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The School Completion Programme and the Development of Human Rights Education in Ireland.

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**Title: The School Completion Programme and the Development of
Human Rights Education in Ireland.**

A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfilment of the requirements for award of Master (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies.

By

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October, 2012

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Master (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

Signature of candidate:.....

Date:.....

ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of the School Completion Programme (SCP) in helping to achieve the three goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) which are that children:

- Will have a voice in matters which affect them
- Their lives will be better understood
- They will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development

The research involved interviewing children who attend the schools involved in the Programme and have participated in the supports at some stage in their educational lives. The findings provided me with a valuable insight into how these children experience their lives and how they perceive the SCP supports on offer to them. It was found that the children's experience of the SCP supports was a positive one which helps them overcome the difficulties they encounter during their educational lives and supports them to ensure their lives do not fall into crises. In conclusion, it is argued such a support should be developed rather than curtailed particularly in the current context of globalisation and growing diversity.

The researcher argues that the SCP is a postmodern service and for that reason, my completed master's research draws on a postmodernist and social constructionist framework using an ethnographic methodology. My conclusions include; (a) that the SCP is a unique, school based service which helps our children achieve the goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010), (b) a real commitment to the development of such supports is needed by Government, and (c) the SCP is an effective service which helps reduce inequality, enhances retention and achievement and provides new ideas about how to achieve a positive climate in schools today.

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List of Abbreviations

CFA	Child and Family Support Agency
CIB	Citizens Information Board
DES	Department of Education and Science
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DECLG	Department of Environment Community & Local Government
DEIS	Delivering Equality in Schools
ESRI	Economic Social Research Institute
EWS	Educational Welfare Service
EWO	Educational Welfare Officer
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
IHRC	Irish Human Rights Commission
JC	Junior Certificate
LC	Leaving Certificate
NCO	National Children's Office
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum Assessment
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
SCP	School Completion Programme
SSP	School Support Programme
UN	United Nations
UNDHR	United Nations Declaration of Human Rights
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Chapter One

Introduction

This study is concerned with how educational policies and legislation have developed in Ireland and contends that since human rights represent ‘de facto the world’s first postmodern ideology’ (Moore and Mitchell, 2009, p.28), the outcome of these rights have been the development of postmodern services and supports in schools which cannot be fully understood using only positivist approaches. The researcher in this study makes a case for the value of using postmodernist theories when studying such services and supports, in particular the School Completion Programme.

Chapter one discusses the phenomenon that is globalisation, the effects of this on society, how it has impacted on child development theories and the emergence of postmodernism. The chapter then goes on to provide an overview of current legislation and policies in Ireland and this is followed by a discussion of the research methodology, the research question and the rationale and objectives of the research. The limitations of the research are discussed after the research recommendations and final comments which are at the end of the study.

Globalisation and Development Child Theories

The effects of globalisation brought with it worldwide societal changes and resulted in social, political and cultural changes which transformed the certainties of past life into one which became more, ‘fragmented, unpredictable and in a state of flux’ (Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p. 286). The result of this in Ireland over the past 15 years has meant significant changes in demographics occurred and as it became increasingly clear that people who experience such changes can and often do become casualties within such an insecure existence (Jordan, 2004 as cited by Daniel & Quiros, 2010), so too did the realisation of a growing need to understand diversity.

The effects of globalisation led to a revolution within the study of child development as contemporary theory and research struggled to deal with the complex biological, social, and cultural forces that were guiding it (Gauvain and Cole, 2001) and it became clear in this area that while evidence-based practices had something to offer

in some cases, this is not so in all cases and with this came a growing sympathy for a critique of its 'narrow positivist approaches' (Beddoe, 2011, p.256) emerged.

Postmodernist Theories

Postmodernist theories emerged as a result to provide us with an alternative to modernistic thought (Pease and Fook, 1999) and while it does not reject the methodologies of positivism, it simply moves us beyond the boundaries which it had set for itself (Fook et al., 2006). In this view there are 'no privileged positions and meaning is constructed through conversation and dialogue' (Pease and Fook, 1999, p.11). In this view individuals possess a number of identities across a range of social categories and provides us with the means of continual reconstruction of reality. This in turn plays a key role in the empowerment of marginalized groups, who in creating their own narratives, can then take responsibility for constructing their own identity and a 'sense of agency' (Fook, 2002 as cited in Daniel & Quiros, 2010, p.288) can be restored.

Educational Legislation and Policies in Ireland

The development of human rights education in Ireland has been guided and shaped by the United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights (1945) and the (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (See Appendix C). It cannot be denied the Irish Government have made progress in its commitment to delivering human rights in education and the recent establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and its recent announcement of the (Children) Act 2012 confirms this is so. However, concerns remain about the seriousness of Government to providing the resources needed for the development of services particularly in the current economic climate.

The recent Report of the Task Force on the Child Family Support Agency (2012) recommends that the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) be 'transferred to the new Agency from the establishment date of January 2013' (NEWB, retrieved 22/09/2012) and while the Minister of DCYA confirmed there will be no reduction in funding for the services provided by the NEWB, a major review of the School Completion Programme (SCP) is to be undertaken and it is subject to savings in the region of €2m in 2012 (DCYA, retrieved 22/04/2012).

The Research Methodology and Research Question

The research proposed in this study is a small scale ethnographic approach located within a postmodern critical, social constructionist paradigm which uses a narrative approach as its primary mode of inquiry. The research aims to investigate the effectiveness of the SCP supports in helping achieve the three goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) which broadly speaking are that children:

- Will have a voice in matters which affect them
- Their lives will be better understood
- They will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development

Rationale and Objectives of the Research

I have a strong personal interest to the research I am undertaking because I am the Project Co-ordinator of the SCP being studied here and the experience I have gained as Project Co-ordinator during the past six years, has given me invaluable first hand experience of working with the children who have benefited from the supports provided there. I have also had the pleasure of getting to know many of them and of understanding their lives better long before this study was even thought of.

