenthood. This, in turn, may lead to early school leaving. In a number of cases, most obviously Samantha's, sexual abuse is a powerful influence on educational participation. In others, it is part of a wider pattern of adversity contributing to early school leaving.

I will now turn to identity and self-esteem.

5.4.5 Identity and self-esteem

The view that early school leavers have 'pronounced identity difficulties' and low self-esteem and that one's physical appearance and the approval of the peer group are important in these regards was noted at 2.6.4. It is suggested in the literature that there is a causal connection. The outcomes of the present research do not overwhelmingly endorse these views. While it is true that as many as two out of five of the subjects have difficulties with identity and self-esteem, the majority does not have the kind of profound deficits in these areas that might be expected from the literature.

Do the subjects have, as White (1997) suggested, 'pronounced identity difficulties'? Some do, but only one in five. In just over 30 per cent of cases, the subject has some difficulty or is in transition. But the individual has no significant identity difficulties in almost 50 per cent of cases. Darren is one of

those who do. He is 'embarrassed about where he lives and (his) lack of education'. His sister 'gives him a hard time about being in YOUTHREACH'. He has 'pretended that he lives in a posh area and that he is involved in drama, (in) panto in the Gaiety'. Others with identity difficulties include Martin, who has no sense of identity or purpose, Gerard, Dora, Matthew, Samantha and David. The latter's family are born again Christians, he never speaks of his family's history or location, is 'afraid and bullied', is a loner, and has no idea of what he would like to do or be.

Some of the subjects are in transition, like Pádraig and Ann-Marie. The latter is 'still very young (and) doesn't know where she's heading yet, but she will work hard'. Those with no identity difficulties include Carol, Simon, Lisa and Beth. They also include some young people who have a strong sense of identity despite other difficulties. For example, notwithstanding her own offending behaviour and her parents' separation, Tina has a strong sense of community. She 'is part of a well-known family and is proud to be part of it'. She is personally optimistic, has a 'strong sense of belonging' and is interested in hair-care as a career. Gemma's family background is even more difficult, yet she 'sees herself in the same path as her mother – a strong happy family despite their troubles'. Although each has other issues with which to contend, the four Travellers have no identity difficulties. A morbid certainty of identity also features, albeit rarely, for example with Graham, who sees himself as an outlaw, and Joseph, who sees himself as a useful, hardworking intelligent Traveller, but who is also a violent lawbreaker. His capacity for violence and theft is part of his identity.

It is also argued in the literature that early school leavers have low self-esteem. Many Observers agree, with one commenting that the subjects have a 'total and utter lack of self-esteem and self-worth'. In her experience, 'you have to start to build them up from scratch...right across the board, regardless of their ability'. But in stark contrast to this view, and indeed to the literature, it transpires that less than a quarter of the subjects have low self-esteem. In 14 per cent of cases, the answer is equivocal and 60 per cent have positive or high self-esteem. Thomas is among those with low self-esteem. His family 'lives in poor circumstances' and is 'caught in a money-lending spiral'. The 'whole family is unable to get up in the morning'. Thomas 'recoils when approached' and is

'timid'. He is ambivalent and apathetic and 'feels very inadequate'. He hides in a group situation. He has 'a fear of being laughed at'. Others include Tony and Aoife. Those for whom the answer is equivocal include Robert, Katie and Martha, who has poor self-esteem apart from her appearance, of which she is aware and is confident. Among the 60 per cent with positive or high self-esteem are Lisa, Beth and Alan. In Dean's case, although he left school in 2nd year, he is 'intelligent' and 'spoiled'. He is 'interested in ideas, has a narrative sense of the self and is inquisitive'. He sees himself on a career path leading to ownership of his own company. The Observer comments that 'his self-image is good'. Another is Joseph who does not suffer from low self-esteem, except as regards schooling. Yvonne is a 'second mother' in her family, and in her peer group 'she is popular and a real leader'. When we look at identity and self-esteem together, we find that:

- Eight subjects, or 14 per cent, have both identity difficulties and low self-esteem.
- Five subjects have no identity difficulties, but display low self-esteem, such as Jacinta and Josephine.
- Seven have identity difficulties coupled with high self-esteem. They include Gerard, who has a high regard for his ability to learn.

Some subjects have high self-esteem in certain areas and low self-esteem in others, especially learning. For example, Carol 'thinks she is thick', but has a high opinion of her employability. Bridget is another – while she regards herself as a slow learner, she is 'quietly confident' regarding training. Darren sees himself as very intelligent and insofar as he has low self-esteem it derives from his physique and his perception of his neighbourhood. He also has identity difficulties. Patricia feels very important in her own family and peer group outside the centre, but is less certain of her status within the YOUTHREACH Centre. In a number of cases, the Observer suggests that the subject's self-esteem is inflated, as with Ronan. He sees himself as 'well ranked' in family and community, but the Observer feels that 'his family, time and self is a state of confusion'. As for Jackie, she 'sees herself as hard working (true) and reasonable

(untrue) and co-operative (most of the time).’ (Comments in parenthesis are by the Observer).

In the light of the accepted research consensus, these findings are unexpected. So, how are we to reconcile the literature, not to mention the views of experienced Observers, with what we find in the case studies? A number of factors appear to be significant. Firstly, the subjects have already left school and have spent time in an environment (YOUTHREACH) that is geared to enhance self-esteem. They were not all so positive about themselves when they began the programme, as may be seen with Trevor and Derek. Secondly, while subjects have low self-esteem regarding school-type learning, their self-perception is much more positive when measured in terms of qualities, capacities or activities which they themselves regard as important. These include demonstrable skills, employability, peer status, athletic or sporting ability and so on. There is support for this conclusion from triangulation interviewee MS who points out that for self-esteem to be high ‘you need to be good at those things that you value’. Thus, ‘if you are good at woodwork, if you are good at football and those are the things that you value, in very simplistic terms, you’d have a good self-esteem’.

Certainly, success in such non-academic activities appears to improve self-esteem. Wayne is a good example of this. His family is poor and there is a history of violence and petty crime. He wants to distance himself from this background. He sees himself as important in his community and among his peers. He left school in 1st year. He was disruptive, felt the system was too strict and that he was unimportant – ‘only a number’. However, he has ‘no learning difficulties’ and ‘has no difficulty with anything he is interested in’. He is a member of a boxing club, and the person in charge has been a mentor for him. Wayne is now ‘a very positive and definite person, a good communicator, organiser and willing to work hard. He has an interest in achieving high standards in sport and in learning. He feels it is important to be somebody and to achieve this he must work hard’.

Turning to physical appearance and approval of the peer group, Pines’ (1993) view of the importance to self-esteem of ‘physical appearance and the image of the self – mirrored in positive or negative response from peer figures’ was cited in the review of the literature. The present research supports this viewpoint. A

predictable spectrum of awareness and self-confidence is apparent. Three groups are found:

- One-third are clearly happy with their appearance: this group includes Patricia, Sheila, Martha, Beth, Aidan and Tina. Annette is ‘attractive, pleasant, impeccable and proud of her appearance’. As with other aspects, development has taken place in YOUTHREACH. For example, Francis’ stature has improved with confidence – he ‘swaggers now as opposed to the mooching of old’;
- One third are positive but more self-conscious: this group includes Carol, Caitríona, Karen and Jackie. Martin has a ‘good attitude towards (the) physical side though tattooed and pierced. (He) does not regard himself as good looking’;
- One third comprises those who are conscious of their weight and those who manifestly lack confidence. Among this group are Josephine, Robert, Katie, Seán and Ronan. Dora is described as follows: ‘overweight, love bites, body odour, dirty clothes, very careless and despite approach has not improved – probably unhappy and not able to improve her appearance’.

It seems unlikely that the subjects are exceptional from the general run of adolescents in Ireland with regard to their physical self-image and the Observers consistently hold that, on the whole, they are not. Triangulation interviewee SM argues that ‘the fear of looking stupid’ is ‘predominant’ for ‘all people of between 14 and 17 years of age’ and it is a stage when ‘You don’t want to look silly. It’s the age when you are trying to be something, somebody that people will respect’. Working with early school leavers in four Dublin YOUTHREACH Centres, she found that this was

incredibly strong in the centres. Everybody... (was) in the process of creating or just had created their persona and if that was dented in any way it was very, very dangerous.

This process comprehends physical appearance and contending with what one Observer describes as puts it, ‘all the pressure to be about six stone and be really thin and wear clothes that expose a lot of their bodies’. In her experience, the girls believe they will only be liked if they are very thin and ‘even the ones that are seven and a half stone seem to think of themselves as being two ton Tessa’. Thus, Josephine is ‘Very self-conscious of being overweight (and) doesn’t like

outdoor pursuits'. However, it is not only girls who are subject to this. Darren has 'serious inhibitions about his body' and 'worries a lot about his physique'. He thinks he is overweight and pretended to be bulimic. He refuses to go to sports. In the centre, he 'refused to remove a warm fleece jacket even though dripping with sweat'. This discomfort with their own bodies recurs in the interviews. As to the source of such inhibitions, a number of Observers point out that 'some...would be noticeably neglected in their appearance and hygiene and that sort of thing' and indeed, this applies to a number of the subjects of this research. It is also suggested that this is linked to the subjects' domestic situations, 'the mood they are in' or whether 'they had a hard weekend or... things are really bad with them'.

Pressure to be fashionable is also cited. While it is agreed that this is the same for all teenagers, additional difficulties face early school leavers, many of whom hail from economically disadvantaged homes. However, one Observer argues that financial resources are secondary to self-esteem, instancing Bridget, 'who lives in the most deprived condition (in a halting site) with no water and no toilet' but who is 'the best dressed, with the most make-up on, in the place here. You'd swear she was going out for the night in terms of dress and physical appearance, hygiene and cleanliness'.

Money and sense of purpose are also important regarding self-esteem and indeed physical appearance. One of the Observers describes a former participant who had recently secured employment – 'suddenly he totally cleaned up and changed altogether'. It is also reported that those active and reasonably successful in sports also tend to have high self-esteem, to be well-presented and aware of hygiene. By way of example, Ann-Marie left school because of 'one bad experience'. She 'plays for two local football teams'. This involves both teamwork and training 3-4 times a week. She is 'very athletic, thin, hygienic...very fit and full of energy'. Sport is more important to her than education. She has a strong sense of usefulness in society and family. She expects to find employment, with justification.

As regards Travellers and identity and self-esteem, the case studies suggest that young Travellers set their self-image in a cultural context and have no identity difficulties. In all cases, settled or not, they are described as having a strong

sense of family history and are aware of Traveller culture. Catherine has a 'strong image of and is conscious of being a Traveller in a settled community'. Francis has 'a detailed knowledge of the history of his family and community', even though his own family has broken up. He 'has a strong idea of his identity in relation to it all'. Joseph, although in constant trouble with the law, has no identity difficulties. Turning to self-esteem, Francis was apathetic and disinterested, coming from a broken home and living in care. Now, though still 15 years of age, but having spent time in YOUTHREACH, he 'perceives himself as cuter, more knowledgeable and streetwise than his peers but not as academically intelligent'. He has become a 'positive, self-confident young adult with great commitment to personal change and development and growth'. His stature has improved with confidence. Joseph sees himself as a 'leader who believes he controls his friends' behaviour... and perceives himself to be crafty, a good dealer, loyal friend and a hard worker'. As for the females, Catherine's expectations are positive, she is confident of being heard, though (as already noted) she has culturally prompted inhibitions regarding her body. She is 'very self-conscious of her appearance (and) looks after herself'. Bridget's self-esteem is lower. She regards herself as a slow learner. But she is equally conscious of her appearance, as I have already noted above. Their Observer comments that the young Traveller women 'are all uncomfortable in terms of their bodies' and 'more so than... regular teenagers are because it is viewed as dirty and negative'. He cites discussions that took place as part of the Centre's women's group as reflecting 'how little they know about their bodies'. In his view, 'it's unbelievable for their age that they've got so far and know so little. And it is not just the females – the fellas are so misinformed it is unbelievable and (they) won't engage in any conversation about it because they want to avoid it at all costs'.

It is true that the clarity of Traveller culture assists young Travellers in making the transition to an adult identity. But that identity itself may be implicated in other difficulties the young people face as regards self-esteem and knowledge of, and comfort with, their own bodies.

Finally, examination of the case studies reveals no differences between males and females as regards self-esteem. However, significant differences are apparent

as regards identity difficulties. Of those *with* identity difficulties, ten are male and three are female. Of those with *no* identity difficulties, eighteen are female and nine are male. It is not clear why this is, but the outcome is consistent with research cited in 2.5.1 above. It is a finding that demands further investigation.

5.4.6 The transition to adulthood

In 2.6.5 I noted a number of key themes regarding the transition from youth to adulthood. I referred to the three main patterns identified by Hannan and O'Riain (1993). A majority of the subjects conform to the third of these patterns – 'lower working class, doing badly in school and leaving early and adopting "careerless" manual or lower service occupations'. Sinéad's projected narrative encapsulates their objective and model of successful transition. She has already left school. Now her objectives are 'to find a job, get a boyfriend, get married, settle in the area and have a large family'. An Observer comments that 'They want very ordinary things...a happy family life and a fairly secure job'. But she emphasises that 'at the same time, a lot of them aren't going about their lives in a way that they will have that'. For example Gerard 'wants a proper job or an apprenticeship, but (is) not prepared to put in the work at present. (He) feels his father will provide a job'.

There are many exceptions to the standard patterns. Looking through the case studies, we find atypical backgrounds such as Robert's, Trevor's and Rory's – their fathers are skilled tradesmen and they see this as their likely trajectory. Sheila lives in a comfortable well-off home. Her father is self-employed in the scaffolding business. Her brothers work full-time. She has been diagnosed as having ADD, and her consequent behaviour is the key to her leaving school early. The Observer suggests her transition may be accomplished through lone parenthood. Dean's father is in the car-valeting business and his mother does voluntary work. He is an only child, and somewhat spoiled. He now has a clear trajectory in mind, from YOUTHREACH to an apprenticeship to being a manager and then owning his own company. He also envisages going to college as a mature student. Other subjects are likely to achieve higher outcomes than might be expected from their circumstances. They include Wayne and Alan rising above adversities, probably to work in sport. There is Beth, a New Age Traveller with (justified) ambitions to get a degree and become a writer. Annette

also has ambitions to go to college. She dropped out of school largely because of the distance she had to travel. This was compounded by her father's alcoholism. The Observer suggests she could even become a teacher.

It is true that some young people are not yet ready to contemplate progression to work or further training. As one Observer puts it, 'whether or not they see themselves as being employable (and I think they do), they don't realise the attributes and skills they are going to need to have'. Thus, Martin 'hasn't really contemplated the nuts and bolts of work' and Samantha 'has no opinions (about work) and is unable to focus on anything in the future'. In addition, Observers note that 'It has to be worth your while to get up early in the morning, to travel and to work eight hours'. The alternative is 'the dole, your medical card, rent allowance and so on'. If a job does not pay enough, 'why bother?' Also, some subjects are under-ambitious. So, Jason is likely to work in construction in an unskilled capacity although he is 'very good at computer graphics/drawing'. Others have difficulty in envisaging key steps in a normal transition, such as Patricia who 'would like to settle with a partner and her child' but 'sees difficulty in leaving home'. The subject can be described as disinterested, unrealistic or unready for work in only 12 cases, representing 21 per cent of the sample.

Overall, a substantial majority of the subjects aspire to, and are capable of, work. Moreover, they recognise the importance of work in establishing one's independence and personal adult identity. So, Matthew and Simon are 'aware that work is very necessary for success'. In some cases they are not specific as to what they want to work at. Ann-Marie and Cairíona want to work 'where you can earn enough and the work is interesting'. Where the subjects are specific, their intentions are stereotypical. For the males there is mention of manual work, construction, factory work, farming, working with men, and so on. Possible avenues suggested for females include catering, childcare and hairdressing.

Bearing in mind what we have found regarding ways of learning, relevance, identity and self-esteem, it is unsurprising that that one Observer claims that some of the subjects see themselves 'as being employable in areas in which they're confident of their capabilities'. She adds that 'they're not afraid of...work provided it's what they class as real work, and provided that it's...work they are interested in'. Atypical options are suggested in a small number of

cases. Real work for Zuni is singing and music, and 'she has high expectations'. Beth 'wants to be a writer' and 'accepts different people have values which are different to hers in this area'.

It may also be that accepted patterns of transition to adulthood are being supplanted by new circumstances. For example, Margaret has already achieved a Level 2 NCVA² qualification. She now wants to become a chef, and this is realistic. But it is not a lack of qualifications, nor indeed social class, that inhibits her progress, it is internal family dynamics, inhibitions and fears. Also standard models of transition presume social stability and predictability and do not take account of multicultural elements in modern Ireland, represented in the case studies by Zuni, Karen and the young Travellers. Increasingly, individuals whose families, or parts thereof, have no historic link with established patterns of transition are likely to attend Irish schools. In turn, some are likely to leave early. The present case studies suggest that two mutually reinforcing factors may of themselves prompt early school leaving and disrupt safe transition to adulthood. They are, the experience of schooling itself, and resistance (by schools, or elements thereof) to non-typical individuals or their modes of participation, for example like Karen, who attended school in the United Kingdom.

5.4.7 Disruptions

The literature on the influence of developmental and transitional disruptions on early school leaving was noted in Chapter 2, and several patterns were identified. For example, poverty in early childhood is strongly associated with poor schoolwork and early school leaving. In the present research, we find that eighteen (30 per cent) of the subjects live in families that have always been poor. Eleven (19 per cent) live in families that have never been poor or dependent on social welfare. A second pattern is the association between transition to a female-headed family in later childhood or early adolescence and poor academic performance. Five of the subjects have always lived in a female-headed household. Seven have done so since early childhood and five have done so in recent times. The present research indicates that the more recent the transition, the greater the level of upset and disruption to the young person.