The objective of this research is hopefully to make a valuable contribution to the literature, particularly since the SCP has long been recognised as being both 'innovative and cutting edge' (DES, 2005, p.3) although for that very reason, its work is not readily found in books or journals. It is hoped this research will provide us with a postmodernist evaluation of a postmodernist support from the perspective of the children who use those supports and as a result, will help to better inform our policymakers about the SCP and the supports it provides and they can in turn, make the right decisions and choices about the service being provided to our children in schools today.

It is hoped the data collected in this study may help evaluate the SCP and how the impact of this investment may have affected the quality of children's lives and to help identify where specific targeting of resources is most needed. The study may also

help uncover ideas about how a more positive climate can be achieved and have been identified by the Economic Research Social Institute's (ESRI) (2001) study as being vital in the reduction of educational inequality and the enhancement of retention and achievement in schools.

In the current context of globalisation, restricted finances and major change at Constitutional, legislative, policy and service level, it is envisioned that by giving children an opportunity to tell their stories about their experiences of the SCP supports, the data may provide some guidance about how best to proceed.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter explores the development of legislation and policies in relation to education as a result of ratification of the UNDHR (1945) and the UNCRC (1989) in Ireland. The chapter goes on to set the context of this and discusses the effects of globalisation in society and the revolution it caused in relation to developmental child theories. It is argued that despite the new social context, some have continued to try to understand the issues arising within a modernist paradigm, the effects of this are discussed as well as an introduction to the emergence of postmodernist theories which offer us a new way of thinking and an alternative approach that can be used.

This researcher contends that since human rights are recognised as the ‘worlds first postmodern ideology’ (Moore and Mitchell, 2009, p.28), education policies and legislation here have been guided by them since ratification, a postmodern critical approach is a more suitable approach when studying the effectiveness of the SCP and should be used in this study. The chapter goes on to discuss social constructionism which emerged against the backdrop of postmodernist thought and forms the philosophical basis for this research.

Human Rights Development in Ireland

When the Irish Government ratified the UNCRC in 1992 it committed itself to ‘promote and fulfil the rights of children as outlined in the articles’ (Children’s Rights Alliance, retrieved 22/04/2012). Children are now protected here by the setting of minimum standards which the Government must meet when providing healthcare, education and legal and social services to the children in this country (DCYA, retrieved 22/04/2012).

Education policies and legislation in Ireland have been guided by the UNDHR (1945) and the UNCRC (1989) since ratification and have resulted in the development of the Governments National Children’s Strategy (2000-2010), the DEIS Plan (2005), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the RAPID Programme. It also resulted in the establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs which took charge of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) and its three strands, Home School

Community Liaison (HSCL) Programme, Educational Welfare Service (EWS) and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

The National Children's Strategy 2000-2010

The National Children's Strategy, 'Our Children – Their Lives' (2000-2010) was the first comprehensive national policy document to provide for the development of services for children and its implementation was seen as a major initiative to progress the implementation of the UNCRC (DCYA, retrieved 22/04/2012). The National Children's Office (NCO) was established in 2001 to lead and oversee the implementation of the Strategy and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs was given the responsibility of overseeing its implementation and with the job of co-ordinating Government policy on children. To maintain the policy coherence achieved through its publication, the Minister was also given specific statutory delegated functions in each of the three departments involved, those of Health and Children, Education and Skills, and Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DCYA, retrieved 22/04/2012).

The Strategy's ten year plan has a vision of an Ireland 'where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential' (DCYA, retrieved 22/04/2012). The Strategy placed an onus on the statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and local communities to work together to improve the quality of all children's lives and its three national goals were:

- Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity
- Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services
- Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development (Department of Education and Science (DES), 2000-2010)

Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) (2005)

The Government's DEIS (2005) action plan for educational inclusion aims to ensure the educational needs of children and young people living in disadvantaged areas and is considered as one element of a 'continuum of interventions to address disadvantage' (DEIS, 2005, p.7). One of its core elements is the 'School Support Programme' (SSP) which brings together, and builds upon existing interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage. Its plan was implemented on a phased basis over five years to 600 primary schools (300 urban/town and 300 rural) and 150 second level schools and involved an additional annual investment of some €40m as well as the creation of about 300 additional posts across the education system generally.

Primary and post-primary schools participating in DEIS receive significant additional supports and resources including additional staffing to assist them in achieving the aims of the initiative. The level of additional supports and resources allocated to schools participating in DEIS varies according to the level of disadvantage in the school community. The level of disadvantage in urban/town schools is greater and these are classified as participating in Band 1 of DEIS (Department of Education and Skills, (DES), retrieved 16/09/2012). On its full implementation, all 150 participating DEIS school 'clusters' would benefit from the SSP and have access to a range of academic and non-academic supports for young people to be provided by the School Completion Programme (SCP) (DEIS, 2005).

The RAPID Programme

The Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development Programme (RAPID) is a Government initiative which targets 51 of the most disadvantaged areas in the country and aims to ensure that priority attention is given to the 51 designated areas by focusing State resources there (Department of Environment, Community & Local Government (DECLG), retrieved 15/09/2012).

The Education (Welfare) Act (2000)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is a body of 18 internationally elected independent experts on children's rights and it monitors progress towards implementing these rights. As a 'State Party' to the UNCRC, Ireland is required to submit periodic reports describing progress towards implementing the UNCRC in Ireland. In consideration of one of these reports the Committee noted the adoption of new legislation and policy measures including the Education (Welfare) Act, (2000) (UNCRC, retrieved 24/04/2012).

The Act was considered a progressive piece of legislation which emphasised the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention and resulted in the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) in 2002. In June 2011, the function of the NEWB transferred to the newly established office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs which planned the integration of its three strands, the School Completion Programme (SCP), the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) to work 'collaboratively and cohesively to secure better educational outcomes for children and young people' (NEWB, retrieved 22/04/2012).

Educational Disadvantage

The main objective of the Irish education system is to provide a broadly based, inclusive, high quality education that enables individuals develop to their full potential and to live fulfilled lives, as well as contributing to Ireland's social and economic development. It is recognised to have a critical role to play in nurturing children's development 'across a range of intelligences and skills and in laying the foundations for successful participation in their adult life' (DEIS, 2005, p.15).

While the majority of children receive a good quality education here, many suffer from educational disadvantage because of where they live, poverty, unemployment, poor educational attainment of parents and their socio-economic group (Citizens Information Board, (CIB) 2012). Educational disadvantage is defined in the Education Act (1998) as 'the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools'.

Educational disadvantage is demonstrated in many ways, most often in poor levels of participation and achievement in the formal education system (CIB, 2012). There is agreement that under-achievement in school can have profound consequences for children and adult life in terms of economic uncertainty, as well as personal well being, health, self-esteem and participation in family and community life (DEIS, 2005; National Children's Strategy 2000) and it was with this in mind that the three strands were put in place in schools.

The Home School Community Liaison Programme (HSCL)

The HSCL is a school based preventative strategy targeted at pupils who are at risk of not reaching their full potential in the educational system because of background characteristics that tend to adversely affect their attainment and school retention. Its underlying policy is one that seeks to promote partnership between parents and teachers to enhance pupil's learning opportunities and promote their retention in the education system and it focuses directly on the adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves (NEWB, retrieved 22/04/2012).

The Educational Welfare Service (EWS)

The EWS operates through five regional teams in which are based teams of Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs). The EWO's are located in the most disadvantaged areas and children who are out of school and who have no school place are prioritised. The Department of Education's DEIS programme, is a key policy context for the work of the NEWB and in accordance with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy, the EWS gives priority to children attending DEIS schools (NEWB, retrieved 22/04/2012).

The School Completion Programme (SCP)

The SCP has been in existence since 2002 and currently there are 124 projects nationwide comprising 299 primary schools and 112 post-primary schools. Local Management Committees in each project area put together their annual 'retention plans' which support young people between the ages of four and 18 who are at risk of

early school leaving and outlines the range of supports and interventions available to them. (Department of Education and Science (DES), 2005).

The SCP is overseen by a National Co-ordination team who advise, monitor and support the local projects and retain oversight of the area-based Retention Plans. The Local Management Committees are represented by the schools principals, HSCL, parents, and local community which manage the direction of the project and the use of its resources (NEWB, retrieved 22/04/2012). Each project has a Local Project Co-ordinator who leads the development and implementation of the programme in consultation with the national co-ordination service, under the direction of the Local Management Committee and in consultation with the school Principals (DES, 2005).

The main aims of the SCP are the retention of young people in the formal education system to completion of the Senior Cycle, or equivalent, and to improve the quality of participation and education attainment of targeted children in the education process. It also aims to offer supports in primary and post-primary schools towards the prevention of educational disadvantage and to influence in a positive way policies relating to the prevention of early school leaving in the education system (DES, 2005).

The programme is preventative in nature and young people at risk of early school leaving are supported from an early age in recognition that home school, environmental, social and economic factors influence the patterns of early school leaving. Young people's inclusion in the programme is based on an agreed set of criteria which targets those most at risk of early school leaving. A 'whole school' approach can be used in order to minimise the potential stigmatisation of young people at risk of early school leaving and supports are offered in-school, after school, out-of-school and during the holiday time in recognition of the fact that continuous support must be given to young people at risk of early school leaving. Breaking the pattern of early school leaving and educational disadvantage is key to the programme (DES, 2005). Providing educational interventions to Travellers and International Students is a priority for SCP because studies found they are at a higher risk of leaving school early, with Travellers being identified to be 4.5 times more likely to leave school compared to the overall target group (SCP, 2009-2010). International

students are also more likely to leave school early when compared with the overall target group, although 6% of Travellers who were targeted by SCP left school early compared to nearly 2% of targeted International Students demonstrating that Travellers are at a much higher risk of leaving school early while International Students, targeted by SCP, are more likely to be retained in the school system (SCP, 2009-2010).

Globalisation and Developmental Child Theories

Globalization has been described as the compression ‘of the world through technological and economic means’ (Robertson cited by Fook, 2002 as cited by Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.286) and has resulted in social, political, and cultural changes which have transformed the certainties of past life into one which has become more ‘fragmented, unpredictable and in a state of flux’ (Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.286). It has resulted in a breakdown in the organizing structures, a mass displacement of people around the world and increasing disparities between the rich and the poor.

New forms of domination, social exclusion, and social and cultural injustice have emerged amongst issues of race, ethnic identity and difference. Assumptions around blood connections or fixed cultural allegiances can no longer be assumed as people’s identities are in constant re-negotiation and issues of citizenship and immigration have taken on global significance. People who have experienced these changes, are affected by them differently depending on their resource status and unsurprisingly, can often become casualties within such an insecure existence (Jordan 2004 as cited by Daniel & Quiros, 2010). It is argued that whatever way we view the current wave of globalization, ‘the dilemma for social scientists is to make sense of what they observe’ (Douzinas, 2000, Lindgren-Alves, 2000; Mitchell, 2005 as cited in Moore and Mitchell, 2009, p.28).

Over the last two decades a ‘revolution’ in the study of human development has occurred as contemporary theory and research has struggled to deal with the complex biological, social, and cultural forces that now guide it (Gauvain and Cole, 2001). A critical component of developmental child theories is its ability to describe psychological change or development over time, as it is these that help us to organize

and integrate information into coherent, interesting, and plausible accounts of how children develop and to generate testable hypotheses or predictions about their behaviour (Hetherington, Ross, Gauvain and Locke, 2006).

There are many different kinds of theories that can be used for example, dynamic systems theories, contextual perspectives, sociocultural theory of cognitive development, ecological theory, historical approaches, ethological theory and evolutionary psychology (Hetherington *et al.*, 2006; Gauvain and Cole, 2001). While there are many theories, no one theory has the ability to account for all aspects of human development and it helps to use more than just one theory, since ‘in combination, several theories can tell us a great deal more about the causes and course of development’ (Hetherington *et al.*, 2006, p.21).