² Now FETAC

Bereavement in their immediate family was clearly influential in three cases, Lorraine, Pádraig and Sheila. The last-named shares a 'comfortable, well-off home' with her parents and two brothers live at home'. A third brother committed suicide, and the family is contending with this. Sheila is socially strong and academically poor. She thinks school was 'okay' but she was always in trouble 'taking the rap for others'. At school she was identified as having ADD. On balance, it does not appear that her brother's suicide and its aftermath were the key influences in her leaving school. Rather, it would appear that a combination of ADD (however this is understood) and peer influence were more significant. Death in the extended family appears to have influenced Patricia's early school leaving. There are several reasons, but in her case it appears that the illness and death of her grandmother during the year she was studying for her Junior Certificate was important. Patricia sat the examination, but did not return to school. She is described as intelligent. She became a lone parent at seventeen.

One final case should also be mentioned, that of Lisa. While she quite enjoyed school, she left in 2nd year, because she 'couldn't cope'. She is described as 'very capable' and got a job after school. However, she was 'let go' and as a result, she is 'disappointed and has a battered self-image'. This is a disrupted transition to adulthood, an example of what Hannan and O'Riain referred to, and clearly their view that such disruptions are 'highly distressing' is borne out.

Overall, the case studies lend support to the views expressed in the literature regarding the influence on educational outcomes and early school leaving of disruptions to development or transition.

5.5 Mediating factors – the role of susceptibility and resilience

In Chapter 2, I identified the role of susceptibility and resilience in enhancing or alleviating a person's likelihood of leaving school early. I also raised the issue of multiplier effects. I will now examine the research findings, beginning with susceptibility.

5.5.1 Susceptibility

The first 'fundamental influence and multiplier' noted in Chapter 2 is poverty. Although there are exceptions like Sheila, the vast majority of subjects grew up (and now live) in homes with few financial resources. Including two whose

mothers are widows, forty of the fifty eight subjects live in households dependent on social welfare. This does not include Matthew, whose father is described as 'mysterious' and whose employment status is not known. Contending with limited resources is a matter of routine to many. In Wayne's case, the family is poor and 'it is not considered important to work'. Some subjects, perhaps as many as twenty per cent, live in significantly impoverished circumstances. One Observer comments that in the course of his work he has encountered 'a poverty that no words could describe'. The case studies include a number of example, such as Thomas and Derek, whose father is 'involved a lot with greyhounds and horses' and 'works intermittently...for people involved with animals'. His employment history is 'scattered'. The family 'functions at a very primitive level – basic human needs are neglected i.e. proper meals, washing, clothing and routine'. School 'meant nothing' to Derek.

A causal sequence is clear in Seán's case. His family lives on a small farm and is dependent on social welfare. His father is unemployed on a long-term basis and income from his sons is 'very important' to Seán's father. The latter is 'very authoritarian' and the children were 'expected to be productive from an early age'. Seán is described as 'subservient'. He left school in 3rd year, saying that he 'couldn't cope with the pressure'. Certainly, he had problems with schooling – he became obsessive about homework, 'doing it over and over'. However, the likelihood is that he was told to leave school by his father.

There is an identifiable cause for the family's poverty in some of the case histories. In Grace's case, it is her father's alcoholism. This is also the case with Martin. He is one of 11 children and 'sees himself as one of many in a home of limited resources'. However, he also 'feels cheated by these circumstances'. In these cases, it is difficult to establish which comes first, alcoholism or poverty.

Whatever its origins, and whether it is a direct cause of their early school leaving or a multiplier of other influences, there is no doubt that both poverty and impoverishment place great strain on families and undermine the well-being of the subjects. As the Observer in the south east points out, the young people want to have the same clothing and footwear as their peers, and these are often expensive. 'These are badges that their parents didn't have to wear to be accepted in their peer group' she comments, adding that this is 'a huge pressure'.

Indeed, she feels that the pressures are such that that some young people resort to petty theft in order to compete. Overall, the case that poverty is a fundamental influence and multiplier regarding early school leaving is supported by the research outcomes.

The second negative multiplier noted in 2.7.1 above the 'draw' from the labour market. The relationship between labour market demand and early school leaving was noted at. This is difficult to test with the present subjects as, being on a YOUTHREACH programme, by definition they have not been, or are not presently, successful in the labour market. Nonetheless, the influence of pragmatism and rational choice identified in the literature are apparent from the sample of subjects. The labour market's capacity to draw a young person from school appears to be inversely proportionate to the subject's success or interest in school. For example, Sinéad's main stated reason for leaving school was that she 'wanted to earn money'. She had no burning problems with school itself – it was 'okay but not interesting'. As already noted under poverty (above), some subjects experienced parental pressure to leave school for financial reasons, such as Ann-Marie and Seán. In both families, the ability to contribute financially is important. If a family needs money and if jobs are available, the likelihood is that short-term needs will outweigh any consideration of long-term benefit. This was the case with Yvonne, whom the school wanted to retain and who certainly has the capacity to complete secondary education, but who felt she needed to be contributing to the family income. In Dora's case, the desire to be financially independent of her family interacted with another influence – she didn't like teachers and felt 'picked on'.

The third set of multipliers identified in Chapter 2 comprehends worry, anxiety and fear. The research outcomes strongly support the literature in this regard and four themes emerge:

- fear of violence and, in turn, the level of violence encountered by the subjects;
- personal fears, including fear of failure;
- peer factors and fear of rejection;
- fear of the outside world or fear of the unknown

Violence is a routine fact of life for 45 per cent of the subjects of this study and a dominant factor for 25 per cent. In reflecting on these findings, the Observers distinguish between a 'clip around the ear' and serious violence. One comments that 'they would get "a box"'. Another adds that in some families it seems to be 'almost an accepted part of the family dynamics that you get slapped around a bit if you get on the wrong side of the father'. This is so commonplace that Observers doubt that the subjects would see it as violence. 'They would see that as the norm'. Violence is also attributed to frustration and inability to address and resolve issues arising between parent and child.

As regards the instances of extreme violence, this is associated with criminality in the immediate or extended family in a number of cases, for example Gemma, Martha and David. In a small number of cases it may arise from parental mental illness. In Kevin's case, his mother is dominant and violent. Otherwise, extreme violence is almost invariably linked with alcohol abuse in the family. In some instances this has now ceased. For example, Grace's father is alcoholic. In her own words, 'I had to keep out of Father's way when he was drunk'. She moved out of home. In Jason's case, violence is a family pattern – not only was his father violent, but so too is his mother's new partner. As for Margaret, she 'lives in fear' of violence and abuse. Away from her family, she is 'good with people' and when she goes away on residential trips she is 'transformed – the fear goes'. Violence is also seen to be inter-generational (for example, Bridget's family). As triangulation interviewee MS summarises, 'some of the most violent young men that we've had over the years... would have had quite a lot of physical abuse when they were growing up (and) they are...emulating that'. Joseph is a case in point. Finally, violence is also associated with neighbourhood and peer influences. In Dublin's inner city, the Observer reports that while violence is not necessarily a feature of all families, 'If you're living in the flats...there's a row every other night'. Another comments that the young people 'tend to comply' with 'the norms of whatever group they hang around in'. In her experience, many of the young people 'don't have a very extensive repertoire of behaviours'. There is 'an over-attribution of motive and under-estimation of context' so, 'if you think somebody is going to be a threat you deal with that quite aggressively'.

There are no comparable figures for the population at large, but the incidence of violence in the lives of the subjects appears high.

A second set of fears is identifiable, largely deriving from personal insecurity and low self-esteem, identity difficulties and fear of failure or exclusion. As an example of personal insecurity, Thomas 'feels very inadequate'. He is timid and fearful with authority. This derives from his family background. He also has a 'fear of being laughed at' and a 'fear of divulging'. For others such as Gerard and Margaret, there is fear of failure. In Martha's case, this is coupled with 'fear of not being liked'. Observers report that when faced with an opportunity, the subjects tend to 'pull out rather than risk failure'. One describes her experience:

The kids we have the most difficulty with are the ones who are so locked into fear - *I can't do it, it's too hard* - and they work themselves into such a frenzy of frustration and...high adrenaline levels, that they physically can't do it. They get so flustered they can't think. "*I'm stupid*". And then they say "*this is stupid, this is f-ing stupid, why are we f-ing having to do f-ing this*". So you're coming close to getting a strong physical reaction, throwing down the pen and storming out the door.

The third theme concerns peer factors and particularly fear of exclusion or of not belonging. For example, Martin is insecure with his peer group and Patricia is 'hesitant to express opinions, despite having them on most things'. They have, it is reported, 'a fear of not being able to be themselves... They have to go with the gang'. There is also a 'fear of not fitting in, fear of being outside of here, of not being tough enough to get by, not being smart enough to manage'.

The fourth theme concerns fear of the outside world and of the unknown. For example, Josephine is 'somewhat hostile to' and fearful of the wider community in her neighbourhood whom she regards as a 'gang of drug pushers'. She is also 'lonely in the peer group' despite being part of a clique and is 'hostile to outsiders'. One Observer argues that the subjects feel safe in their known places, but fear the unknown. In her experience, 'they want to live and work in their own area', not because they are proud of their neighbourhood, but because 'generations before them haven't moved outside the area'. It is also said that 'a lot of them wouldn't be seriously thinking of ever living anywhere else. There would be no question of going with a job'. However, another respondent doubts

that the young people perceive this as fear. She associates it with 'the tight community thing, group norms and sticking to the group'. It is suggested by interviewees that this may inhibit young people from travelling to second-level schooling outside their areas.

The fourth group of multiplier factors identified in Chapter 2 comprehends alcohol and drugs. It is clear from the research that separately and together alcohol and drugs are an enormous and problematic presence in the lives of the subjects. The Observers report that alcohol, as one Observer puts it, contributes to 'significant difficulties domestically and educationally, far more so than... petty crime or minor drug misuse'. In his view, it is 'the all pervading background influence'. His view finds support in the case studies. Two levels are evident. The first is that of the family ecology, and the role of alcohol and drugs in family functioning. The second is to do with the subjects' own personal set of behaviours and attitudes.

As regards the first of these, the Observers repeatedly describe how alcohol permeates many family lives and how the young people are inducted into a 'drink culture'. Commenting that she had seen babies being given their milk in gin bottles, one describes how the eldest child 'minds the younger one while the parents go out to the pub'. Another Observer adds that 'we have people under age here whose parents actually bring them to the pub and buy them drink... It's seen as almost a right within some families'. There is also heavy drinking in the home, including under-age drinking. It is claimed that some parents are 'really not capable... of taking on parental responsibilities' and we have seen examples of this elsewhere in this thesis. It is also argued that alcohol abuse is a major cause of unemployment, poverty, violence and unplanned pregnancies, and even that some families 'wouldn't think anything unusual about having all their money spent on it and not having food and so on'.

These views are reflected in the case studies. Moreover, the research findings support the view that these effects, in turn, influence the subjects' educational history. Martin is an example. His father's abuse of alcohol caused unemployment, poverty and other functional problems. These in turn led to Martin's school difficulties and early leaving. In many cases, alcohol abuse leads to violence. For example Caitriona's father was employed at one time, but was

injured in an accident, and 'squandered' the compensation award on drink. Poverty is a central issue for the family as well as violence. In Margaret's case, it is her mother who drinks heavily. There is violence in this family too. In many instances, both parents drink, for example in Jackie's family. There were beatings when she was young and 'the violence and criticism she experienced has left her unable to take direction'. In some cases, though certainly not all, this violence leads to marital breakdown. For example, Grace's father is described as alcoholic. 'Her mother was physically abused, the children suffered, there was little food care or space'. The abuse of alcohol and its impact on family functioning is the main cause of her leaving school.

Heavy consumption of alcohol and drugs does not necessarily involve such excesses. In many instances, the impact is of low intensity and manifests itself in effects such as inconsistent discipline. An Observer comments,

If there is a drink problem in the family, one day they get reprimanded for doing something where the following day they won't be reprimanded because the parent or parents are under the influence of drink. It's difficult for the young person to know what she is allowed or not allowed to do...

Other effects are also evident, for example in Jason's family. His father abused alcohol and was violent and his parents separated. Jason is very angry towards his father. In turn, he himself is a heavy hash user. He 'does one thing at a time and even finds it hard to concentrate on that'. It is acknowledged that peer and neighbourhood influences are also involved, but it appears that his father's alcoholism and violence are central to his own drug abuse and early school leaving. However, others are more resilient. For example, while members of Wayne's family are involved in drug dealing and crime, he is not, and is determined to 'climb above all that'. He is described as 'very responsible' and 'totally opposed to the use of drugs'. Annette is another example. Her father is alcoholic and violent. He is described as 'a tyrant in drink', though also 'a caring, loving/demonstrative man' when sober. She regards alcoholism as an illness and 'does not appear to be severely damaged as a result of family background'. Nor is this the main reason why she left school. She left because of the distance she had to travel. However, the effects of alcohol abuse, especially the consequent poverty, were also significant. Alan is also resilient. While his own family is

'normal', his uncles are 'on heroin and living nearby'. However, this seems to have steeled him. 'His own sense of the future is defined by the need to break away from (a possible future of) drug dependence'.

As to the subjects' own behaviours and attitudes, Observers see them replicating family patterns of alcohol abuse. In the south, they identify a 'the lack of moderation' and a sense that 'from a very early age you can go out and consume vast quantities' of alcohol for whatever reason'. Alcohol is described as 'a significant cause of a lot of mistakes' and 'the cause of the majority of teenage pregnancies'. While similar views are expressed in Dublin, the prevalence of other drugs than alcohol is also cited. Moreover, this is seen to be 'as big a problem in their (subjects') parents' generation'. Cannabis is the main such drug. However, heroin is also a factor, as in Alan's case. The misuse of prescription drugs is also cited as a serious problem.

A range of attitudes is evident towards alcohol and drugs among the subjects. Some are inexperienced, such as Emmet – 'drugs and theft (are) not part of his experience'. Others are fearful, hostile or reserved, such as Robert, who is 'afraid' of drugs, or Josephine. She 'doesn't even smoke', says the Observer, and is judgemental on crime – 'lock them up and throw away the key'. Yvonne is 'very anti-drugs'. Karl 'will stand by his mates through anything except drug-taking'. However, most regard alcohol as acceptable and important in their lives. There are those who also regard cannabis as acceptable, such as Caitriona, who believes it should be legalised. The subjects include cannabis users, for example Carol. There are also those who discriminate between drugs – George thinks that 'heroin is dangerous, hash and alcohol are okay'. A small number are more clearly anti-social. For example, in Graham's view drugs and crime are 'all okay – just don't get caught'. He himself had a mentor 'as regards stealing, drinking, drugs and joyriding'. Trevor tends to be anti-social, and empathises with criminals and drugs.

A fifth theme was identified in 2.7.1, the operation of multiple adversities and synergistic effects. The research findings support the literature in this area. Observers identify 'a cocktail...alcohol, violence perhaps, unemployment, poverty and anger'. The synergistic effects of multiple adversities are also clear. In Emmet's case, for example, the Observer comments that each adversity

'impacts on the other, creating a considerable burden'. All of the subjects have problems although in many cases the difficulties are single adversities, not compounded by others. Three key points emerge. The first is that some subjects live in extreme circumstances. They include Martha, David, Jackie and Samantha. Francis formerly lived in a very difficult environment, but has lived in care for ten of his fifteen years. These young people constitute up to one fifth of the sample, a far greater proportion than would occur in the population at large. Given that all subjects are early school leavers, it seems inarguable that multiple adversities are closely associated with and influential on early school leaving. The second point is that in a number of cases, such as Gemma, Wayne and Annette, individual resilience and other protective mechanisms appear to counteract the cocktail of multiple adversities. In our sample, these factors were not sufficient to keep the individual in school. Nonetheless, they have helped the young people remain more optimistic and less damaged than might have been expected. I will return to this aspect in the following section. The third point is that multiple adversities are not always mutually reinforcing. According to the Observer, Francis' considerable adversities do not multiply each other because 'he is able to discern in any given situation which adversity needs to be overcome, or at least confronted or recognised'.

I will now examine the findings of the research on the subject of resilience.

5.5.2 Resilience

In Chapter 2, I identified a number of variables identified in the literature regarding individual responses to risk factors or susceptibilities. Of course, the subjects are all early school leavers, and the resilience or protective factors in play are not sufficient to prevent that. Nonetheless, different levels of resilience are evident among the subjects. For example there is the variation in response to parental alcohol abuse and violence. If we take Jason and Annette, the former's engagement with life is still dominated by his father's alcoholism and the consequent collapse of his parents' marriage whereas the latter 'realises alcoholism is an illness' and 'does not appear to be severely damaged as a result of family background'. Such variations in response recur throughout the case studies. I will examine the outcomes against the variables identified in Chapter two.

The first of these concerns individual factors and personality features. A number of these emerge from the case studies, one of which is temperament. For example, Grace who 'has had a difficult road through life', is described as 'a very understanding person' and a 'good natured, caring, loyal friend'... who 'has coped very well'. Temperament is also the most apparent difference between Gemma and Jackie. Both live in difficult circumstances. And, while both also left school early, their experiences of school and YOUTHREACH, not to mention other ecosystems, were very different. Gemma, who is in care and whose background is the more chaotic, is described as 'an absolutely lovely...very easy going, outgoing girl'. She has 'no chip on her shoulder about her life', says the Observer, who also describes her as 'very philosophical' and accepting of life as it comes. In contrast, Jackie, while also 'friendly and outgoing' can be disruptive, moody, aggressive and obsessive, and 'sees herself very much in the victim role'. The second personality factor to emerge in the research is what triangulation interviewee MS terms 'persistence in the face of adversity'. As she puts it,

As well as having a natural aptitude towards something, you also need to have qualities of persistence and motivation and a type of ruthlessness to pursue whatever it is you are interested in at the expense of other things. And that can be quite difficult.

Others agree, one describing her conversation with Lorraine, regarding her aspiration to emulate her cousin 'who has her own car, an apartment and a job':

She kept saying. 'I wouldn't be able to stick at it'. It was the same for school. She couldn't stick at it...She said 'she's *fifteen years*... earning for that car and that apartment' and 'I couldn't do that'. And I asked why couldn't you do that - 'ah I couldn't stick at it'. So she doesn't have the perseverance. And I think that's the thing with a lot of our kids...it's the same with education... 'I wouldn't stick at it'... it's not in their culture, in their values.