Social work for instance, is a field which is characterized by a biological, psychological and social framework in its understanding of human behaviour and development. Its current theoretical foundations are largely dominated by the psychological and systems perspectives which are argued to be, ‘essentialised, limited and uninterrogated notions of identity’ (Daniel & Quiros, 2010, p.283) and to provide us with an inadequate depiction of the new social context in which we live. The argument is made for the need of an approach to development that focuses on the complex interactions between children’s development and the cultural context in which they grow, since much of what they learn and experience is as a result of their daily culturally based experiences (Gauvain and Cole, 2001).

In the current context debates abound about which theory is more relevant and these represent a marked split among scholars, centring primarily on the structural vs. individual approach to interventions, both of which have been subject to criticism for not dealing with social change (Payne, 2005 as cited in Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.283).

Despite the new social context, some have continued to try to understand the issues arising within a modernist paradigm which it is argued fail to account for such matters as ‘change, personal innovation and creativity’ (Shekarey and Rahimi, 2006, p.65)

and are 'no longer adequate for dealing with issues of difference and belonging' (Daniel & Quiros, 2010, p.286).

Postmodernist Theories

Postmodernist theories emerged in the ideas of the French sociologists Baudrillard and Lyotard and the American social psychologist, Kenneth Gergen. In a political sense, postmodernism developed as a reaction to the failure of modern democratic society 'to deliver on its promise of justice, freedom and equality for a variety of marginalized and exploited groups' (McKay, 1994, p.34) and gained attention during the 1970's amid a growing belief that individual and group identities are informed by the political, economic, and cultural dynamics which keep them 'repressed, veiled, and unspoken' (Arrigo, 2004, p.93).

These theories depict new ways of knowing, a move away from modernistic thought and help us with the task of deconstructing present day society through 'linguistic structures and socio-historical narratives' (Crossley, 2000a as cited by Pienaar, 2010, p.26). Critical social science approaches recognise that 'the everyday struggles of people are rooted in oppressive social structures' (Healy, 1999 as cited in Daniel & Quiros, 2010:p288) which cannot be overcome without changing the systems and structures that give rise to them. It is an approach which emphasises the importance of context and difference and provides us with a rational organization of human activity (Roseneau, 1992 as cited in Daniel & Quiros, 2010).

The problem with postmodernism is that it asks us to abandon the logic we have known in the past and to embrace fuzzy logic and while it provides us with the rationale for insisting on free and open encounters, it fails to tell us how these will result in anything other than a 'discourse mediated by abstract reason' (McKay, 1994, p.34). Critical theories are criticised for going so far, but not far enough in helping to provide us with a 'rational organization of human activity which promotes man's emancipation from slavery' (Röhle, 2005, p.406). Benton and Craib contend that the 'problem with trying to abandon vast and complex bodies of thought is that it cannot be done' (2011, p.174).

Postmodern Critical Approach

In the context of globalisation a postmodern critical approach is proposed to offer us a more useful paradigm within which to respond and one which succeeds to interweave with other perspectives to help guide practice. It is an approach which does not reject the methodologies of positivism but instead moves us beyond the boundaries which it set for itself in the production and articulation of knowledge (Fook, White and Gardner, 2006). It rejects the dualist thinking of modernist approaches which construct the world in binary opposites such as, 'worker/client, black/white, middleclass/working class, man/woman and where one member of the pair tends to be more privileged than the other' (Ife, 1999 as cited by Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.288).

In this view, 'there are no privileged positions and meaning is constructed through conversation and dialogue' (Pease and Fook, 1999, p.11). It recognises that individuals possess a number of identities across a range of social categories and that the continual reconstruction of reality can play a key role in the empowerment of marginalized groups, who in creating their own narratives can take responsibility for constructing their own identity, thus allowing for the restoration of a 'sense of agency' (Fook, 2002 cited in Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.288).

It is argued that postmodern critical theories offer us the core principles we need to establish interventions that are more 'culturally accessible, enabling and relevant in a multicultural society' (Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.283) including 'discourse analysis, consciousness raising, giving voice, sharing power and reflexivity and transformation' (Daniel & Quiros, 2010, p.284). Its foundational aim, which is especially important for members of marginalised groups, is to raise people's awareness of where their beliefs come from and how these are used to keep them in their current situation. Its goal is to create a space where 'multiple ways of knowing and responding are welcomed' (Weiss as cited in Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.288) and its deconstruction process involves 'a constant questioning and dismantling of implicit or explicit notions of presence' (Benton and Craib, 2011, p.170). It recognises that language is the place where we create our sense of self and provides us with the normalizing truths which help shape our lives and reality (Fook 2002 as cited in Daniel and Quiros, 2010).

Central to this approach is the need to recognise how the ‘voice of marginalized groups have been silenced, suppressed or unrecognized’ (Ladison-Billings and Tate 1995 as cited in Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.288) and its key goal is the amplification of their individual and collective voices, since without these our interventions and research questions may ‘fail to capture the needs or concerns of marginalized groups’ (Goodman *et al* 2004 as cited in Daniel and Quiros, 2010, p.288).

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism emerged against the backdrop of postmodern thought, and is a multidisciplinary approach to human inquiry which takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world in which we live. It is argued when social psychology is informed by a constructionist view of knowledge it expands and enriches the scope of the field and is an approach which does not completely rule out empirical research but substantially refigures it (Gergen, 1996)

A social constructionist approach argues that understanding of the world is historically and culturally specific and our knowledge and understanding of it is directly related and only relevant to the period and context the knowledge was generated in. Therefore, our understanding of the world is dependent upon the social, economic, and political context of the particular culture that the knowledge was created in (Burr, 1995 as cited in Pienaar, 2010, p.29).