Some Observers argue that the subjects are generally unclear as to the gap between their present skills and qualifications and their aspirations in terms of occupation and earning power. That said, perseverance and motivation are evident in the case studies of Ann-Marie, Wayne and Alan. In Ann-Marie and Alan's case, their strong interest in sport (football and boxing respectively) seems to be an important factor. Alan is slightly different. He is personally

motivated and determined, and has channelled this into keep-fit and voluntary work. In these areas, mentors are important, and I will return to this topic below.

Finally, family and/or community support, culture or strength can engender perseverance. In this regard, Francis is a Traveller and has grown up in extremely difficult family circumstances. He has come to terms with these, and among his strong points, the Observer lists 'perseverance, resilience (and) positive attitude'. He is described as a 'forward-looker and a good planner'. He has a strong interest in his family and the support of social workers.

The second variable is family cohesion, parental warmth and absence of discord. The research findings show the following:

- Family cohesion is evident in two out of five cases. In several cases, the cohesion relates to recent family arrangements – for example in Karen's case it does not include her father;
- Parental warmth and affection is evident in three out of five cases. However, it emanates from one parent only, principally the mother, in a quarter of these;
- Absence of (family) discord is found in just under half of all cases;
- There is little consistency in the outcomes – some individuals combine positive and negative answers. For example, in Gemma's case, there is no family cohesion but there is affection. That said, there is also discord.

The outcomes are ambiguous. For example, a relatively benign family ecology, in which there was family cohesion, parental warmth and affection and an absence of discord, did not protect Robert from early school leaving. In his case, his temperament outweighed these protective factors. Much the same is true of Dora, who also grew up in a large family characterised by cohesion, parental warmth and interest and absence of discord and whose parents 'seem to be encouraging...and to want what's best' for their children. There are other examples in the case studies of young people who have some or all of these protections, but who still left school, for example Sinéad, Beth, Charlie, and Lorraine. Karl 'knows that his parents care for him and his brothers look out for him'. Anita 'was the special child' and Dean was 'smothered and adored'. In most of these cases, their disenchantment with school outweighed family

protective factors. In Aoife's case, over-protective parents are themselves part of the problem. She was 'showered with affection, happy atmosphere, comfortable, good holiday trips and material luxuries'. But she is also a slow learner, who was 'very difficult all along' in school. Her early leaving was a mutual decision between school and her. In many cases, some or all these protective factors are missing, for example with Martha, David, Matthew and Wayne, although some personal temperamental factor has protected the last named from his ecological adversities. Family warmth has not protected Graham who sees himself as an outlaw. However, while family cohesion, warmth and absence of discord may not have been sufficient to keep the young people in school, they appear to have had a beneficial impact in other areas of the subjects' lives. They present as more open and trusting. The beneficial effects of support from the extended family also emerge in the research.

The third protective factor identified in the literature comprehends positive expectations, hope and optimism about the future. I have already discussed the impact of low expectations evident in the case studies. One Observer recounts how she has met 'many parents' who say of their child 'ah he's very slow at school, I have to take him out, he can't keep up'. This, she adds, is said in the presence of the young person. She asks, 'what is the child led to believe only that he *is* slow or he is under-achieving?' Yet, those with pessimistic outlooks represent a minority of the subjects. Notwithstanding their pessimism regarding schooling, three out of four have generally positive expectations of education, seeing it as a means to get a better job, a trade, to 'get on' in life, or further education. For example, while Ann-Marie was 'uninterested' in school, she expects to be trained and steered towards a job by YOUTHREACH. She also expects to find a job. Three out of four also expect to get employment. In general, though not in all cases, this is in low-skilled work. For example, Laura has no expectations of education, nor that it is the path to a 'better' way of living – rather, she believes this will be accomplished by hard work. Seán expects to find work in manual or semi-skilled work (involving hands) and this is a common expectation in family and community. As many as two out of three families are similarly positive. Some have mixed positions. For example, Carol is optimistic about finding work, but is 'fairly hopeless' about her position in

society. Gerard has high expectations of himself, yet has 'put the future on hold'. Robert is both pessimistic and arrogant. Jackie is herself generally positive, but her background and personal susceptibilities override. In a number of instances, the young person's own optimism overrides negative family expectations or conditions. For example, Wayne has high expectations of himself, fuelled by his interest in boxing and the support of a mentor, while his family have low, or no, expectations, being involved in crime and theft. Gemma comes from an area of high unemployment and is 'surprised by the idea of her getting a job'. But she is otherwise optimistic. Some subjects have high expectations, such as Annette, Pádraig, Dean, Katie, Trevor, Alan and Rory. Francis believes that 'any course is possible if you study, practice and train repetitively'. Glenn 'sees himself as always working and doing well like his parents'. His parents and siblings are already working full-time. However, some expectations are unrealistic, for example Carol's, Aoife's and Darren's. He wants to attend college after YOUTHREACH, and to become 'an actor, doctor, nurse, talk-show host'.

The fourth protective factor cited in the literature review in Chapter 2 is the beneficial effect of external support systems and in particular of mentors. In this regard, three key findings emerge from the research. The first is that two subjects out of three had no experience of a mentor up to the age of 15. Family members acted as mentors for a quarter of subjects and a teacher or care worker in 7 per cent of cases. A club leader acted as mentor in only two cases. A mentor is mentioned as a negative influence in one instance (Graham's) 'as regards stealing, drinking, drugs and joy riding'. In one Observer's view, if there had been a mentor or key worker in the school, 'it would have kept them there'. The benefits are clear from Wayne's case. He 'sees his family as being on the edge of society and wants to get away from that'. Wayne is a member of a boxing club and has trained in Dublin and abroad. 'The person in charge of the boxing club has taken a great interest' in him and has 'given him an aim in life'. He now has 'an interest in achieving high standards in sport and in learning'. He also 'thinks it is important to be somebody and is willing to work hard to achieve that'. Wayne 'does not want to get involved in crime and...is totally opposed to the use of drugs'. He wants to get a good job 'preferably in the field of sport'. The mentoring by the leader of the boxing club was too late to keep Wayne in school,

but it ameliorated other negative effects, and has been extremely important in helping him establish a goal in life.

The second is that the extended family often provides a support system that encourages and reinforces the child's coping. This is as might be expected from the description of extended family functioning in 2.5.2 and 5.3.2 above. A family member acted as a mentor in a quarter of all cases. All possible combinations occur in the case studies, from Josephine and Carol's 'older sister' to Patricia's late 'Nanny' (grandmother). The latter was 'very important to her – like a second mother'. For Zuni, it is her mother. Bridget 'talks a lot about her Auntie – likes the fact that she is working'. In Emmet's case, 'his older siblings seem to have adopted this role' as he is the youngest. For Jackie it was her late grandfather, with whom she spent a lot of time. 'She is now friendly with a 50-year old separated man in the town and confides in him'. The Observer believes the relationship to be platonic.

The third is that the subjects appear to have had little experience of clubs, but where they do, their effect is generally beneficial. Less than one third of the subjects are presently members of a club, and half have never been. The Observers endorse these findings. According to one Observer, 'when they opt out of one, they opt out of everything... even a youth club'. The benefits of having been in a club are evident from the case studies. Pádraig was a member of a rugby club. It promoted disciplined participation and a sense of belonging. In Glenn's case, club membership played a positive part in his assimilation into YOUTHREACH. Positive effects are noted for others, such as Ann-Marie, Laura, Alan, and Aoife, and also for those who were formerly club members, such as Lisa, who 'learned to be part of a team' and Rory, whose membership of a soccer club 'has kept him out of trouble'. Being a member of a club appears to have been helpful to Gemma in dealing with her chaotic background. Amongst those who have left clubs or have never joined, a number of reasons recur – a lack of facilities, a club not being part of a local tradition and their unwillingness to get involved. In a number of instances, the Observers also comment on how the subject might have benefited. For example Seán 'missed out on a lot of social interaction and the capacity to develop relationships'. It is also acknowledged

that other factors can override the benefits of club membership. For example, Joseph was a member of a young Travellers club, but was expelled for bullying.

The impact of geographical factors is the final multiplier noted in Chapter 2. Two general points are noted there, firstly that rural young people seem more successful than urban counterparts and secondly that problems faced by young people in rural areas are often more extreme, including issues of access. As regards the first of these, I have already noted positive associations for rural environments elsewhere in this thesis, for example in play and family structure. The Observers broadly support the view that young people in rural areas are more rounded than urban counterparts and that a rural background functions as a protective mechanism. Young people from rural backgrounds are seen to have a more positive outlook on their ability to learn. There is also a stronger work ethic and sense of usefulness. One Observer suggests that 'those from the country seem to be that bit more balanced' and 'handy'. She attributes this to having tasks to do from childhood. Aidan is an example. He left school because he was making no progress and 'didn't take school seriously'. But he's useful, good with animals (horses) and regards work as the 'forepoint in life'. He is also described as 'aware of his problems with literacy', and 'very knowledgeable'. A rural background also offers greater availability of mentoring and general supports, for example that offered by family GAA connections to Pádraig. However, being from the country is not always protective. Indeed, it is quite the opposite for Dora. She is aware of her likely future living in the country and she does not like the prospect to such a degree that it is itself an adversity for her. In this case, and others such as Lisa, being from a rural background is beneficial in terms of social development but not schooling.

Are problems faced by young people in rural areas more extreme? The case studies contain examples of rural isolation, urban and rural poverty, lack of appropriate transport and lack of mobility. For example, Martha's extended family lives in rural isolation. It is unclear whether the isolation is causal in her family's manifold dysfunctions or vice versa but the rural environment has not protected her. Indeed, the isolation compounds adversity. However, she too is resilient. She has ambitions to escape this background and cycles a considerable distance each day in order to get away. Annette's is another case where a

geographical effect can be seen. She comes from a family of 15. She is a highly intelligent young woman and has just taken a number of subjects in the Leaving Certificate. She is described as 'well regarded, highly respected, and admired – a delightful girl – well able to cope'. The family home was overcrowded and her mother struggled to cope. Her father is alcoholic and does not live with the family. Annette 'loved primary school and enjoys learning'. She had 'no real difficulty with school itself', nor with the transition to second level, but secondary school was 26 miles from her home, and she was 'missing time, getting wet (and) ill'. While Annette dealt with other ecological difficulties, it seems that the key to her early school leaving was to do with a combination of distance (from school and from bus route) and poverty.

5.6 Summary

In this Chapter, I have examined the outcomes of the research regarding the matrix of influences associated with early school leaving. Its operation is clear. There are individuals with learning problems. Ecological and developmental factors are represented. There is evidence of both vulnerability and resilience. Each element of the matrix is found among the subjects, often in abundance. Several overarching general influences are apparent, the most important of which is social class. The occurrence of morbid factors such as paternal unemployment and the abuse of alcohol and drugs appears high with linked levels of casual and sometimes extreme violence. As against that, no element of the matrix is universally present. For example, while violence is routine in 45 per cent of families, in many there is none. This pattern holds through the matrix of influences. Furthermore, the research outcomes reveal unexpected findings, for example to do with gender effects, self-esteem and the lack of mentoring. It is also true that many of the subjects lead largely unremarkable lives and their early school leaving is often triggered by individual and contingent factors. These include specific events, such as bereavement, a difficult or unpleasant interaction with a teacher, learning difficulties and peer influences.

In the next Chapter I will review these findings and draw conclusions.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduce early school leaving in Ireland and explain why it is seen to be problematic. In doing so, I ask why this is and what are the forces that drive early school leaving. Many authors have argued that research into early school leaving in Ireland has generally been epidemiological in outlook and, as a result, explanations for early school leaving have largely focused on the action and interaction of a range of risk factors and causal processes. These are often described as a matrix of influences. In Chapter 2, I identify, gather and group these processes and influences in a general framework or matrix consisting of four parts: given (individual) factors, contextual (ecological) factors, developmental factors and mediating factors. The research sets out to test this explanatory framework towards addressing two key questions:

- why does early school leaving exist in general and
- why does an individual child leave school early?

This is accomplished through a combination of case study observations and interviews, including triangulation interviews, as described in Chapter 3. The outcomes of this research are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The case study observations present individual and unique personal histories, encompassing many different contexts, situations and experiences. The purpose of this final Chapter is to identify and discuss the most salient of these outcomes, towards addressing the two key questions raised above. I will first consider whether the matrix of influences identified in the literature is endorsed as a convincing framework to explain early school leaving in general. I will then consider whether the matrix of influences explains why an individual child might leave school early. Finally, I will discuss the implications of these outcomes for educational policy and provision.

6.2 Does the research vindicate the idea of a matrix of influences to explain early school leaving?

As we read in Chapter 2, researchers into the phenomenon of early school leaving have long identified the presence of a range of 'risk factors' and the

action of a broad matrix of influences and processes. And certainly the case studies reveal examples of each element of the matrix as described in earlier chapters. Furthermore, every case study shows at least one identified influence at work. However, there is considerable variation. Certain factors feature strongly, for example, family functioning and peer group influences, and these appear to be closely involved in the process of early school leaving, either in predisposing or influencing a child to leave school. Other influences occur less frequently, have a less definable impact or are less significant in their effect than other accompanying factors that multiply their impact. In a number of instances, the research does not find evidence to support the inclusion of certain influences or processes, for example certain family structural factors. As against that, a number of other factors are revealed to be of greater significance than previously thought. The research also suggests a number of new lines of inquiry. I will now examine the matrix elements that are most clearly vindicated by the research.

6.2.1 Which elements of the matrix of reported influences does the research vindicate?

When setting out the general framework for the matrix in Chapter 2, I listed four categories: given (individual) factors, ecological factors, developmental factors and finally mediating factors (susceptibility and resilience). The elements that are confirmed in those categories will be considered below. However, before doing so we must acknowledge the presence and effect of meta-influences whose operation is evident in the research outcomes, in particular social class and poverty. Whereas these are proposed as aspects of the matrix in Chapter 2 – social class as a contextual factor and poverty as a multiplier – they emerge from the research as overarching, pervasive influences. The vast majority of subjects hail from the working class and small farmer background long associated with early school leaving in Ireland. The contrast between Yvonne and Aoife's stories encapsulates the degree to which a family's economic circumstances, social capital and values set can determine a young person's future. Had the former enjoyed the same levels of support, expectation and advocacy from her family as the latter, it is unlikely that she would have figured in the present research as a

pregnant early school leaver*. Poverty recurs throughout as a cause of early school leaving and also as a multiplier and risk factor. Reliance on social welfare is predominant and over half the fathers are long-term unemployed. If we include those whose status is unknown, this figure rises to two out of three. Indeed, some subjects live in very distressing circumstances. It also appears that poverty and/or impoverishment, however they have come about, are closely implicated in the apparent negative effects of ethnicity and family structure cited in some research literature. Of course, there are exceptions: Gerard, Aoife, Sheila and Dean are from relatively well-to-do families. Nonetheless, both social class and poverty are highly significant general influences and Irish education emerges as socially reproductive from the present research, as indeed it does from much other Irish-based research.

The first of the general categories making up the matrix is given or individual factors, including gender, intelligence, special education/learning needs and ethnicity. Each of these can be seen at work in the research outcomes. While a broad spectrum of ability is evident in the case studies and some subjects are reported to be highly intelligent there is a high incidence of special education needs. A clear causal link between low ability and/or special education needs and early school leaving is evident in some cases, such as Aoife's. However, psychometric assessment of the subjects was not part of the present research and estimated incidence is based on the observations that form the basis for the case studies. The Observers argue that in the absence of universal mechanisms for identification and assessment in schools it is not possible to establish the general incidence of special education needs amongst early school leavers on any scientific basis. However, they suspect the incidence to be relatively high and the evidence of the case studies supports this.

Two effects are suggested by the research outcomes. The first is that those with learning difficulties are more likely to encounter problems with school functioning – many of the subjects detach, and are detached, from schooling for what are seen to be disciplinary reasons but which in fact have their roots in

* Similar outcomes are evident in the United Kingdom, where, according to Minister of State for School Standards David Miliband, 'a socio-economic attainment gap' is 'evident in children as young as 22 months' (DfES Teachers Magazine, September 2002).

learning difficulties of one kind or another. The second is that those encountering problems with school functioning may appear (incorrectly) to have special education needs or assess as of low intelligence. Because of longstanding disruptive behaviour or poor attendance, some young people under-perform significantly in school or in psychometric tests. They appear to have greater education needs than in fact they have, and are treated as slow learners as a result. It is likely that this increases their frustration and detachment.

Notwithstanding provisions of the Education Act (1998) and the establishment of the National Educational Psychological Service in 1999, mechanisms for assessment and early identification of special education needs and other learning difficulties are not universally available in Irish education. Indeed, reference in the present research to assessed low IQ and special education needs of one kind or another (for example ADHD) occurs only in the cases of young people from families with substantial levels of financial or social capital (for example Aoife and Sheila). Here too, social selection can be seen to be at work.

The morbid effect of a special education need or specific learning disability on the child's self-perception is also clear. S/he is likely to perceive herself as 'thick', as having no place in the school's value system, and is therefore likely to leave early. This is frequently paralleled by lowered expectations of the child in the family, and a diminished sense of the value to be gained from persisting in education. While the Observers generally accept that many schools and teachers invest time and energy in the subjects, an unwillingness to do so beyond quite specific boundaries is also clear, especially if the subject presents as disruptive. Whether or not other factors, such as personal or class bias might also be at work is a matter of conjecture. As already established in the literature, the research confirms that school structural arrangements for different ability levels such as streaming have a negative effect on early school leaving.

So, while the research confirms a strong general association between low IQ, specific learning difficulties and special educational needs and early school leaving, it also indicates that it is not the low IQ or special educational need that causes the individual child to leave early. Rather it is a combination of personal and ecological consequences, multiplier influences, diminished self-esteem, school and systematic failures and social reproduction.