Social constructionism holds that our knowledge is sustained by social processes and knowledge is constructed between people through their daily interactions in the course of their social lives. The processes of social interaction are informed by the language people use and the knowledge created by them in the social interactions that occur between them and cannot be understood only through objective observations of the world (Burr, 1995 as cited in Pienaar, 2010, p.29). Faux contends that while the value of experiments and quantification should not be discounted, the realities of peoples lives are widely varied and ‘to reduce them to a formula or numbers in a table is to extract from them their meaning and complexity’ (2005, p.31).

Traditional psychology holds that language only conveys our thoughts and emotions while social constructionism argues one is born into a social and cultural context and

it is there that we learn about the constructs of the particular context through the acquisition of language. Language provides us with a framework for understanding and it is far more than a verbal act and acquires its meaning from its use within human interaction and exchange (Pienaar, 2010). It was Saussure (1959) who found the hard scientific evidence that language was a 'self-enclosed system of contrasts' (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997, p.180) and that people are not just the speakers of their language, but are 'spoken by their language' (Benton and Craib, 2011, p.164).

According to Reissman, 'Narrative enquiry in the human sciences is a 20th century development and is a field that has realist, postmodern and constructionist strands to it' (2005, p.393), has 'penetrated almost every discipline and profession' (2005, p.393) and provides us with a 'forestructure' through which we can make ourselves understood (Gergen, 1996 cites Gergen and Gergen, 1998). It is argued the correct way to understand language is as a differentiated system, within which individuals are suspended (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997).

Critique against social constructionism centres on its postmodern grounding which challenges the traditional views, although in recent years, the influence of the more extreme versions of postmodernist scepticism has declined, and 'its legacy in the form of the research focus on language and culture and the popularity of constructionist approaches to social problems remains strong' (Benton and Craib, 2011, p.175).

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter discusses the use of an ethnographic, qualitative approach and Roscoe and Madoc Jones (2009) '*Critical Social Work Practice a Narrative Approach*' in this study. It discusses the set of techniques proposed in this methodology and provides a diagram of the model proposed and its three key stages of, engagement and rapport, critical questioning and re-authoring conversations which guide the narrative model and discusses each of these stages. The chapter then goes on to discuss the 'unique outcomes' which can so often emerge and how it is that these can provide us with the scaffolding needed to '...re-author an alternative story/plot' (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7).

The research design and procedure follows Roscoe and Madoc Jones (2009) paper and demonstrates how the research participant's perspectives were sought and subsequently documented. The chapter discusses the research methods, the location, the research participants and how Roscoe and Madoc Jones, (2009) three key stages were achieved. The method of collection of data is discussed as well as the assurances that were given in relation to confidentiality and this is followed by a discussion about ethics particularly in relation to children.

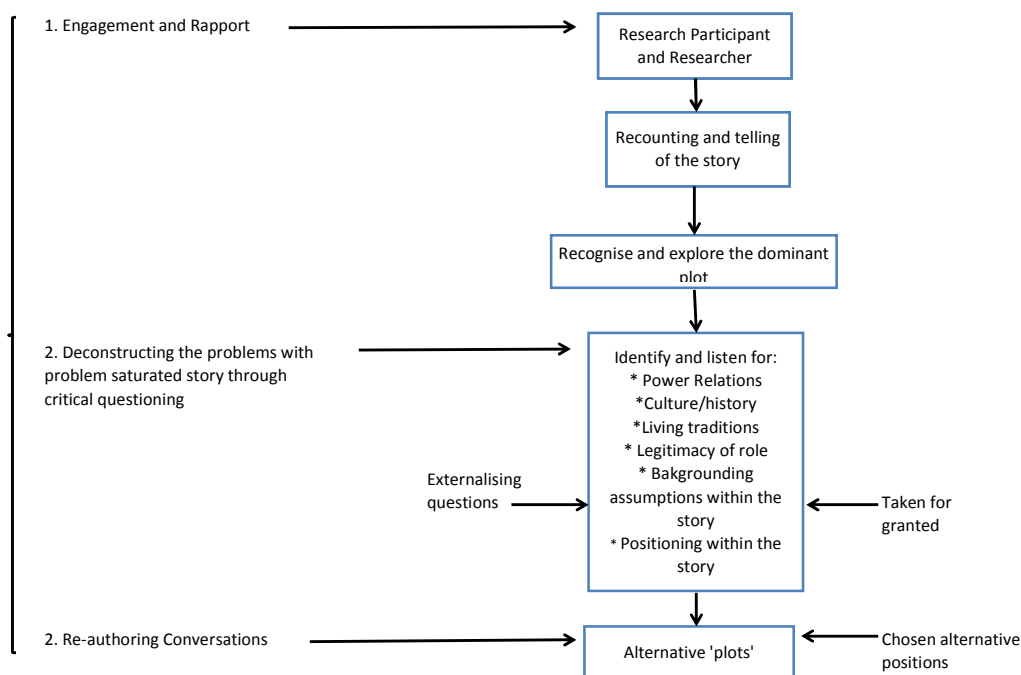
The research in this study is a small scale ethnographic approach located within a critical postmodern, social constructionist paradigm which uses a narrative approach as the primary mode of inquiry. An ethnographic approach is considered appropriate as it is 'grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting' (Delamont and Atkinson, 1995; Spindler and Spindler, 1982 as cited in Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2009, p.188). It is an approach which draws on a diverse range of research techniques including the analysis of spoken discourse and narratives, while this usually involves making the strange familiar, 'the task of a school ethnographer is to make the familiar strange' (Delmont and Atkinson, 1995; Spindler and Spindler, 1982 as cited in Gordon *et al*, 2009, p.188).

The research is qualitative in nature as it is intended to gain a deep insight into the perspectives of the research participants, derived primarily from its inductive approach and its focus on specific situations or people (Maxwell, 2005 as cited in Fitzgerald, 2009). It is argued that since peoples realities are many, to ‘reduce them to a formula or numbers in a table is to extract from them their meaning and complexity’ (Faux, 2005, p.31).

Karen D. Roscoe and Iola Madoc Jones’s (2009) *social constructionist* inquiry presents the philosophical basis for qualitative research as well as a set of techniques and methods for conducting research based on the implications of a new paradigm and is a practice which is located within a ‘seekers after meaning paradigm in Howe’s (1980) taxonomy of social work theories’ (Roscoe and Jones, 2009, p.5).