The second general category is contextual factors. These include the family, the peer group, the school and the neighbourhood. While the literature suggests that both structural and functioning aspects are significant, the research outcomes indicate that *of themselves* structures are considerably less important than functional aspects. For example, family structure, such as a one-parent family, does not appear to be significant. Rather, it is the associated functional factors, such as poverty consequent on single parent family status, that are likely to either predispose the subject to, or cause, early school leaving.

It is clear that family functioning is highly influential and in many cases directly causal. Disruptions such as parental separation or bereavement are especially significant. Although most of the subjects' parents are married, there is a high incidence of family instability and separation. In a number of instances the process of parental separation demonstrably affected the subject's school participation and can be cited as a direct cause of her/his early school leaving. It is also clear that bereavement influences school participation and may, in the absence of (and sometimes even despite) external supports and compensatory mechanisms, subsequently precipitate the subject's leaving school.

If disruptions precipitate early school leaving, other family functional factors are likely to predispose the young person to leave early. Most significant amongst these are paternal unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, intra-family violence, poverty and low levels of social and cultural capital. As already noted above, poverty is a key factor, whether pre-existing or a consequence of other family functional factors such as drugs or alcohol. It is intricately linked with all the foregoing, adversely affecting participation in school and multiplying the effect of other influences. There are individual instances of parental pragmatism regarding money and consequent pressure on the child to leave – the rational choice theory is supported in these cases. Poverty is intimately involved in early school leaving. As regards social and cultural capital, three out of five families are in some form of difficulty. There are no support networks other than the extended family, though in a number of cases this is notably beneficial. The positive contribution of grandparents was emphatically stated. What value is placed on education is largely utilitarian and in five cases out of six parents offered little or no resistance to the young person leaving school early. Indeed

they offered active support in one case in six. The parents' own limited schooling is significant in this, as is lack of knowledge of the education system and low expectations of their children's education. Families do not speak the language of the school and there are few reading materials in the home. It is even suggested that this extends to the area of play. For example, we recall interviewees commenting that subjects were not familiar with Humpty Dumpty.

The findings are equally clear regarding the school as an ecosystem. School factors are central to the subject's leaving school in seven cases out of ten. As with the family, structural factors predispose and functional factors precipitate. The transition from primary to post-primary schooling and a different class organisation and timetable structure caused problems for forty per cent of the subjects. Significantly, however, it appears that little was done to cushion this change for those vulnerable to transition difficulties. In general, they were left to their own devices. Overall, the apparent effects of structural factors may be masking the effects of other factors. As to functional aspects, the school's disciplinary climate is a major factor, with just under two subjects out of five recording disruptive behaviour. However, disruption and detachment are closely linked. The disruption is extreme in a small number of cases. Someone like Joseph presents attitudes and behaviours that are beyond a school's competence. But in many instances the relationship between young person and school breaks down consequent on a particular incident or over time and the school is unable or unwilling to retrieve it. Four patterns of exclusion are identified in the research, expulsion, suspension, 'polite requests' and indifference.

This disciplinary issue is closely connected to a wider question, of how the school deals with young people who are, for any of myriad reasons, outside its norms. Schools appear to operate within (and expect) clear learning and behavioural norms. Those outside these norms are likely to leave school, either drifting away or leaving precipitously, unless appropriate supports are in place. As we have already seen with special education needs, these supports are more likely to arise from within family resources than from school responses. Ironically, as we have seen, where such arrangements *are* set in place, the outcomes can be equally morbid, with streaming and withdrawal for one-to-one remedial work being interpreted by many young people as a 'relegation' process.

The research also indicates that the organisation of learning in schools creates difficulties for young people whose learning style, particular capacities or interests are not accommodated. That so many of the subjects are experiential or active learners is also significant. Furthermore, the research shows that many early school leavers show wide variations across their own skills and capacities and to a greater extent than is allowed for in the curricular organisation of schools. Of itself, this is likely to lead to considerable personal frustration.

The stark difference between the learning values of the young people and those of the schools they attend is certainly a significant influence. Indeed, for some of the subjects of this study it was itself causal in their early school leaving. The young people emerge as pragmatic and utilitarian learners, interested in learning where they see the point of doing so but unwilling to commit to an activity unless it is (to their eyes) purposeful. This works its way into much of their experience. Throughout the case studies we find the subjects disengaging from a system which (in their view) did not respect them or make adequate accommodation for their particular needs or situation. In many homes, the benefits of continuing in schooling are measured against the gains to be made by leaving. Yet, many have a high regard for their own usefulness, intelligence and employability and in non-school contexts they learn well. In short, while they may be alienated from schooling, they are not alienated from learning.

Teachers are central actors in these processes and the research finds a pervasive animus between the subjects and their former teachers. Teachers represent the education system and the school to the young people, and they are largely responsible for the organisation and presentation of learning. Notwithstanding complimentary comments by the Observers on teachers and teaching in school, there is little evidence of flexibility, commitment or problem-solving. The research also finds linguistic discontinuity between home and school. There is also a suggestion of cultural bias on the part of individual teachers though it is not possible to estimate how widespread this might be. But certainly, the subjects of this research who are of minority ethnic origin are deeply dissatisfied with their school experience. Overall, a combination of generalised disinterest and disengagement, low expectations and intolerance of exceptions by teachers is apparent. Hostility from particular teachers, and from schools, towards

individuals (and sometimes this is not without provocation) is also identifiable. As regards the neighbourhood and community it appears that mediating factors are at work at this neighbourhood/community level. Areas that are similar in socio-economic terms have quite different perceptions and expectations. In turn, this influences how the young person perceives his or her prospects. In this regard, neighbourhood factors influence early school leaving and, as expressed through peer attitudes and influences, may cause it.

Developmental factors make up the third general category in the matrix. Certain of these, such as difficulties with the transition from primary to post-primary school are significant in prompting early school leaving. Also, many of the subjects are generally law-abiding risk-taking, for example with drugs and alcohol, is much in evidence and can affect behaviour to the extent that schooling is compromised. This is a general influence for all *and* a cause of early school leaving for some. Among the risk-taking behaviours, early sexual activity is also in evidence, though by no means universal amongst the subjects. It is frequently associated with alcohol abuse. When it results in pregnancy, it is likely to precipitate early school leaving unless the young parent and her/his family possess significant levels of financial and social capital.

Finally, as regards mediating factors, in many cases different elements combine to multiply each other's impact on the individual. Indeed, it is frequently difficult to distinguish between underlying difficulties and multipliers. Poverty occurs as both. The ubiquity and abuse of alcohol and drugs is highly significant. Some subjects live in extreme circumstances in which mere survival clearly takes precedence over school completion. Yet some are sufficiently resilient, of themselves or by virtue of a range of positive influencers such as family warmth, positive expectations or external supports, to resist these pressures. The benefits of mentoring, whether outside the family or in an extended family context, are emphatically endorsed in the case studies and it is significant (to their early school leaving) that two subjects out of three had no experience of a mentor up to the age of fifteen years. Females are 2.5 times more likely than males to have experience of a mentor, a finding that is unexplained by the research. It may be that the young females are more embedded in a relationship network than males (see 6.2.3 below). It is a finding that warrants further study.

6.2.2 Many early school leavers have few problems

So far I have reflected on those aspects of the matrix that appear strongly influential or directly causal in early school. However, no element of the matrix occurs in every case, even social class. Indeed, one of the fascinating aspects of the case studies is the variation evident across the different elements. So, for example, while 40 per cent of subjects have negative perceptions of their intelligence, 20 per cent regard themselves as intelligent and over 70 per cent see themselves as 'useful'. Indeed, it is clear that some subjects are highly intelligent and demonstrate no learning difficulties. It is reported of a number that they could and should be attending third-level education. While three in every five subjects have negative feelings about family and community, one in four is positive, happy and feels s/he belongs. Family cohesion is evident in two out of five cases and family warmth in three out of five. In some cases the family support is very strong, even excessive. Over half the subjects experienced play as children. The findings are strongly positive regarding four out of five subjects on friendship. Twenty one per cent show a 'continuous' (that is, largely uncomplicated) pattern of adolescent development. While factors associated with ethnicity may predispose to early school leaving, Traveller culture is also protective in more general terms. Personal resilience and external supports such as mentoring can override adverse ecological influences, and so on.

These findings challenge the assumption that all early school leavers are themselves problematic or come from difficult backgrounds. The research also challenges assumptions about adolescent turmoil amongst early school leavers. It is true that more than one in three subjects has had a tumultuous pattern of development, that these are predominantly male, that one in five think that crime is acceptable, and there is a general acceptance of cannabis and alcohol use. That 60 per cent of subjects display anger (in general or against family members or authority) is certainly significant. However, over half have not been involved in anti-social activity, three out of five are opposed to crime and the use of drugs, and in terms of social responsibility almost two in five are 'very responsible'. While there is a general agreement that sexualisation takes place early for many early school leavers, it is not causal in itself unless pregnancy results, in which case it usually is. In sum, adolescence is not itself causal, but a factor.

Much the same is true of many other aspects of the matrix, for example ethnicity. The research indicates that Traveller culture encourages young men in particular to leave school and become active in the Traveller economy – there are several examples of this amongst the case studies. On the other hand, the research also shows that membership of an ethnic minority is protective in many respects. The clear implication of the research outcomes is that it is not the ethnicity that causes the early school leaving, it is a combination of culture, poverty and alcoholism and their myriad consequences.

With regard to neighbourhood influences, the research confirms that while early school leaving is spatially pervasive the majority of subjects hail from areas of concentrated disadvantage. A local authority housing effect is found. There are also cases of rural isolation and extreme poverty. However, a communal resilience and a sense of personal association, loyalty and pride are also in play in some of the areas the young people come from. The communities in these neighbourhoods show a greater sense of optimism and high expectation both of education and of prospective employment. This communal optimism, or its counterpart of pessimism/fatalism, does not apply consistently.

These outcomes are evident across the matrix. They indicate the need for caution regarding our use of the matrix of influences and its largely pathological perspective.

6.2.3 Unexpected findings and new lines of enquiry

In addition to the foregoing, the research also throws new light on certain aspects of the matrix of influences and suggests new lines of enquiry. The most significant of these are to do with gender, peer influences, belonging, the importance of structure, self-esteem and mentoring. As regards gender, male and female early school leavers have had significantly different experiences in school, and these go some way to explaining why twice as many males leave school early. The females observed in this study are twice as likely as males to dislike teachers or to feel picked on by teachers. But males are twice as likely to dislike school or to find that the system does not suit them. While no differences are apparent regarding discipline or expulsion, schools are more likely to wish to retain females and to agree with the decision to leave by males. Similarly,

females are 2.5 times more likely to have experience of a mentor. Females are more likely to regard themselves both as 'not intelligent' and as 'intelligent', to favour continuing in education and to prioritise recreation and socialising. They are more optimistic about the outcomes of training, but males are more optimistic about employment. In both cases, projected occupations are stereotypical. Females have a stronger sense of family and family ties and higher reported levels of social responsibility. Males have a lower sense of self in their family setting. From these outcomes it appears that young females

- are more embedded in a relationship network
- relate to their school on personal and possibly emotional terms whereas young males relate to the school as an institution. If this is sustained, females are more vulnerable to poor teacher-pupil interaction, whereas young males are more vulnerable to institutional factors.
- are more positively regarded than males in family and school and
- are more likely to achieve, to be socially responsible.

Replication of these outcomes across the education system in Ireland would have significant implications for the plethora of school completion programmes and related initiatives available in schools. In particular, approaches and activities should be tailored more closely to how the young people perceive their school, rather than how their school perceives the young people.

Turning to peer influences, it is clear from the research outcomes that peers are very important to the young people, and are generally underestimated as a both general and individual influence in early school leaving. It is true that more than one in six of subjects have difficulties regarding friendship, but this is not likely to be different to the general run of adolescents. The majority have no difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships, however limited the circle or narrow the range of shared interests. They are in transition to adulthood, and the influence of the peer group waxes as that of the family wanes. With a limited pool of friends and a narrow range of recreational activities, the subjects' peers are largely drawn from their immediate environment. Friendships are revealed to be intense and often fraught. Loyalty to the peer group and peer norms is a priority. Status in the peer group is of great importance. As is noted in Chapter 5, there are 'high

levels of conformity and compliance within the group'. It is therefore not surprising to find clear evidence in the case studies that the peer group influences young people to leave school. This being the case, once again, in addition to school-based measures, school completion measures should address young people in their out-of-school contexts, as these are where peer influences are largely unmediated by adult supervision or inputs.

The research also finds that *belonging* is extremely important to the young people. Research published by the OECD as this final chapter is being written establishes that Irish school students score higher than those in most other countries on belonging – that is, they feel they 'belong' in their schools (OECD, 2003). This is not the case with the early school leavers observed in this research, of whom quite the opposite is true. This need to belong threads its way through the case studies and transcends the school to comprehend family and peer group contexts and processes. Belonging is not simply a matter of being acknowledged. It also involves relationship, acceptance, and having a place in the ecosystem. It is about being valued and heard, about knowing one matters and that one has a place in the greater scheme of things. It is to do with process as much as status, that is about how families, schools and peer groups function. It also transcends the individual child, to comprehend the validation and accommodation of his/her value system, skills and capacities. And of course, a young person may 'belong' in one context, but not in another – hence the importance of managing transitions, for example from primary school to post-primary. Hence also the significance of support mechanisms, mediation, mentoring and networks as well as non-academic and extra-curricular activities. It is important to accustom the young person to the new school arrangements, but the priority is to accustom the school to the young person so that s/he feels comfortable there and feels s/he belongs. The need to belong also suggests that greater importance be given in schools to the establishment of self-sustaining groups. It is one of many ironies of Irish education that, although the class is the fundamental unit of the school, little emphasis is given to training teachers in group work skills.

The research also pinpoints the importance of *structure* in the lives of the young people. As Observers commented, the YOUTHREACH Centre is often the first place where they have encountered consistency and structure. In many homes,

discipline is inconsistent and no clear value set is transmitted. But we also recall interviewees commenting that teachers and instructors who adopt a consistent and structured approach are more likely to succeed with the young people under observation. Similarly, we heard of the decline in religious practice in their families and communities, but the maintenance of certain religious rites of passage, less because of vestigial religious belief and more because they gave structure and stability at critical life transitions. The findings endorse the views of the European Commission (2000a:5) when setting out the case for a new form of guidance practice:

Young people (in Europe) have more choice and more freedom than at any time in human history. But there is also less structure and less certainty – less guidance, less orientation and less support in making the transition to adulthood'. Young people appreciate their freedom and choice, but they also want, or need, a framework that offers support and guidance.

A further unexpected outcome of the research is to do with identity and self-esteem. It is true that one in every five subjects has difficulties in these regards. But the majority do not. And some are very sure of themselves indeed, even where this is perverse, as with Graham, who sees himself as an outlaw. Sixty per cent of the subjects have positive or high self-esteem. Many have high self-esteem regarding employment and training, but low self-esteem regarding education and schooling. Those who attended 'slow classes' or received remedial teaching are very likely to have negative perceptions of their intelligence. However, the subjects are markedly more positive regarding specific areas of interest or ability such as practical skills. Over 70 per cent see themselves as 'useful' to a greater or lesser degree and over half are optimistic about their ability to learn. If they excel at things their peers respect and value their self-esteem soars. Success in non-academic activities improves self-esteem as does peer approval of physical appearance. This is not to suggest that early school leavers are entirely positive in these regards. Many have grave doubts about their abilities and their appearance and a deep unease at having to participate in any activity that might expose their self-perceived weaknesses to scrutiny.

There is a general belief that early school leavers have low self-esteem and identity difficulties. Considerable energy is expended on addressing these

perceived deficits. But it seems that for much of their time in school the subjects were asked on a daily basis to do things they were not good at and/or did not value and were largely denied opportunities to participate in activities they value and were good at. Schooling might be a more mutually satisfactory experience, and their self-esteem regarding education higher, if these were reversed.

Finally, throughout this chapter I have noted that on one hand few of the subjects had experience of mentoring and on the other the case studies and the Observers emphasise its effectiveness in helping young people integrate, develop a sense of perspective and negotiate challenges. Mentoring and other positive family and community influences ameliorate school and other factors but cannot guarantee school completion if adversities are of sufficient gravity. However, as an approach it has much to recommend it in school settings, especially as part of a school completion programme. Such approaches cannot be introduced in isolation from and without reference to the significant experience and opportunities for mentoring that exist in community settings and youth groups working with young people outside of school hours (European Commission, 2000b).

I will now turn to the two fundamental questions posed at the outset of this study.

6.3 Does the matrix explain why early school leaving exists in general?

The first of these questions was ‘why does early school leaving exist in general?’ Does the matrix help answer this question?

It does. When we test the matrix against the case studies, we find that certain powerful factors emerge, as predicted. The matrix offers us a framework in which to identify and gather the major forces that are at work in the lives of the subjects, their families and the schools they attend. It reminds us of the range of possible factors that may be in play. Social reproduction, poverty and malfunctions in major contexts like family, school and peer group represent the tectonic forces that adversely affect the participation of young people in school and prompt early school leaving. The matrix also identifies the key multipliers that exacerbate the effects of other factors and multiply their impact. Yet, there are many variations in the research outcomes. No influence has universal

application. And when we examine the individual case studies, in many aspects we find that as many do not apply as do. With few exceptions, specifically social class, poverty and learning difficulties of various kinds, the matrix is revealed to be as unreliable as it is reliable. It helps explain early school leaving in broad brushstrokes. And in those broad brushstrokes we can see why, in general, children leave school early. On the other hand, while no case study is without one or more element of the matrix, no subject shows all, and each shows a combination of factors unique to him or her. So, while the matrix is useful as an explanatory framework and helps explain why early school leaving exists in general, to explain why an individual child begins to detach from school we must look to the individual case studies.

6.4 Does the matrix of influences explain why an individual child leaves school early?

The case study observations allow us to test the generality of the matrix of influences against the particular circumstances of individual lives. When we do so, we find the elements of the matrix, but they occur in idiosyncratic and individual patterns. We read of unique, arbitrary experiences of family and school. There are events, disruptions and unresolved issues. There are family histories and heartbreaks as well as routines of ignorance, violence and abuse of alcohol and drugs. There is mental instability. Again and again, we can see how the cards stack up against the subject. Yet, others encounter similar hurdles in their lives and do not leave early. The idea of a matrix of influences does not explain why one leaves and the other does not and in its inherent pathologisation may divert attention from the often intimate causes of early school leaving.

The subjects' early detachment from school is not surprising. The action of one or more elements of the matrix in their lives is evident in the case studies. In no case has a young person left school without reason. There is always a reason, but each is different, personal. Certainly, there are patterns and the subjects conform to these generalities, yet across the matrix most categories have as many positives as negatives, except for social class, paternal unemployment and learning difficulties of various kinds. For many, leaving school early is a rational decision, a decision to leave an arena of failure, or relative failure, for one in which there is some possibility of success, be it through alternatives, peer

appreciation, parental values or monetary gain. Furthermore, the processes by which the various factors triggered the individual's early school leaving are identifiable from the case studies, and would be evident to any objective observer. We can see the breakdown of systems and relationships. In many cases we can also see that an intervention would have helped, in others we can see that the supports were not sufficient.

Taken case by case, the research outcomes suggest that, while certain factors may predispose or protect, it is personal, local and immediate factors that are most significant at the individual level. Peers are very important, as are parental injunctions to leave school to earn money. We also see positive and negative multipliers at work and how individual resilience can alleviate apparently insurmountable ecological adversities. Each trajectory is unique – each young person follows an individual pathway out of school. There is considerable variation in the occurrence of the different elements of the matrix in their lives. For example, the role of social class as a significant general determinant of early school leaving is underlined. Yet several of the subjects are not from the working class and small farming background generally associated with early school leaving. It also emerges that some young people have led largely ordinary lives, with little to distinguish them from other adolescents. Indeed, a number of subjects live in strong and supportive family environments. Others encountered no particular difficulty in school.

So, does the matrix explain why an individual child leaves school early? The answer here is no – while it provides a viable and valuable framework to examine the question and a checklist of factors that might be implicated, it does not explain why an individual child leaves school early. Each history is unique.

6.5 Considering the outcomes

As I have established in Chapter 1, early school leaving is regarded as a matter of grave concern in Ireland. Its significance is seen to extend far beyond the education system, comprehending a wide range of other areas of policy and provision, including employment, health and justice. These are often addressed under the general heading of social inclusion. Because early school leaving is closely associated with social exclusion, it has become a stated national policy

that it will be reduced and if possible eliminated. This objective was expressed in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (Ireland: 1997) and underlined by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF, 1997).

6.5.1 What has been done to eliminate early school leaving?

Official statements of progress towards alleviating early school leaving are commendably detailed and extensive. They list and document the expenditure, the measures and the numbers involved (see, for example, Department of Education and Science 2002). But they do not state the *outcomes* of the various measures. There is a reason for this, to which I will return.

In fairness, there is much to report. Considerable resources have been allocated both within and without the education system to tackle early school leaving. They fund (and indeed have funded for a considerable period) a wide range of measures across the system, each addressing an aspect or element of the matrix of influences and risk factors. Three principal categories of response can be identified, *prevention measures*, *response measures* and *system development and research*. Whether or not this is achieved in practice, it is intended that a continuum of measures be in place across all levels of the system. The predominant aim is to prevent early school leaving, and three key measures aim to do so. They are 'Giving Children an Even Break', the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme.

'*Giving Children an Even Break*' was initiated in January 2001. According to the Department of Education and Science (2002:5), it 'benefits 2,276 primary schools, involving the appointment of 204 extra teachers over a three year period'. It targets the schools with the highest levels of disadvantage on condition that additional resources are used for 'the provision of holistic supports for these pupils'. Lower teacher: pupil ratios are implemented, as well as 'initiatives focused on disadvantaged pupils'. The initiative costs €26million.

The *Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)* was initiated in 1990. Its central focus is the development of parents as the primary educators of their children. It promotes active co-operation between home, school and community and raises awareness of education. In this regard, it can be seen as a contextual initiative firstly addressing low levels of social and cultural capital in families,

for example through increasing family appreciation of and involvement in education, and secondly developing teacher attitudes and behaviours. The HSCL operates in 277 primary schools and, while available to all 211 post-primary schools with designated disadvantaged area status, is provided in 192. The initiative costs €14,600,000 per annum. It does not work with the parents of young people who have left school, though they are often of normal school-going age.

The *School Completion Programme* was launched in 2002 and amalgamates a number of older programmes, such as the *8-15 Year Old Early School Leaver Measure* and the *Stay-In-School Retention Initiative (SSRI)*. According to the Department of Education and Science (2002:13), it is 'designed to deal with issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage'. It is 'a key component of the Department's...strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving'. The Department of Education and Science (2002:14) describes the matrix in all but name:

The School Completion Programme recognises that a wide variety of home, community and school-based factors can contribute to low school attainment and early school leaving. Consequently, strategies designed to address the needs of young people at risk of early school leaving must include a range of actions that impinge on these aspects of young people's lives.

The authors add that the strategies must be 'holistic and child-centred by nature'. Emphasis is placed on local strategies to maximise participation in 'the education process'. They also state that 'it entails targeting individual young people of school going age, both in and out of school, and arranging supports to address inequalities in education access, participation and outcomes'. Schools are selected on the basis of returns from the Department of Education and Science's post-primary database. There are 82 clusters of second-level schools and key feeder primaries. Each is directed by a local committee which produces a 'fully costed plan to tackle early school leaving in their area, including retention targets'. The average funding per cluster is €200,000 and €24 million is spent on this initiative annually.

The Department of Education and Science also funds other substantial initiatives

in schools. They include the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, Breaking the Cycle, Learning Support/Resource Teachers, Traveller education measures and supports, the National Educational Psychological Service and the Education Welfare Service. A range of curricular initiatives (generally of long-standing) is also supported, for example the Junior Cycle Schools Certificate Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied. Some small-scale or specialised measures are also funded, for example, the School Books for Needy Pupils Grant Scheme or the supports for pupils with special needs.

No aggregate calculation of expenditure on these measures is offered. However, clearly, it is substantial and addresses all the aspects of the matrix (or as the Department puts it, 'wide variety...of factors'). Fifty-nine separate measures are identified, of which over forty are intended to address one or more aspects of the matrix of influences on early school leaving. Indeed, so broad is the range of measures that merely listing them fills twenty five A4 pages (Department of Education and Science, 2002; see also Murphy, 2000). Outside the education system, there is what Stokes (2002a) describes as a 'plethora' of other activities, supported by many different agencies and Government Departments. These address (matrix) factors that are outside of the education system's terms of reference. In some areas, they also compensate for shortcomings in education provision (Murphy, 2000).

6.5.2 Does this expenditure work?

In aggregate terms, these measures within and without the schooling system involve very substantial public expenditure. Some of those described above have not been in operation long enough to be meaningfully evaluated on their success or failure. Yet many, for example the Home-School Community Liaison Scheme, Learning Support/Resource Teachers and the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, have operated for over a decade and others, such as the School Completion programme amalgamated earlier initiatives. General effects should be tangible. But are they?

Each measure was set in place to counteract one or more aspects of the matrix of influences. If the matrix explained both early school leaving in general and why an individual child leaves school early, and if the measures effectively tackled

the particular aspect of the matrix they were set up to tackle, then they would have eliminated early school leaving. But they haven't. When we examine the figures, notwithstanding the enormous range of measures and huge levels of expenditure, we find that levels of early school leaving in Ireland have remained stable between 1997 and 2002 (Department of Education and Science, 2003; Ireland, 2004). Early school leaving and the forces that drive it have proved more resilient than expected.

The reason why the Department of Education and Science lists expenditure and measures rather than outcomes is clear. If the level of political and systematic commitment to the elimination of early school leaving is evaluated in terms of *effort*, that is expenditure and range of measures, then rhetoric is being translated into action and early school leaving is being addressed. But if commitment is measured in terms of *effect*, that is outcomes or results, then it is not.

Undoubtedly, notable local and personal successes have accrued. But the fact remains that a decade and a half of effort has failed to significantly reduce *general* levels of early school leaving. Yet, the policies on which these measures are based derive from the concept of a matrix of influences and taken together, the measures address the different 'risk factors' and 'influences'. The system is doing what the available expertise told it should be done. Why doesn't it work?

6.5.3 Why doesn't this expenditure work?

Various reasons may be suggested as to why such enormous expenditure and such a variety of measures, has had such little general effect. A number of observations are pertinent:

The first is that education outcomes reflect the outcomes of Irish society. As this thesis is being written, we learn that Irish society is amongst the most unequal in the developed world (OECD, 2003). The major general influences on early school leaving are deeply ingrained in that society. Early school leaving may be, as NESF (1997) describes it, 'among the most serious social and economic problems this state must address'. But it seems that Irish society only wishes to address this problem on condition that everything else remains the same. It is argued (for example, Fleming and Kenny, 1998) that the same is true of schools. They accept the need to address early school leaving but only do so on the basis

that the school is a bounded system, that everyone works according to the rules of that system and change happens within that system's boundaries. In this, they replicate the society they serve. Social exclusion and school exclusion are closely linked. If early school leaving is to be significantly alleviated, so too must the growing inequality in Irish society. This prognosis reflects the compelling evidence, which the present research merely underlines, that social reproduction is a force of tectonic proportions in Irish education.

The second is that the idea of a matrix of influences and the concepts of risk and influence it embodies derive from systematic and institutional perspectives rather than those of the individual learner. As a framework, it is indisputably useful as an instrument for understanding general influences and for evaluating systematic and institutional functioning. But, as we have seen, it does not explain why an individual child leaves school early. So, notwithstanding the rhetoric of a child-centred system, any set of measures that takes the matrix as a starting point is likely to engender institutional and formulaic responses that are insufficiently responsive or versatile to deal with the idiosyncracies and contingencies presenting in real life situations. Children encounter illnesses, accidents, deaths, alcoholism, violence and family separations. Some are more vulnerable than others. It is what happens in the aftermath of events or in response to identified problems that triggers detachment or supports retention. In practice, the established measures address many aspects of the matrix but they do so on systematic or institutional grounds, not those of the child or his/her family.

The third factor follows. It concerns individual institutional functioning, and the tenacity with which policies and consequent resources are converted into the existing delivery frameworks of each institution. If all schools were alike the outcomes of any given measure would be predictable. But, as Smyth (1999) has shown, schools are not alike. They also have their matrix of influences – they have their given factors, they live and work in a number of ecosystems, they have developmental phases, each with accompanying problems, and they are vulnerable and resilient in varying degrees. Indeed, some may not be very interested in retaining those they perceive to be troublesome beyond the end of September when their annual capitation is secured. The outcomes of this and other research suggest that schools differ significantly in their application of

resources accruing from the various measures attempting to end early school leaving. In this environment, initiatives such as the School Completion Programme are at risk of becoming 'add-ons', and not embedded in the school's policies or operations.

Fourthly, explanations of early school leaving usually start from the assumption that the young person's disengagement is pathological. Measures adopted in Ireland follow suit. But, as we have seen in this research and as Piper & Piper (1998/9) point out, it may actually be a rational response to their experience. Individual narratives do not conform to general pathologies. No two children are the same, nor are any two families. No school is the same, nor are any two teachers. Peer groups vary also, as do the multiple processes of detachment. Yet, policy responses are largely built on the opposite premise, that pathways to leaving are largely homogeneous, that families of early school leavers are deficient in various ways, that they come from areas of economic disadvantage, and that the issue of early school leaving can be resolved in a school context.

The fifth is that responses to disadvantage in Ireland have been reliant to an inordinate degree on short-term projects, and educational disadvantage is no exception to this (Boldt & Devine, 1998). As Stokes (2002a) argues, 'At national and policy level, we have not created a coherent service infrastructure targeting young people. This applies across the board, but particularly to social policy and youth work'. He suggests a number of reasons, including the availability of European Union funds and other monies in the late 80s and 90s 'under various project-based programmes'. Projects were used in Ireland to deliver services 'which would, in most other environments, be delivered by statutory bodies and services', or were, in previous generations, provided by religious and voluntary organisations. This inhibited the development of 'a stable and predictable' service infrastructure. Of course, many measures are effective at local level or over particular periods of intense effort. But at a general level, responses to disadvantage are unreliable, episodic, inconsistent and, from a systematic point of view, incoherent.

The foregoing refers to incoherence *within* systems. But there is also incoherence *between* systems, and this is the sixth factor in the relative failure of efforts to end early school leaving to date (see Stokes, 1996a, 2002b; Cullen, 2000). The

standard paradigm for education, training and social service delivery in this country and many others is the 'vertical service paradigm'. By this is understood the culture in which services are established, resourced, delivered and accounted for from top to bottom, without reference to any other services. It stands in contrast to the *lateral or integrated service* model. It is the case that inter-agency collaboration and partnership has been a national priority for more than a decade, and has underpinned many policy innovations in education and beyond. However, as is the case with most measures targeting disadvantage, it is likely that 'service integration' is more easily aspired to than delivered, other than occasional case conferences and referrals. In the research we encounter subjects who should clearly have been the focus of coherent multi-agency added-value care plans but were not. Once again, while there are examples of best practice (the care system for Gemma and Francis, for example) there is no pattern of comprehensive response (for example, Joseph, Martha and David), and individual young people slip through the various nets.

The seventh factor concerns the selectivity and parochialism with which policymakers and practitioners alike engage with the subject of early school leaving. Various discourses can be discerned – at policy level, within schools, amongst those dealing with disadvantaged pupils and amongst those working in out-of-school contexts. These discourses remain largely separate, each unheard by the others. There is a consequent failure, perhaps even an inability, to absorb other approaches, learn from other systems and mainstream. This is despite the accretion of an enormous body of knowledge and experience through a multitude of (largely European-funded) projects between 1977 and 2000. For example, between 1993 and 1999, over IR£20 million was expended on 44 projects funded by the Employment/Youthstart Community Initiative (Youthstart National Support Structure, 1996, 1998). Despite the establishment of a 'mainstreaming committee', which included Government Departments, the projects themselves ended and few if any of the models were adopted. Faced with the prospect of meaningful change, the education system effectively reneged on mainstreaming. As a result, a vast reservoir of expertise has been dissipated, and a generation of practitioners has had to learn the same lessons all over again.

Why is this relevant to the present enquiry? Because, while the major school-

based initiatives were piloted on their introduction, none were previously tested in projects when established. By contrast, all the out-of-school initiatives were. Yet, the former are embedded in the system, whereas the latter are (at best) temporary or (at worst) shelved. The major school-based initiatives are top-down measures, deriving from a formal academic research consensus. In general, they address structural issues or pathologies and they focus on institutional and organisational factors. Insofar as personal agency is addressed, it is in the context of taking value from the school programme. In contrast, the out-of-school responses are largely 'bottom-up' measures, deriving from practitioner experience, community development and action research. In general, they emphasise personal agency, contextual factors, participatory processes and collaborative responses. Insofar as structural factors and pathologies are addressed, it is generally on the basis of empowerment and affirmation, building awareness and a pattern of problem-solving and lifelong learning. It is fundamental to these measures that they take accept the young people as they present, and take the reality of their current lifestyles and behaviours as their starting point. Responses are unlikely to be effective unless they do likewise (European Commission, 2000a; Watts, 2001). However, as Watts comments, 'this involves considerable rethinking both of traditional conceptual models and of traditional models of delivery'. Schools have found this difficult, if not impossible and, as Watts predicts, the schooling system as a whole has not succeeded in retaining early school leavers.

To summarise these points, Irish society is unequal and early school leaving is an outcome of social reproduction. Measures have been largely systematic or institutional rather than individualised and institutions function differently and use resources in different ways. Explanations for early school leaving are pathological, and measures follow suit. While excellent services can be identified throughout the country, there is no coherent infrastructure for the delivery of services to young people. Furthermore, there is little cohesion between different service sectors. Finally, notwithstanding the success of out-of-school activities and services with early school leavers, policymakers have followed the academic research consensus which has favoured the pathological and institutional rather than the affirmative and individual.

It is true, as Kellaghan et al (1995) point out, that in the 1990s the emphasis in policy on educational disadvantage shifted from the individual child to the child in context and, given the profound influence of ecological factors, this is justified. But if the underpinning assumptions and analysis continue to be pathological and institutional, and if the measures and responses follow suit in terms of relationships and methodologies, this apparently progressive change achieves little more than extending the range and breadth of targets for intervention. The general affect is to pathologise in ever increasing circles – the deficit model is extended from individual children to whole families, schools and peer groups. But the outcomes for the individual young people remain the same.

A second major shift in policy emphasis appeared at the same time, away from the idea of ‘cure’ and towards ‘prevention’. In this regard, risk factors and influences were identified so that children who were ‘at-risk’ could be identified and preventive action taken. This was seen to be more beneficial in terms of the child’s well-being and also more cost-effective. At face value this is an imperative but in practice it is compromised, perhaps fatally, by the diffuseness of the ideas of ‘prevention’ and ‘at-risk’ and the tenacity of the institutional factors I have already noted. Against any or all the matrix of influences, how can it be determined that any particular child is at risk? Social class is a key determinant – does this mean that every working class child is at risk? Neighbourhood factors are also significant – does this mean that every child in, for example, Ballymun, is at risk? And coupled with the emphasis on the child in context, there is now the prospect that every family, every peer group and peer group member are ‘at risk’ and therefore the target of ‘preventive’ measures.

This is not tenable. Most young people do not leave school early. While certain factors may predispose, detachment is not a given, nor is it inevitable. It unfolds in the interplay of any of the matrix of influences. Amongst these we may include the fulfilment of teachers’ morbid expectations. In an ideal world, a range of actors would have addressed the different risk factors evident in the lives of many of the subjects of this research in a holistic and integrated manner to alleviate risks and prevent early school leaving. But, as I have outlined above, such integration and focused prevention challenges our systematic and institutional paradigms beyond their capacity to deliver. Because preventive

work is difficult to define and 'risks' are ubiquitous, working with *children in context* to deal with *risk factors* on a *preventive basis* allows systems, institutions and individual practitioners to discharge responsibilities in general rather than in particular. So, while general measures are set in place, the individual child still leaves school early. If aggregate early school leaving is not reduced by the measures introduced, their net general effect will have been to generate activity in schools and to create new employment for teachers.