A critical practice stance requires us to practice in ways which ‘challenge domination, exploitation and oppression’ (Fook, 2002 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.10) and its hallmark requires a preventative response which ‘opens up the possibility for change’ (Stepney, 2008 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.10). The use of a narrative approach allows researchers to become raisers of consciousness which in turn, helps people identify how dominant discourses may influence their ideas, feelings and thoughts, and how the re-interpretation of these can provide them with ‘an opportunity for re-construction, change and action’ (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.11).

The approach used in this study is concerned with a subjective view about how the social world is understood and the model proposed draws on three key stages, which are, engagement and rapport, critical questioning and re-authoring conversations to guide the narrative model. The following diagram illustrates this process and outlines of the axioms that are inherent in Roscoe and Madoc Jones (2009) social constructionist inquiry which have influenced the shaping and development of this research.



For Roscoe and Madoc Jones, the achievement of the first stage of this approach requires engagement and rapport skills which are viewed as vitally important since, ‘it is the quality of the relationship that stands out as being the most important determinant’ (2009, p. 7). The researcher already knows the research participants, albeit at different levels, are on a first name basis with the researcher and know the researcher works in the school to help and support the students there. Prior to asking each research participant to agree to the interview, the researcher was sure to *hear* each research participant’s story fully before considering whether a narrative approach would be purposeful, thus fulfilling the important requirements of ‘humanistic qualities of unconditional positive regard and empathy’ (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.6).

Stage two, is a key part of a narrative approach and uses ‘externalising conversations’ to deconstruct the ‘problem saturated story’ (Roscoe & Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7). The researcher’s aim is to encourage the research participant to understand themselves and their problems as being separate and questioning is used which helps to ‘undermine the sense of failure that can often develop from problems’ (White and Epston 2005 as cited in Roscoe & Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7).

Questioning techniques are used to explore how cultural and social expectations may have impacted upon the research participants and are referred to as, 'mapping the effects of the problem' (White, 2007 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.8). 'Landscape of identity' questions capture a persons 'desires, wishes and preferences' (Morgan, 2000 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.8) and 'landscape of action' questions explore the events or actions that 'took place before or after and can be linked to the unique outcome' (Morgan, 2000 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.8).

The process of mapping and identifying unique outcomes encourages re-authoring conversations which can 'thicken an alternative plot' (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p10). Once this is achieved, these can then be examined and critiqued and enable exploration and surface of 'taken for granted assumptions' (Jessup and Rogerson, 1999 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7) which help to sustain the problem.

Stage three is the re-authoring of conversations which allow people to link events of their lives 'into sequences, through time according to alternative perspectives on events' (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p7). The researcher looks out for alternative narratives which can be found in 'unique outcomes' and defined as an 'aspect of a person's lived experience that lies outside the dominant story' (White, 1989 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7). The researcher explores the unique outcomes since it is these which 'act as a bridge between a dominant narrative (problem saturated story) and the re-authored alternative story' (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7).

The researcher also looks out for instances where the problem was less influential, and can often stand out in contrast to the dominant story. The researcher is careful not to miss unique outcomes which can go unnoticed when people place less significance on them because they do not support their problem saturated story (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009). The themes or patterns of 'unique outcomes' that emerge provide us with the 'scaffolding' which helps to 're-author an alternative story/plot' (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7). Unique outcomes provide 'a conduit for exploring identity' (White, 1989 as cited in Roscoe and Jones, 2009, p.7)

and allow for the exploration of what these mean in terms of a persons 'desires, intentions preferences and beliefs' (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.8).

The Research Design and Procedure

The research in this study is a small scale ethnographic approach located within a critical postmodern, social constructionist paradigm which uses a narrative approach as the primary mode of inquiry. The research design and procedure follows Roscoe and Madoc Jones (2009) paper and demonstrates how the research participant's perspectives were sought and subsequently documented.

The School Completion Programme

The SCP in this research includes a cluster of four large urban schools, one post-primary and three primary schools, each are located within a RAPID area and are classified as Band 1 DEIS. The Local Management Group follows SCP Guidelines in Best Practice (2005) and provide supports to the children who attend their schools in a variety of ways including literacy/numeracy supports, attendance tracking, one-to-one mentoring, transfer programmes, meal provision, sport and leisure activities, music/dance/drama and holiday programmes, some of the supports are aimed specifically at the targeted children only while others like basketball coaching, computer classes and dance and drama are aimed at the whole school.

Each of the schools involved in the Programme have been affected by globalisation and currently, just under 40% of the total student body are international students, there are a significant number of children attending the schools from the Traveller community and the majority of the children who live in the local RAPID area attend the schools.

The Research Participants

The purposive sampling method was used to identify particular cases that illustrate a particular feature that is of interest to the study (Strydom and Delport, 2002 as cited in Pienaar, 2010, p.43). Each research participant was asked if they would be willing to participate and contribute to all aspects of the interview schedule and if they would be comfortable with the interview surroundings.

The narratives of the research participants will form the basis of this ethnographic study as it is through their understandings and perspectives regarding the SCP supports and services that one gains a clearer insight into how it may have helped them to remain in school.

The participants were chosen based on certain criteria, for example, having completed their Junior Certificates, being more than 16 years of age and no more than 18 years of age, and in either 5th or 6th year in this post-primary school. They each had experience of the SCP support at some stage of their educational lives and had experience of their own 'problem saturated stories' which had made them more vulnerable to risks such as early school leaving.

Eight students were asked to participate in the study, four male and four female, although one of the male participants was sick at the time of the interviews and could not participate. Of the seven research participants interviewed, five were sixth year (three male and two female) and two were fifth year (female). Each research participant was assured their contribution to the research study was welcomed, their anonymity would be upheld at all times and it was explained that it was their particular understanding of how the SCP supports may have helped them to remain in school that would form the basis of the data analysis.