This is not to suggest that policy should revert from working with children in context, nor that the idea of prevention should be eschewed. Rather, two developments are indicated. The first is a synthesis between working with the individual child and working with the child in context. Individual responses must be organised through institutional structures and processes and institutional processes must resolve themselves in individual solutions. The second is that the matrix of influences should no longer be seen as the basis for a range of disconnected measures aimed at preventing early school leaving. Rather, it should be extended to encompass processes, that is the *interplay* of factors, events and influences, and re-imagined as a checklist for identifying risk and guiding responses. These, in turn should be holistic both in terms of institutional organisation and personal experience. In such a scenario, the matrix is less to do with problem identification than with problem solving.

With this observation, I have moved to consideration of the implications of the present research for paradigms, policies, systems, institutions and practice. I will consider these below, towards outlining the kind of system that can best deliver optimum outcomes for each child in terms of completion of education in general and school in particular and the consequent changes that need to happen at the levels of paradigm, policy, system, institution and practice.

6.6 Towards optimum outcomes for each young person

It is important to begin this consideration by acknowledging recent relevant legislative and structural developments, both within education and without. The passage of the Education Act (Ireland, 1998a), the Education Welfare Act (Ireland, 2000b) and the Children Act (Ireland, 2001) represent important milestones in the development of a more consistent, structured and responsive

system as regards early school leaving. The release of the report of the Task Force on Dyslexia (Ireland, 2002) and the publication of the Disabilities Bill as this chapter is being written are significant. So too is the establishment of the Educational Disadvantage Committee on a statutory basis to advise on policies and strategies 'to identify and correct educational disadvantage'. In these and other measures it is possible to imagine a more coherent, caring and child-centred system of education, health and social welfare.

These developments offer much hope for the future. But the history of the Education Welfare Board prompts caution. It was established in 2002, mere weeks before the legislation would fall. It took a further twelve months for the Board to advertise for its first tranche of new staff members. With all due respects to the Board, this does not convince that educational welfare is high on the national policy agenda. If this were replicated in other areas, such as psychological services, disabilities or special needs, or indeed in the fulfilment of the complex and ambitious agenda set out in the Children Act, then the legislation would be little more than window dressing. Policymakers, institutions and practitioners alike must travel significant distances if the considerable effort to end early school leaving is to be translated into comparable effect. More of what has already failed is unlikely to succeed. Additional expenditure and new or expanded measures, however well-meant or grounded in research, will not end early school leaving in the absence of other changes and developments. These must happen at five levels: which I will discuss below.

6.6.1 At the level of paradigm

As Smyth and McCabe (2001) point out, 'different perceptions of the causes of educational inequality call for different sorts of solutions'. They add that educational policy 'is informed, implicitly or explicitly, by particular perspectives on how inequalities in educational outcomes come about'. In this regard, five points regarding paradigms arise from the present research:

The first involves a change *from a deficit model to a credit model of education*. As we have seen, a deficit or pathological model, in which children are thought to lack the capacities or attitudes to survive within the formal system, strongly influences thinking on educational disadvantage in Ireland. But the present

research suggests that many subjects have learning styles and personal goals that the school was either unable or unwilling to cater for. The deficit belongs to the system, not the person and, given that leaving school is often a pragmatic and rational decision, the idea that early school leaving is some kind of medical condition is untenable. A core feature of successful interventions with early school leavers, and one that has been widely validated, is an emphasis on achievement, that is, a credit model. This focuses on strengths and interests, on what the young person *can* do and values. These are used as a platform for learning. The difference between these two models is fundamental. The former works from the basic premise that there is something wrong with the client, and that only a specialist can fix her/him and the latter emphasises agency, self-direction and empowerment. This distinction threads its way through all aspects of subsequent education provision, including school functioning.

Early school leavers are not the only likely beneficiaries of such a change. As the European Commission (2000a) and Watts (2001:13) note, those who are successful in education may also benefit from an approach that proves successful with those who are not. It is, in fact, a better way to educate everyone.

The second involves a change *from targeting passive risk to addressing active risk*. As I have already noted, the notion of 'at-risk' is both problematic and contested. A more effective strategy to deal with early school leaving would eschew the conceit of identifying those at risk in favour of addressing identified difficulties, that is active risks, at the earliest possible juncture. The former is open-ended and imprecise – as Boldt (1994) points out, everyone is at risk – whereas the latter is precise and unambiguous and has the virtue of concentrating resources on those who are verifiably in difficulty.

The third involves a change *from general prevention to preventive intervention*. As we have seen, the emphasis of Irish policy on early school leaving shifted in the 1990s from post-school responses such as YOUTHREACH to preventive approaches such as Home School Community Liaison and School Completion. A substantial body of literature and polemic advocated this change, and a substantial investment in preventive measures followed. Yet early school leaving has remained intractable. It follows that prevention alone is not a viable policy. As with 'risk', the notion itself is open-ended and imprecise. Indeed, it is

arguable that it would have been better to have less emphasis on prevention and more on early identification and alleviation, that is on what might be described as 'preventive intervention'. The inception of the National Education Welfare Board is likely to change the prevention-cure duopoly and promote the idea of a continuum of response, with greater permeability between school (preventive) and post-school (response). In turn, this will demand a re-evaluation of resource mechanisms. If a child leaves school and is placed in a YOUTHREACH centre, the resources that attach to him/her should follow.

The fourth involves a change *from school completion to education completion*. The research outcomes challenge the interpretation or meaning of school completion. Irish schooling is essentially norm-referenced and as we see from the research outcomes, early school leavers combine the routine with the exceptional. Irish schools will always struggle to cater for a full cohort of learners. Moreover, if a child's experience of school is as negative as those we have encountered in the research, retaining him/her in school longer is likely to be seen as a punishment, not an opportunity. Offered the choice, few of the subjects of this research would return to school. But they have all returned to education. Accordingly, the paradigm should shift from school completion to education completion, underpinned by the concept of lifelong learning and supported by an appropriate range of options. In this regard, post-school provision should not be limited in terms of numbers, as at present, an arrangement that, by definition, means that a person with an unsatisfactory experience of schooling is not guaranteed continuation of his/her education.

The fifth involves a change to *differential resourcing based on level of need*. As we have seen, early school leavers have very different levels of need. However, there is a mismatch between resource allocation and needs. This is as true in the post-school sector as the school sector (CHL, 1996). In addition, all needs are not equal. It is clear from the case studies that some young people are contending with a range of adverse and often extreme influences. Moreover, whereas these are often thought of as cumulative, that is, adding to each other's morbid or beneficial consequences, the research indicates that their effect is more usually to multiply. It is also understood that the same process works in reverse – some influences are positive in their effect and cancel adversities. There is a

compelling argument for the development of a profiling system to generate a more realistic understanding of resource requirements. Effective strategies to alleviate young people's difficulties will inevitably be more expensive than catering for the needs of most school students. But this issue must be set in the context of the other forces in the lives of many users. Conventional services have not worked for them. Yet their entitlement is the same as other children's. If early school leaving is to be reduced, radical, flexible funding strategies will have to be introduced to tilt the bias towards investment in those who are most in need and towards equality of outcome. This was a largely rhetorical objective in the past. However, with the passage of the Education Act and the Education Welfare Act, and also an emerging case law, rhetoric is likely to be confronted with reality. Differential funding based on level of need is the most appropriate response. The development of an appropriate system to achieve this is fraught with technical and professional difficulties. Appropriate, clearly stated and objectively assessed criteria are required. This should include all aspects of the matrix, appropriately weighted according to morbid impact on the young person's schooling. It is possible, given the general indications of the Disabilities Bill, that in the future schools and centres of education will function with a dual funding mechanism, comprising a guaranteed core funding to deliver their core responsibilities and supplementary funding to respond to each additional need they encounter. Such supplementary support should operate across primary, post-primary and further education sectors alike. This would yield a system more precisely calibrated to the needs of learners. It would also be more consistent, connected, and coherent.

6.6.2 At the level of policy

In considering policy challenges arising from the present research, five themes emerge. The first is to do with the characteristics of an effective system. When we consider the experience of a subject such as Annette, we find that her family's rural isolation was key factor in her early school leaving. But in many areas, arrangements are in place to assist someone in her situation. A central policy problem is that supports are not available in a consistent, equal and transparent fashion. From both the present research and other critiques of the education and health and children systems in Ireland, a number of key terms are

identifiable that describe an effective system. They include cohesion, consistency, continuum, co-ordination, clarity, effectiveness and access. Similarly, key elements include intervening early and often, being watchful yet not intrusive, being egalitarian (for example regarding gender, ethnicity), flexible and adequately and appropriately resourced.

A second theme is to do with building a continuum of service. The use of this term suggests the need to link and integrate measures within and without the schooling system. This has never been consistently achieved. For example, YOUTHREACH lone parent groups are not connected to Early Start clusters, nor do they have the benefits of Home School Community Liaison, resource teachers, and so on. It also refers to the establishment of a continuum of care, and the consequences of this for systems. Early school leavers, by definition, are found in a margin between the school and out-of-school. Efforts to retain them in education involve actors from outside the school structures. Community-based actions, for example drugs initiatives, have extended the range and depth of such external involvement. In addition, thanks in part to the development of a range of interlocking qualifications systems, out-of-school responses have been enabled, not only to engage in significant learning experiences with the young people but also to facilitate their achieving qualifications outcomes similar to those they might have achieved in school. In effect, the education community *and* the range of education environments have been extended. Thus, instead of being cut off from the school system, a programme such as YOUTHREACH becomes part of an education continuum offering a variety of equally regarded approaches within a single framework. These represent different and equal paths to the same outcome, rather than a hierarchy of high status mainstream and lower value and less secure out-of-school system. While such recognition is suggested in the White Paper on Adult Education (Ireland 2000a), it has not been achieved. Indeed, Watts (2002:9) has doubts as to whether this is likely. For him, 'a key policy issue is whether provision like YOUTHREACH will become incorporated as a positive alternative option, or will remain a residual 'safety net' for those for whom the formal system has not catered adequately'.

The third policy theme emerging concerns the establishment of co-ordinated strategies and actions at local level. As we have seen amongst the subjects, many

have multiple difficulties and have been the object of attention by Health Boards and other social services. Young people have a global needs set and live their lives 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Not everything can be dealt with by education. What happens in the home impinges on the education, but it is not directly the school's business, any more than what happens after school hours. Other actors are, or should be, involved with the young people. Their respective actions must link with and add value to each other. Given the dominance of the vertical service paradigm in Irish education and social services, this is a significant challenge. Just how difficult it will be is clear from consideration of the range of actors engaged with young people at local level in Ireland. In the school they meet a range of actors including teachers, school guidance counsellors, resource teachers, learning support teachers and so on. In out of school education and training settings they meet instructors, tutors, advocates, centre Co-ordinators and Directors as well as youth workers both salaried and voluntary. If not attending school they will encounter the Education Welfare Officer. If involved in offending behaviour they may meet Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers and Probation and Welfare Officers. For a variety of reasons they may also encounter social workers, drugs outreach workers and health promotion officers. These are managed by Health Boards as are public health personnel and possibly psychologists and psychiatrists from Health Board Addiction Services. Psychologists may hail from the National Educational Psychologist Service or from Health Boards. Mediators are found in Local Employment Services and placement officers in FÁS offices. The Children Act (Ireland, 2001) has introduced family welfare conference co-ordinators, family welfare conference facilitators and family welfare conference mentors. Clearly, concerted policy direction is required, firstly to develop this plethora of disconnected activity into a consistent, coherent and reliable infrastructure of services for young people and secondly to encourage inter-agency co-operation and an area-based approach at local level. Formal and non-formal systems should overlap and interact to the benefit of the target groups. Indeed, such is already the basis of support committees for the School Completion programme and the Home School Community Liaison Initiative.

The fourth policy theme arising concerns the status of those working on out-of-school actions. These professionals are often as isolated from mainstream education as their participants are from schools. Notwithstanding their successes with young people who have left school early, their rates of pay and conditions of service are inferior to those of teachers working in ordinary schools. But they represent a key human resource and their training and support needs should be a priority. Too often, they are employed on short-term contracts. The object, from a policy point of view, should be to recruit the best and retain them. Arrangements to monitor possible burn-out should be implemented as a matter of urgency. Also, training models and new qualifications have been developed for those working in less structured situations. In some cases, these add to existing skills and qualifications. In others, practitioners gain new insights and theoretical underpinning for their existing good practice. There is an urgent need for the education system to give due recognition to such new training and qualifications developed for its practitioners. There is also a pressing need to encourage permeability between in-school and out-of-school measures, to share and transfer knowledge. But this can only fairly happen on the basis of equal status.

The fifth theme concerns the policy of targeting specific geographic areas and particular schools. Given that the research shows that early school leaving is spatially pervasive, this needs to be reviewed. While important in the general sense of focusing resources on areas and institutions of particular need, it means that measures do not, indeed cannot, reach very substantial numbers of early school leavers.

6.6.3 At the level of systems

A young person lives and grows in a framework of systems. Successful negotiation of contexts and stages presumes that these systems function and are coherent. Early school leaving occurs when one or more fail or break down. Hence the importance of early warning systems, mediating interventions and compensatory mechanisms. Fundamentally, the emphasis should be on making these systems work rather than making work for these systems. In this regard, three points are made.

Firstly, the present research shows the importance to early school leaving of idiosyncratic, individual and incidental processes. But by their very nature systems look for the orderly, the predictable, the sequential and the measurable, that is for what fits. It is accepted that the predictable must be addressed – that is, the general factors that predispose a child to leave school early. But the exceptional must also be accommodated. This is likely to be through flexible, multi-modal programmes, that is those which allow for different modes of participation and delivery towards equality of outcomes.

Secondly, young people spend a greater proportion of their lives outside the hours of schooling or training than they do inside. Their global needs set may comprehend any of a range of general dysfunctions. These can include the effects of alcohol or drug abuse, crime in the family as well as shocks and disruptions, including illness, bereavement in their family or extended family, family breakdown, transition to a new school or home, and pregnancy or childbirth. Most of these are outside the school's compass, but they are *someone's* business. The challenge at system level is to forge coherent and consistent links and referral pathways covering these factors.

Thirdly, given the wealth of experience that has accumulated, and indeed the models in place (such as the Leaving Certificate Applied), with their acknowledgement of the value and relevance of action-based learning, it is astonishing and worrying that curriculum is still an issue. The present research highlights the need for appropriate curricular arrangements. Watts (2002) summarises these as 'more flexible learning provision, with easier movement in and out of the system and more alternatives attuned to different styles of learning'. Programme design and review is also important – leading to an integrated curriculum in which vertical elements (for example hand-skill classes) are linked and supported by lateral elements (for example, personal development, health and safety, literacy development). This establishes a holistic curricular matrix linking the academic and vocational with the personal.

6.6.4 At the level of institutions

It is to be acknowledged at the outset that schools and colleges can be large and complex organisations. By definition, their structural and functional

characteristics are geared to maximising beneficial effects for the majority of children, not for all. Most schools have boundaries of behaviour and need beyond which they feel unable to accommodate and indeed, under the Education Act, they are obliged to set these down and observe them. It is also to be acknowledged that there has been considerable change in Irish schools and education institutions in recent years. That said, six points regarding institutions emerge from consideration of the present research.

Firstly, given the outcomes of the present research and the relative failure of school-based, there is a compelling argument that schools as institutions and teachers as practitioners should engage in a committed dialogue with those working in out-of-school contexts. This is not just a matter of building effective links at local level. It is also to do with extending what is meant by the mainstream to incorporate their experience and practice. There is little evidence of such dialogue, nor of any sharing of experiences between school and out-of-school service providers, nor between formal and non-formal services. It also appears that learner-centred teaching is honoured more in rhetoric than in reality, notwithstanding the reservoir of research in its favour and indeed its espousal in a range of policy documents and programme outlines.

Secondly, the development of individual learning plans for those with educational needs is mandatory under the Education Act and there are compelling grounds for arguing that this should be interpreted expansively. The research suggests that a high proportion of early school leavers have one or more learning needs. The development of an IEP that accompanied the individual from primary through post-primary and on to post-school provision, for example in Further Education (YOUTHREACH), would be an excellent manifestation of continuity and cohesion and would constitute a preventive action with considerable chances of success. However, the development of such plans does not imply the withdrawal of children from classes, or the formation of 'special needs' groups. As we have seen, young people regard these as negative assessments of their prospective outcomes. Rather, the plans should be executed with the child remaining in her/his peer group and classroom contexts. This will involve resource teachers working with the group and their teacher, apparently with all children but focusing on one specific child. Early warning, needs

identification and ongoing support are intrinsic to such an approach. Schools should be watchful and supportive throughout, able and willing to make key interventions at critical moments, and must prioritise the most needy in doing so.

Thirdly, all measures targeting early school leavers should believe in the young people, promote participation and envisage their positive progression. In the research we find young people who have learned what they cannot do rather than what they can do and are also inhibited as regards their ability to learn. Schools and centres must foster a culture of achievement and success. Schooling should also be respectful and egalitarian, and learners must be involved and consulted. This is enormously threatening to many teachers. But, as is clear from this research and much other (for example Thornton, 2000), young people evaluate teachers as objectively and as clinically as teachers evaluate them. In the case of early school leavers, their assessments are issued in terms of abandoning an unsatisfactory experience for one that is more productive. In this regard, student feedback should be intrinsic to all school planning and evaluation.

Fourthly, change may be envisaged at the level of relationships and school organisation. These involve the community. Many schools have already made the leap of consciousness involved in building a community base and local support network and no longer regard themselves as 'benign fortresses'. They also involve the school *as a community*. Newer, flatter hierarchies are already evolving in many subject areas, particularly in Information and Communications Technologies, where the young people are accepted to be much more knowledgeable than most teachers. Closer networking both within and without the school is also indicated – for example, instead of the learning support teacher being seen as the safety valve to whom all teaching problems can be sent, s/he becomes a member of a team. Whole school plans should also encompass the guidance and pastoral roles of teaching staff, including formal pastoral care roles as well as, to quote Watts (2002:10),

recognition of strong helping relationships that may be forged with young people by teachers of favourite subjects or through extra-curricular activities. Community-based mentors may also have a role to play.

The fifth point is to do with school functioning. As we have seen, early school leaving occurs when the relationship between the child and the school breaks

down. School functioning is central to this, including the attitudes and behaviours individual teachers. So, the commitment to tackling early school leaving must be more than merely a platform to argue for more resources or to retain teachers. Indeed, Pearson (2000) cites Ofsted's finding that IEPs 'are most likely to be effective when they operate within a culture of effective and detailed educational planning'. Also at the level of functioning, the research indicates that while early school leavers do not necessarily have difficulties with structures, rules or sanctions as such, they require them to be visibly just, predictable and even-handed.

The sixth point concerns the research outcomes regarding mentoring. They echo comments by Watts (2002:9) who, in reflecting on the experience of YOUTHREACH participants and European YOUTHSTART projects, noted the importance of young people 'having access to a trusted adult who understands their needs and demonstrates genuine care and concern'. Watts emphasises that 'the genuineness is important: it is not just a role relationship'. This person, he adds, might be a guidance counsellor, a teacher or someone working in the community. Watts also argues 'the need for some *space* where their needs and hopes can be articulated and addressed'. Watts also argues, and the research outcomes underline, the need for training and support for teaching staff to deal with new roles and 'the complex and stressful situations with which they are confronted'.

6.6.5 At the level of practice

Much of the foregoing incorporates or implies change in practice. It is not just that the teacher is a central figure in the child's experience of school. It is also to do with the way in which the present pathological model generates demand for extra specialists at increasingly rarefied levels of expertise and expense. An affirmative 'credit' model, and an individual-oriented approach to teaching involves a more holistic dynamic in the school or training centre and the development of cross-skills and collaborative approaches among teaching staff. It renews the role of the teacher as general practitioner and as the fulcrum of the school's operation. In this scenario, building self-esteem and communication skills, including literacy and numeracy, are of a piece with other curricular elements. If a young person's primary interest in life is pigeons, then let pigeons

be the starting point for learning. In turn, expert support should be available as required, based on early identification and appropriate assessment. But as I have indicated above, their expertise should be put to use in collaboration with the teacher and where possible in the same classroom.

In this pivotal role, the skills, attitudes and knowledge the teacher brings are fundamental to retaining as many young people as possible in the school. Responding to early school leaving requires subtlety and insight, vigilance and responsiveness. Teachers should exercise pastoral responsibilities as well as teaching roles and they must be able to build and maintain relationships with young people, even in the face of difficulties. They must also be respectful, as they expect the young people to be. This means being non-judgemental, able to recognise their students as individuals, learning to listen positively and feed back constructively. Teachers should have high expectations of the young people and encourage them to have high expectations in turn.

As regards curriculum and teaching practice, there is little need for new programmes. Rather, there is a need for a return to the curriculum development approach of empowering practitioners to initiate and innovate according to the needs of their learners. Having made these general points, four specific observations are pertinent.

The first concerns what is sometimes known as a pathways approach (European Commission, 1998, 2000a). In this, an individual education plan includes personal and sometimes vocational goals. Given the circumstances and expectations of early school leavers, these may be short-term and modest in ambition. What many young people need most is time and tolerance.

The second concerns the inherent tension between the formal and the informal. As I have noted earlier, an extended education community is already under construction. Within this framework, teachers are challenged to recognise other professionals and learn from them. Out-of-school practitioners are experts in the discharge of new and appropriate functions with much to contribute to teaching practice. This link is characterised by Watts (2001) as between the 'street knowledge' of youth services and the 'formal knowledge' of schools and mainstream services.

The third concerns reporting and evaluation criteria. Work with potential or actual early school leavers may generate readily identifiable and quantifiable outcomes such as examination successes. But the principal measure of success is likely to be increased participation and satisfaction with the experience of education. Educators should be in the forefront of developing appropriate models by which such work can be validated.

The fourth concerns teacher training, both initial and in-service. It has long been argued that teacher training should be redesigned to better equip practitioners to work more effectively to retain children in school and maximise the benefits they derive from schooling. This view is endorsed by the present research.

6.7 Implications for adult education

What we have found in the research is a group of early school leavers who have returned to education. Not all of them see YOUTHREACH as such – some see it as training, others as work. Yet, they are engaged in purposeful activity intended to help them make decisions for themselves about how they want to organise their lives and what they want to do as a result. All may be situated on a continuum between detachment and integration and all are engaged to some degree. They have learning needs and many will continue to have these or related needs for the foreseeable future. Few had satisfactory experience of schooling but still, few are alienated from learning if this is understood in a general, personal or vocational, rather than an academic, sense.

Most envisage working, finding partners and starting homes and families. Their learning needs will evolve as they change and grow. But having left school with few qualifications if any, their situation, and their return to education however they view it, represents a significant vindication of the idea of lifelong learning and of recurrent chances to complete one's education and learn new skills, knowledge and understanding. Some are already parents. Most will be parents at some point in the future. What kind of parents will they be? To what degree will their families function better than their birth or foster families? Given the cyclical nature of disadvantage and the social reproductivity of Irish society, their participation in continuing education represents the best chance they and the Irish education system have to intervene positively in the lives of their children

so that they might not be early school leavers in turn. In this regard, lifelong learning should be seen as the overarching conceptual framework and adult education as the overarching *delivery* framework for family-based and community-based interventions targeting early school leaving. This means close co-operation between schools and adult education providers. In addition, initiatives such as the Home School Community Liaison Initiative, which works exclusively with parents and is an adult education measure though not so styled by the Department of Education and Science, should be re-sited in the adult education sector. In addition, it should be broadened in scope to work with parents young people of normal school-going age who have left school and are attending approved out-of-school programmes. (That at present it does not in itself makes a pointed statement of priority and ownership).

Many subjects have ongoing learning needs, for example to do with literacy. The provision of adult literacy opportunities in Ireland has expanded greatly in the first years of the 21st century. The need for a continuum applies here also, between schools, education centres and adult literacy schemes. Particular attention should be paid to their present or future roles as parents and to their need to help their children with their studies. I have also referred to the need for collaborative approaches at local level. This may include the development of neighbourhood education plans, with School Completion initiatives dovetailing with and complementing adult-oriented education completion initiatives, and whole families participating in their various ways.

One other area of adult education should be mentioned. Most of the subjects see themselves working. The likelihood is that their employment will be in low-skill and low-status jobs in construction, services or manufacturing. They will be at risk of redundancy and skill obsolescence. Whether in or out of work, individuals in these marginal areas of employment should, as argued in the White Paper *Learning for Life* (Ireland, 2000a), be the target of proactive initiatives to develop skills and knowledge in general and literacy and Information and Communications Technologies in particular.

6.8 Research Questions arising

The research outcomes prompt consideration of the relationship between research, policy and practice. Researchers take as many and contradictory positions as do practitioners. While Irish policy on early school leaving has been led by academic education perspectives, research into youth unemployment has been driven by economic and sociological perspectives. Also, policymakers and providers 'cherry-pick' research outcomes and recommendations. The announcement at the time of writing of a Children's Research Programme and a National Longitudinal Study of children by the National Children's Office is welcome in this regard (Ireland, 2000c; National Children's Office, 2003). This should provide an empirical database to guide research, policymaking and practice. Bearing these observations in mind, the following research questions arise from the research:

- The multiplier effect of adversities should be explored, towards developing a mechanism to identify and quantify as far as possible such effects, with a view to appropriate targeting, and to constructing a more appropriate regime for the allocation of resources.
- Study is required of the spatial distribution of early school leavers with a view to establishing mechanisms to support those who do not live in areas of high disadvantage or attend schools with high levels of drop-out.
- Evaluative research into the effects of the many school-based measures addressing educational disadvantage is required to examine their impact, if any, on early school leaving and also their effects on school organisation and culture;
- Similarly, a research project should examine the plethora of services aimed at young people out of school towards developing a new model or framework for programmes and services for young people to promote cohesion, consistency and accessibility;
- Empirical study is required to establish the levels of special education needs amongst early school leavers nationally (see also Smith, 2002). This should lead to the platform for a new, more rational and needs-driven resource allocation mechanism both for schools and YOUTHREACH centres.

A number of other research projects are suggested, including

- gender effects in early school leaving
- The experience of schooling of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds
- Peer group influence on early school leaving
- The extent and usage of unofficial or auxiliary languages among Irish adolescents
- Ways of learning and early school leaving
- Learned inhibitions and school completion
- Attachment theory and early school leaving (this is a longitudinal study of extensive duration)
- Self-esteem and early school leavers, and particularly in relation to academic learning, vocational learning and personal interests

6.9 Concluding observations

The core question that I set out to explore in this thesis was whether the risk factors and influences identified in the research literature and on which policy and provision in Ireland are based was true to the lives of the young people at whom the many measures were aimed. Having developed and co-ordinated YOUTHREACH at national level and having listened to young people and those who worked with them in out-of-school situations, it did not seem so. I decided to test this matrix against the lives of a small but representative sample of early school leavers.

The outcomes show that, while many lives are alike, no two are the same and that while all history is general, every history is unique. Certainly, all the influences identified in Chapter 2 can be found in their profiles. But they do not apply universally and they do not explain why one young person leaves school early and another does not. Furthermore, measures based on these influences have largely been institutional in operation and not individual. At the end of the day both their effectiveness and the very idea of the matrix itself are found wanting by the tenacity of early school leaving as a phenomenon. Fundamental realignment is required of measures addressing early school leaving if they are to make a significant contribution to ending early school leaving.

The young people have simple predictable desires and dreams, as have their families. In the main these refer to work and family. They might once have included staying in school, but not now. On the whole they require simple solutions. Concentration on the general rather than the individual means that complex and systematic responses are provided even where not needed. But the study did not just reveal the inadequacies of the concept of the matrix and the measures set in place. The profiles revealed much that is to be respected and admired amongst the young people. There is determination, heroism and loyalty. They are both ordinary and exceptional. Self-belief is evident, though in many cases battered. But on the whole they are unbowed. They emerge as rational and pragmatic. They survive, and as far as possible prosper, finding belonging and success in ways that make sense to them if not to the education system. They have not failed, they have been failed.

At the time of writing, new contexts have come into play. The passage of the Children Act (2001) is intended to lead to early intervention with families at risk, the development of comprehensive family plans and sustained supports to promote the general welfare of children. Similarly, the Education Welfare Board is intended to accomplish much the same in the narrower field of education. Overall, considerable resources have been and are being expended to alleviate social exclusion, educational disadvantage and early school leaving. They manifest political will and policy direction. But worryingly, these are largely set in place with neither the infrastructural arrangements nor resources to effect them, as has been the case with the Education Welfare Board. Resources are often insufficient to their task and are frequently deployed with little clarity as to what they should achieve. In turn, there is scant evaluation of school-based measures, nor indeed of many community-based initiatives either. Few measures have been subjected to thorough *independent* evaluation, other than those funded through the European Social Fund, such as YOUTHREACH. Finally, the tenacity with which the education system and schools convert measures into their own institutional currency prompts pessimism that early school leaving will be eliminated in Ireland in the foreseeable future.

The system, in other words, will continue to get high marks for effort, but low marks for effect.

Appendix 1: Observation Record

Individualised Observation Record: Notes

1. The basis of the exercise is the experienced practitioner as observer and interpreter of the participant.
- 2 The record should be compiled for a random sample of participants. Please identify all young people born between January 1st and March 31st (the year is immaterial). Nationally this should yield 25%, although there may be small local regional divergences.
3. The young people should be/have been on the programme for at least three months, so that the relationship and trust which is essential to the observation envisaged will have had a chance to develop. It is intended that the record be completed over time and not as a single set piece. It should represent a reflection and not a direct questioning of the young people.
4. The observation record should be kept for each individual young person of the sample. But this is not a questionnaire. Essentially, it is an *individualised observation record*, compiled by expert participative observers, and part of a structured preparation for subsequent interviews.
5. To protect confidentiality individual young people should not be directly identifiable. Each young person should have a number or code. Please note this number should be (i) recorded alongside the individual's name on a list kept in the centre (ii) entered on the attached observation record. For general outline of the code please see below.
6. The observation records may be completed, or contributed to, by more than one individual, especially in large centres, **under the direction of the Co-ordinator.**
7. It is intended that the completed observation sheets will be collected at the time of the interview.
8. The observation record is available on disc in a Windows format. Please ask! There are advantages in using the electronic form, as it allows for extended written inputs.
9. **Write as little or as much as you think necessary.** Use additional pages as appropriate. Where comments are invited, it is okay to say 'none'!
10. The observation should take a month, but the record may be completed at any time, ie whenever you are satisfied with the answer.
11. **It looks bigger and more intimidating than it is!!**
12. Many thanks for your assistance with this research.

Dermot Stokes

April 1997

Individualised Observation Record

A. General Information

A.1 Centre Code _____ Young Person Number _____ Gender _____

A.2 Year of birth _____ How long on YOUTHREACH? _____

A.3 When did s/he leave school?

Primary ___ 1st Year ___ 2nd Year ___ 3rd Year ___ Other ___

A.4 Was s/he a truant? _____ school refuser? _____ disruptive? _____

Other? (please specify) _____

A.5 How did s/he come to YOUTHREACH? _____

A.6 Main reason for leaving school

A.7 What was the family attitude to her/him leaving school? _____

A.8 What (if known) was the school's attitude to his/her leaving? _____

A.9 What (if any) qualifications from schooling _____

A.10 Other comments on this young person's experience of schooling? _____

B. Social and personal experience, values and beliefs

B.1 Please indicate the status of this young person's family (single parent, unmarried parents, married parents, etc) _____

B.2 Very briefly outline the family narrative if known _____

B.3 How many children in the family? _____
Comments _____

B.4 Is his/her father living with the family? _____

B.5 If so, is he employed or not? _____
Has he been employed in the last year? (if known) _____
Other comments, as appropriate _____

B.6 What is the family history of employment (if known)? _____

B.7 Is there any known evidence of sexual abuse in the family? _____
Comments, as appropriate (bearing in mind the confidentiality of this exercise) _____

B.8 Is there a history of violence in the family? _____

Comments? _____

B.9 Are there other family dysfunctions? Please comment _____

B.10 Has this young person ever lived away from home? _____

If so, why? _____

B.11 Was play (and, particularly, *mirthful* play) a part of her/his early childhood? _____

Comments? _____

B.12 Was dialogue? _____

B.13 Was affection (in your opinion)? _____

Comments? _____

B.13 What was the nature of conversation in her/his childhood and early adolescence?

B.14 Were values and morality ever discussed? If so, in what way? _____

B.15 Has any older person ever functioned as a mentor for this young person? In what context? _____

B.16 Has his/her experience been understood, worked out and built into a way of living? If so, how? _____

B.17 Is s/he a lone parent? _____
If so, what age was s/he when the first child was born? _____
Other children? _____ Ages _____

B.18 What are her/his own opinions on what is 'really important' (for example, is literacy important?) _____

B.19 What are her/his own opinions on crime and punishment in general and drugs and petty theft in particular? _____

B.20 What are her/his own opinions on 'real' (ie proper) work? _____

B.21 What are her/his own opinions on 'real' (ie proper) learning? _____

B.22 Is s/he very definite or ambivalent? _____

B.23 Is s/he apathetic? _____ If yes, about everything? _____

Comments?

B.24 Has s/he been in trouble with the police? Before the courts? **Bearing in mind that the young person's identity is protected, and the limitations of your own knowledge,** can you describe the level of any anti-social activity? _____

C. Self-image: how does the young person see her/himself, particularly in relation to

C.1 general sense of self, family, community, place, time _____

C.2 personal, family, community histories/narratives? _____

C.3 own status in family, peer group, community? _____

C.4 voice, ie having something to say, being able to say it, being heard _____

C.5 position in society; capacity to change, or interact with, society _____

C.6 relationships with authority _____

C.7 usefulness _____

C.8 her/his ability to learn _____

C.9 'intelligence' _____

C.10 physique; appearance _____

C.11 friendship _____

C.12 employability _____

C.13 social responsibility _____

C.14 weaknesses, inhibitions, hostilities _____

C.15 anger, hostilities _____

C.16 love _____

D. Narrative

D.1 What, if any, is this young person's sense of her/his family/community's history and location? _____

D.2 What, if any, is this young person's sense of her/his home's relationship to other areas (in space and time)? _____

D.3 Has s/he a projected narrative¹? Does her/his family? Community? If so, please outline

¹ A projected narrative may be implicit or explicit. The classic example is of a child growing up in a Welsh mining village - it would be presumed that s/he was going to be a miner, or a miner's wife on reaching maturity, even though in many cases other careers were chosen.

E. Expectations

E.1 How (in general) would you characterise this young person's expectations?

positive/hopeful _____ negative/pessimistic _____

neutral - passive/apathetic _____ neutral - active/'realistic' _____

E.2 What, if any, are her/his expectations of education, training? _____

E.3 How does s/he view YOUTHREACH (as work? as education? as 'something to do?', etc) _____

E.4 Does s/he expect (or not) to find employment? _____

E.5 Is this a common expectation in family or community? _____

Comments? _____

E.6 How does this shape attitude to school, YOUTHREACH Centre/CTW, possible employers, other services? _____

E.7 If the answer to E.4 is yes, as what? _____

Realistic? _____

F. Transitions

Some people perform quite adequately in steady-state ('safe') environments or occupations, but find it very difficult to adapt to new situations (eg change from primary to post-primary education, from school to work, from child to adult, etc).