The researcher asked the Principal about parental permission which was not needed in this instance because the research participants were senior students in the school. Prior verbal agreement and consent was obtained from the Principal and was followed up with a letter outlining the research study, design and arrangements and assurances were given that the least amount of disruption would be caused and the confidentiality of the school would be maintained throughout (See Appendix 1) (Wisker, 2009).

The researcher was conscious that, in the case of children, for consent to be valid, it has to be informed consent and the onus is on the researcher to show the necessary steps have been taken to ensure the person whose consent is being sought, has been given the 'requisite information and has been supported in developing an adequate understanding of the research' (DCYA, April 2012, p.2). On their agreement to participate, they were invited by letter to participate in the study and each received a

plain language statement (See Appendix 2) explaining their unique contribution, the research design and the arrangements for the storage of the acquired data analysis.

Piloting provided the research participants and the researcher with a shared understanding and by communicating with them in their natural setting, enabled the researcher to acquire contextual data and to use tacit knowledge in the analysis, the 'purpose of the qualitative research interview is to understand themes and the lived daily world from the subjects own perspectives' (Kvale, 1996 as cited in Fitzgerald, 2010, p.31). To achieve stage one – engagement and rapport - the researcher used a preliminary meeting to help because not all of the research participants were equally familiar with the researcher or the SCP office. The preliminary meeting was arranged and each research participant was briefed on the aims of the research and provided an opportunity for them to get to know the researcher better, these lasted approximately fifteen to twenty minutes.

The ethnographic interviews took place within the school grounds of the post-primary school and were located in the SCP office which conforms with child protection issues and offers a safe place where the researcher can engage in one-to-one research with the children and where they 'are always in sight of others' (DCYA, April 2012, p.5).

A narrative approach requires the incorporation of creative means to engage the child in storytelling (Freeman, Epston and Lobovits, 1997 as cited in Pienaar, 2010) and for the purpose of this research, the researcher used photographs of memorable occasions in school for the research participants, for example, the SCP summer/basketball camps group/class trips/outings. The use of the photographs was a great success and provided them with a source of fun and laughter which helped to build engagement and rapport and helped them to remember when they were younger and to begin to recount their stories.

The second stage of the research means the use of externalising questions and the researcher listens carefully for taken for granted assumptions in relation to identity as outlined by Roscoe and Madoc Jones (2009, p.8) study and are as follows:

- Power relations
- Culture/history
- Living traditions
- Legitimacy of role
- Backgrounding assumptions

The researcher will also listen carefully for incidences of when the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) goals were achieved and these are:

- Children will have a voice in matters which affect them
- Children's lives will be better understood
- Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development

Data collection

The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews which took place between May 14th and May 25th 2012, each lasted approximately 45 minutes.

When asking questions the researcher was careful to take into account the developmental stage of each of the research participants and to not ask questions that may have been too technical or that might cause them any upset. For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality all names in this study have been changed.

The data was recorded using a digital voice recorder, each of the research participants responses were subsequently transcribed by the researcher in their entirety. This transcription is an essential aspect of the research process and is 'an important inducement to the production of ideas, as well as to their communication speech event' (Fitzgerald, 2010, p.35). It is intended to portray the research participant's understandings and perspectives regarding the SCP supports in the schools included in this SCP.

Stage three, the process of re-authoring of conversations allowed people to link events of their lives into sequences through time, the themes or patterns of unique outcomes that emerge can act as a bridge between the dominant narrative and the re-authored

alternative story/plot (Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009) and is a conduit for exploring identity.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings and each story was discussed individually within the framework provided and based upon its three key stages of engagement and rapport, critical questioning and re-authoring conversations.

Ethics

In its report (April, 2012), the Minister of DCYA stated that while research has the potential to greatly improve children's lives by strengthening the evidence base for policy development and service delivery, it also carries some risks and it is critical, 'that our pursuits to better understand our children, should never compromise them' (DCYA, April 2012, p.v). Ethics in research and are concerned with considerations about safety, protection, rights and aims to ensure that 'the research is not undertaken for harmful or evil purposes and that no harm comes to anyone or any living thing which research is carried out' (Wisker, 2009:p205).

The researcher was conscious that while there are basic ethical principles and a number of core ethical concepts which arise in all research, in relation to children's research, 'a number of additional issues need to be addressed' (DCYA, April 2012, p.1) and include, child protection principles, legal obligations and policy commitments in relation to children and a child-centered, inclusive approach to research.

The researcher also realised there is a responsibility to 'provide whatever assistance is required to ensure successful participation' (DCYA, April 2012, p.5) and used preliminary meetings to help with this process. The researcher could check the research participants were comfortable with the interview being audio-recorded, re-assured them of their anonymity and confidentiality at all times, that the digital voice recorder would be stored safely and securely throughout and the data would only be used for the purposes of the research.

The research was carried out in accordance with the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011) (DCYA, April 2012) and when it came to sensitive topics, did not consider them to be high risk but put adequate protection measures in place (DCYA, April 2012). The researchers experience in working with children in school means there was ‘access to relevant expertise where necessary, is a pre-requisite for ensuring child safety and well-being in the research process’ (DCYA, April 2012, p.4) and meant the researcher could call on the school Guidance Counsellors that they would be available for the research participants if anything of a sensitive nature came up.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings and in this chapter each story is individually analysed using Roscoe and Madoc Jones (2009) framework and its three key stages of engagement and rapport, critical questioning and re-authoring conversations. The dominant plot that is in each problem saturated story is noted, the unique outcomes that emerge are highlighted after each stage two and a brief summary of the findings is provided at the end.

Stage One – Engagement and Rapport

The first stage of engagement and rapport was achieved with each of the research participants through the use of the preliminary meeting and with the use of photographs prior to each interview and for the purpose of keeping within the word count here, is not mentioned further.

Story one: Thomas

The Problem Saturated Story

Thomas's moved here from Latvia with his father, step-mother and three younger brothers to live and for his parents, to find work. When he came here, he was thirteen years of age and at a difficult developmental stage of his life, he had left his other family members and his friends in Latvia, he knew nobody here and while he had some knowledge of the English language, he found the local dialect difficult to understand.