F.1 Does this apply to this young person? _____

F.2 What is his/her history in this regard? _____

F.3 What supports might best assist him/her? _____

G. Capacities and interests, niches/orientations

G.1 As an informed observer, what do you see of the young person's capacities (strengths), interests, niches and orientations? (Multiple Intelligence Theory is one frame for this, but insights deriving from your own observation over time are most important)

G.2 Can you identify any sense of potential social status? Occupation? What might s/he do? Etc. _____

G.3 Is s/he a member of a club? _____

Has s/he ever been? _____

Significance? _____

G4 What achievements might be listed or projected? _____

G5 Comments? _____

H. Learning and thinking gateways

H.1 In terms of Multiple Intelligences, please indicate a general impression of the young person in the categories listed below. Please rate as follows: 1=very weak, 2=weak, 3=average for age, 4=stronger than average, 5=exceptional. (Note: it is understood that this is a matter of opinion not empirical testing).

linguistic _____

mathematical/logical _____

spatial² _____

musical _____

bodily/kinaesthetic³ _____

interpersonal⁴ _____

intrapersonal⁵ _____

environmental/naturalistic⁶ _____

Comments: _____

² An understanding of space, dimension, relationships.

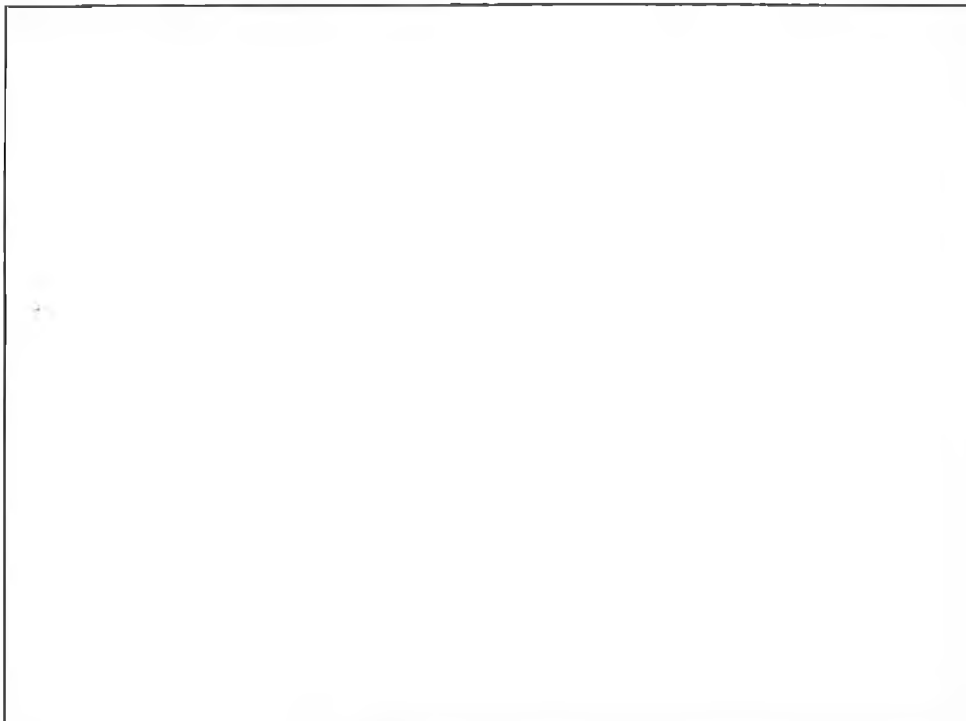
³ Sometimes known as physical intelligence; can include any sport, dance, mime and movement, eye-hand co-ordination, etc.

⁴ For example, it might be said that s/he is 'good with people' ...

⁵ Able to work alone; secure in him/herself

⁶ Notably aware of immediate and general surroundings, in both natural and built environment..

H.2 Do particular learning/teaching approaches suit this young person? If the answer is yes, please outline



Taking the above illustration, which of the following paths best describes the young person's learning path? (please tick)

ABC _____ ACB _____ BAC _____

BCA _____ CAB _____ CBA _____ Disagree/Other _____

Comment? _____

H.4 Reflection: Does s/he have a 'secret place' where s/he goes 'to be alone', to think, to escape from hassle? If possible, please describe⁷.

⁷ For example, in the YOUTHREACH video 'Leaving Early', all three contributors had such a private place. For one it was a cave with water running through it. For another it was a bedroom.

I. What blockages, difficulties, inhibitions, multiple adversities and interactions of same, exist for this young person?

I.1 Blockages _____

I.2 Learning difficulties _____

I.3 Personal difficulties _____

I.4 Inhibitions _____

I.5 Are these inhibitions learned or otherwise? _____
Comment? _____

I.6 Multiple adversities _____

I.7 How do these adversities interact? Do they multiply each other's impact? Any additional comments? _____

I.8 What is the most significant adversity? _____

I.9 Any further comments? _____

J. Needs

J.1 In your opinion what is/are this young person's most pressing education needs(s)? _____

J.2 In your opinion what is/are this young person's most pressing general needs(s)? _____

K. Which of the following ‘five levels of knowledge’⁸ best describes this young person?

Silence: Feels ‘deaf and dumb’, ‘someone has to show me’, uncomfortable with words, ‘I had to get drunk so I could tell people off’, does not engage in abstract or representational thought, little sense of the past or the future; passive, reactive, dependent, sees authority figures as all-powerful, even overpowering, accepts things as they are - not curious; sees her/himself as powerless and dependent; no confidence. Males can be unpredictable, inarticulate, sometimes violent.

Yes/No _____ Comment? _____

Received knowledge: regards words as central to knowing; learns by listening (eg to ‘those who know’); sees listening as a very active and demanding process, hears ideas and ideals as right or wrong, good or bad, true or false, black or white; assumes there is only one right answer to any question; while open to others, has little confidence in own ability to speak; easily influenced by authoritative voices; hierarchical - for example, is likely to assume that a teacher knows more than a student, having probably been taught by an even higher teacher ...; a recipient, but not a source, of knowledge; unoriginal; likes things neat and tidy. Males more likely to talk, women to listen.. Looks to others even for self-knowledge.

Yes/No _____ Comment? _____

⁸ From Belenky et al, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Basic Books, USA 1986.

Subjective knowledge: Active, not passive; sees truth as personal, private, subjectively known or intuited; still believes in 'right' answers, but truth now resides within the person and can negate answers the outside world supplies; in particular, women increasingly rely on intuitive processes; is more autonomous; less concerned with social conventions; may suspect logic, abstraction, science. Can talk of personal past in negative terms - 'I was brought up to think of everyone as better than me'...

Yes/No _____ Comment? _____

Procedural knowledge: less suspicious of authorities; will have encountered knowledgeable people who functioned as formal or informal tutors; will engage in conscious, deliberate systematic analysis; knows that things are not always as they seem to be; thinks before speaking; sees the world as reasonable; objective; can wait.

Yes/No _____ Comment? _____

Constructed knowledge: integrated; can speak with a unique and authentic voice; looks for pattern in things (eg behaviour); can move outside the given; has a narrative sense of the self, past, present, future; interested in personal history and the history of ideas; understands that truths can conflict; tolerates ambiguity and contradiction; can understand that all knowledge is constructed and that the knower is an intimate part of the known....will question a question; believes in 'real talk'..

Yes/No _____ Comment? _____

L. illustrations; anecdotes; copies of participant writing/diaries; etc (may be included as appropriate)

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

A: General

Gender – what are the local patterns re school, employment, etc?

A.6 What are the main reasons for leaving school – among the sample; in general

A.7 How do families react to their children leaving school? Comments? Patterns?

A.8 What about the schools' attitudes?

A.10 Other comments?

B: Social and personal experience, values and beliefs

B.1 What patterns did you find as regards family status? Representative?

B.2 And family narratives?

B.3 Family size – representative? Is this changing?

B.4 Do the fathers live with the families? Pattern in sample: representative?

B.5 Can we turn to patterns of employment among fathers?

A: in sample; B: among participants in general; C: in area

B.6 Ditto re families

B.7 Is there any evidence of sexual abuse in the sample? Pattern?

B.8 Ditto violence in the family; do they talk of this? How do they talk?

B.9 Other family dysfunctions? Patterns?

B.10 Lived away from home – among sample; in your experience? (Explore –how might this come about? What happens then?)

B.11 Did they (sample) experience play as children? Compare with others – patterns in area, families, groups. (NB: *mirthful* play); how do they talk about childhood, about play?

B.12 Did you find a pattern of family dialogue? How do they talk about conversation in childhood and early adolescence? Was there any? What did they describe? (Explore – how do they talk of conversation, things that were said?)

B.13 Affection (explore)

- B.14 Were values and morality ever discussed? If so, in what way? (How do they...)
- B.15 Mentors - discuss
- B.16 Have any of the sample worked out their experience? What patterns, process?
- B.17 Patterns of lone parenthood, LP and early school leaving patterns, etc. – discuss.
- B.18 Their opinions on what is ‘really important’. How do they... What do they...
- B.19 Their opinions on crime and punishment, drugs and petty theft?
- B.20 On ‘real’ (ie proper) work?
- B.21 On ‘real’ (ie proper) learning?
- B.22 Definite or ambivalent – patterns?
- B.23 Are they apathetic? Patterns?
- B.24 Offending behaviour/anti-social activity?
- C. Self-image:**
- C.1 Can we discuss their general sense of self, family, community, place, time – what’s your sense of this, from the sample and the process?
- C.2 Ditto personal, family, community histories/narratives
- C.3 Ditto own status in family, peer group, community?
- C.4 voice, ie having something to say etc – have they a voice? Do they think/know they have or haven’t? (Explore)
- C.5 Ditto position in society; capacity to change, or interact with, society
- C.6 Ditto relationships with authority (explore re school, if known)
- C.7 Do they have a sense of usefulness?
- C.8 Do they think of themselves as being able to learn? What do they think?
- C.9 Ditto ‘intelligence’
- C.10 What findings re physique; appearance? Discuss.
- C.11 Ditto friendship
- C.12 Ditto employability – do they see themselves as...
- C.13 What findings on social responsibility? Male female? Other patterns? Consistent with experience?
- C.14 Ditto weaknesses, inhibitions, hostilities
- C.15 Ditto anger, hostilities

C.16 Ditto 'love'

D. Narrative

D.1 Did you find that the young people had a sense of family/community's history and location? (How did they relate to it? Did they have sense of it as a place, with history, community? Did they feel they belonged? Etc.)

D.2 Do they have any sense of their home or community in relation to other areas (in space and time)? (Do they feel safe in another area? Would they travel to work in another community? Have they a 'geographic' sense? Etc.)

D.3 How about the idea of projected narrative? Does her/his family? Community? If so, discuss.

E. Expectations

E.1 How (in general) would you characterise their expectations?

Positive/hopeful etc (refer to OR) (Family and community?)

E.2 What expectations of education, training?

E.3 YOUTHREACH (work? as education? as 'something to do?', etc)

E.4 Expectations of employment – general question: have they? What kind? What shapes these?

E.5 Family and community attitudes to/expectations of employment

E.6 How does this shape attitude to school, YOUTHREACH Centre/CTW, possible employers, other services?

F. Transitions

F.1 What did you find in the sample in general re transitions – did they have difficulty? What's your general experience in this regard? Do you hear it said that so-and-so found it hard to change from primary to secondary? What about to here?

F.3 What supports work best? How would you suggest young people should be helped through key transitions?

G. Capacities and interests, niches/orientations

G.1 Have you any comments on capacities (strengths), interests, niches and orientations?

G.3 Membership of clubs – discuss findings from sample, general.

H. Learning and thinking gateways

H.1 Take Multiple Intelligences first. General impressions from the group? Discuss findings; also ‘How do you feel about Multiple Intelligence Theory? Also, discuss different headings.

H.2 Do particular learning/teaching approaches suit those in the sample? Your group in general?

H.3 Ways of learning – discuss ABC, CBA issue. What emerged? What do you think about this? What’s your general sense, etc.

H.4 Reflection: Do the young people have places where they go ‘to be alone’, to think, to escape from hassle? Are they reflective?

I. Blockages, difficulties, inhibitions, multiple adversities and interactions of same...

I.1 Blockages

I.2 Learning difficulties

I.3 Personal difficulties

I.4 Inhibitions

I.5 Are these inhibitions learned or otherwise?

Comment on idea of learned inhibitions?

I.6 Multiple adversities

I.7 How do these adversities interact? Do they multiply each other’s impact? Any additional comments? (Open)

I.8 What is the most significant adversity you found in the sample?

J. Needs

J.1 What did you find regarding the most pressing education needs(s)? Pulling back from the sample, from your experience, what would you say about this in general – regarding early school leavers?

J.2 Ditto re most pressing general needs(s).

K. The ‘five levels of knowledge’...

Findings in general?

Usefulness as an idea?

Finally

Who is the most remarkable participant you have had on your programme here. And why?

Appendix 3: YOUTHREACH – A Brief Outline

YOUTHREACH is an inter-Departmental initiative for early school leavers. Participants are generally aged between 15 and 20 and have left school with less than 5 Ds in the Junior Certificate, or without having attempted the Leaving Certificate. The programme operates through a number of different strands – *YOUTHREACH centres*, funded by the Department of Education and Science and managed by VECs, *Community Training Workshops* funded by FAS, and *Justice Workshops* funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and FÁS. There are 90 YOUTHREACH Centres, 47 Community Training Workshops and 6 Department of Justice Workshops catering for over 6000 participants annually. The programme is managed and monitored at national level by FAS and the Department of Education and Science. It is animated, supported and co-ordinated by National co-ordinators in the education sector and in FÁS.

YOUTHREACH – Programme structure and objectives

YOUTHREACH offers a programme of integrated general education, vocational training and work experience. Courses are full-time and are available on a year round basis. A training allowance is paid to participants, depending on age. Centres and Workshops are distributed throughout the country, mostly in disadvantaged areas, in both urban and rural communities. It is delivered in out-of-school settings.

YOUTHREACH is structured around two phases:

- a Foundation phase which seeks to enable the participant to overcome learning difficulties, develop self-confidence and gain a range of competences essential for further learning;
- a Progression phase which provides for more specific development through a range of educational, training and work experience options.

Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme. The programme provides a strong emphasis on personal development, on the core skills of literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme.

YOUTHREACH is learner-centred and experiential. There is a strong emphasis on achievement and on developing the capacities of participants, their sense of self-worth and identity. It is an integrated experience – personal, communications and vocational skills are integrated in a curricular and experiential matrix. The *main objectives* of YOUTHREACH are

- Personal and social development and increased self-esteem;
- Promoting independence, personal autonomy and a pattern of lifelong learning;
- Integration into further education and training opportunities and the labour market;
- Second-chance education and introductory level training;

- Certification relative to ability and career options;
- Social inclusion.

Certification

National certification is available at Foundation Level and Level 1 from the NCVA/FETAC. Participants are also entitled to enter Department of Education and Science examinations as mature or external applicants. Over 200 attempt all or part of the Junior Certificate each year. Increasing numbers of YOUTHREACH participants have now begun the Leaving Certificate Programme as a progression option. A wide range of other certification is also utilised in order to maximise the recording of achievement by participants.

Progression

Eighty per cent of participants progress to the labour market or to further education and training. Progression policy within YOUTHREACH is focussed on

- the promotion of access to a range of options within FAS and the Education sector. e.g. Linked Work Experience, Specific Skills Training, Bridging Measures, Traineeships; entry to Apprenticeship, with support from Bridging Measures where needed
- progression to VTOS, TEAGASC etc where eligible;
- re-entry to mainstream education - opportunities to pursue programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Applied; It is possible for trainees to progress from Level 1 or Leaving Cert Applied programmes to PLC courses, which are certified at Level 2 by the NCVA and from there to third level courses in the Institutes of Technology
- an increased focus on the networking of out-of-school centres with the mainstream system, encouraging the centres to act as brokers and mentors to facilitate successful progression;
- enhanced quality assurance in the networks through the ongoing training of trainers actions, the networking of centres, and the dissemination of good practice and learning from new developments.
- .Guidance, counselling and psychological services

District Approach

A **District Approach** is promoted, i.e. local consultation between all relevant interests to identify and prioritise area needs. This is to ensure complementarity between the work of VECs, FAS, youth services, Area Partnerships and other community providers in the delivery of out-of-school services for early school leavers. The District Approach provides for a local consultation process before any expansion of services or new provision is put in place under YOUTHREACH.

Good practice in YOUTHREACH

In the experience of YOUTHREACH, the key features of successful interventions with early school leavers are as follows:

A focus on the holistic development of the individual, set in a learning environment which is safe, structured and challenging;

a methodology/pedagogy which begins with the young person and places the emphasis on recognising and rewarding achievement rather than reinforcing failure. This is achieved through a process which is both participant-centred and participant-led, where the programme reflects trainees' identified interests and needs. Participants and staff are equal partners in the learning process;

flexibility (at all levels – management, relationships, curriculum) and programme duration based on need rather than time;

staff who facilitate and animate and are themselves open to learning.

a team approach where there is a consensus among staff on the centre's objectives and how to achieve them, with consistent practice and a culture of self-appraisal review, and staff engage in a process of discussion and reach consensus on a mission statement, a set of centre/workshop objectives and the policies and practice which should underpin them;

a strong community base and good contact with local agencies and an integrated area-based approach. This includes referral networks and close contact between YOUTHREACH and local schools, FÁS, youth, health and welfare, probation, juvenile liaison and employment services, area based partnerships and other initiatives in the community;

national certification;

- provision of longitudinal supporting services – literacy and numeracy, Advocacy/mentoring, childcare, guidance, counselling and psychological services.

Programmes are most effective if organised on the basis of a curricular matrix in which each teacher or trainer is implementing a range of trans-disciplinary curricular objectives (such as communications skills development, health and safety awareness, etc).

All YOUTHREACH centres address the issue of substance abuse as an important part of the personal development element of YOUTHREACH.

Programme Supports

A range of programme supports is in place, including staff training, guidance, counselling and psychological supports, crime awareness and SPHE programmes.

Developments

A range of developments is envisaged in the spheres of education, training and employment services, including the Education Welfare Service and the Children Act. They will significantly affect the environment in which YOUTHREACH operates. One of the most significant is the **YOUTHREACH Quality Framework Initiative**

This is the central measure in YOUTHREACH programme development. It derives from a widespread consultation between all those involved in the programme.

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