Dominant plot: Weak positioning within the story (uncertainty, developmental stage), living traditions (new culture/traditions/language).

Stage Two – Deconstruction and Critical Questioning

When Thomas moved here, he had left his other family members and friends in Latvia and '...I played [basketball] all summer alone'. He remembered finding the regional dialect difficult to understand, '...it was different to the English I had learned in Latvia...everyone was speaking so fast...so at the start I had to get used to it...'.

On his first day of school he was faced with the usual challenges a first year student must overcome, such as getting to know the new school, the teachers/staff, learning about timetables, lockers etc., however he also had the additional problems of not knowing the language or having any friends.

Basketball was an important feature in his school and home life in Latvia, and he could remember when he had met the SCP Basketball Coach on his first day of school. When his mother had told him there was a Basketball Coach in the school during the summer, it had helped before he even began there, ‘...I was so excited...I was training for that a lot over the summer’.

Stage Three - Re-authoring Conversations and Unique outcomes

Making the school team in 1st year meant a lot to him, ‘I was so happy...’, and opened up opportunities for him to make new friends, ‘...then I made friends...a lot of friends...’. As his confidence grew so too did his network of friends, ‘...well other guys from my own country...they all played so I got to know them all...and because I was good at it...I got to talk to other people and got to know them as well’. His team’s success was a source of great pride for him, ‘...we won the [Provincial’s] for two years’ and his only complaint was they didn’t get to play more matches ‘I think we played too little matches...we should have played more’.

His commitment to basketball training helped him to stay in school on days when he might otherwise have gone home because it took place three evenings per week and he explained, ‘...yea, it helped me to stay in school for longer...the training is after school, sometimes I would think of going home for a half day, but if training is on that day...so there’s no point...so I just stay in school...’.

His father in particular had always encouraged him to go to college, although he had only recently decided that he wanted to go there. His decision was influenced by his uncles experience of looking for work in Latvia, ‘...I don’t want to go back to Latvia...my uncle has been trying to find a job for 2 years...but this hasn’t happened yet...’.

He knows the college he wants to go to, the course he wants to take and the points he needs to get there. He is confident he can get the points he needs, ‘...I’m doing 4 higher level subjects...so I should get the points...I just have to worry about maths and English...’. He intends to continue with his basketball training when he goes to college, ‘yea...once I’m in college...I’ll just keep on training’.

Story Two: John

The Problem Saturated Story

John and his twin sister are the youngest of three children and he was considered to be the quieter more sensitive twin. His parents separated when he was seven years old and he lived with his mother, her partner and his twin sister. He was born in a rural area and attended the local primary school there. The transfer into first year was difficult for him and caused him a lot of stress. During that year his mother died after an illness and his older sister became his legal guardian, he moved with his twin sister to live with her and her young family.

John was targeted for SCP supports from the beginning of his first year and had a locker space in the SCP office, weekly mentoring and a daily lunch voucher. In fifth year he told his family and friends he was gay.

Dominant plot: Weak positioning within the story (uncertainty, parental separation, death of close family member, poverty, sexuality).

Stage Two - Deconstruction and Critical Questioning

He remembered returning to school after his mother had died and that the weekly mentoring helped him, ‘yeah...livin with my sister, buried my Mam...but you’s really helped me through it...’. The daily lunch voucher also helped him at this time, ‘...coz my sister didn’t have much money to support us and her kids too...it helped a lot...’

He worried alot throughout second and third year, ‘I was scared...bit scared...but I still had the sessions...up to third year...’. He could remember calling into the SCP office, ‘...I would just pop in for a minute or two for a chat...and to see what was happenin and all...’. His move into fifth year brought many changes for him and

caused him to worry, ‘...massive change...all separated...but I went to [Student Support Worker]...the two of us talked about it’.

Re-authoring Conversations and Unique outcomes

However, his confidence began to grow in fifth year, ‘...yea, bit more new friends than from before...all the higher levels dropped down to ordinary’. He no longer had weekly mentoring but he realised this helped him, ‘...but you have to move on and all that...yeah, helped me to feel more grown up and take more responsibility and all that...’. He became less inclined to drop in for chats because ‘...in fifth and sixth year... you don’t have time anymore...’

At the end of fifth year he told his family and friends that he was gay, ‘yeah I did...I came out and all that...’. He was pleased with this decision, ‘...yeah, I was way more happier and all...not depressed anymore...happier all the time, every day...’. The SCP supports had helped him with this, ‘...I think you’s helped me...coz you always encouraged me to talk...I always wanted to say it...I was scared and you’s always talked to me...over the summer, I just said it...I was sick of hiding it...’.

His relationship with his teachers changed after this and they could see he was happier, ‘...yea all the teachers...when my sister was at the [parent-teacher] meetings...he is like a new person...’. His teachers supported him, ‘...they don’t put us down...they are really good teachers...’.

He made stronger female friendships, ‘yeah...well the girls...I became closer to the girls...’ although this was not the case with his male friends, ‘...but the boys just kind of faded away...’. He did not worry too much about this though, ‘...but it doesn’t bother me anyway coz I know I won’t see them after school...I don’t care...as long as I have the girls it doesn’t bother me...’.

John realised he had progressed a lot since first year and it made him happy to think of this, ‘yea, a big jump...I took small steps at a time...and here I am today...’!

Story Three: Theresa

(The research participants hereafter attended the local primary schools included in this SCP and participated in the whole school computer classes, basketball coaching and transfer programmes there).

The Problem Saturated Story

Theresa's parents and older sister left their home and other family members in Africa to travel to England in search of employment, '...my dad was offered a job...' and shortly after this Theresa and her two younger sisters were born. Later, her father became unemployed and her family moved again, this time to live here in the hope of finding work for both her parents. She attended the local primary school and participated in the SCP supports there. Both her parents found work when they came here although her father is currently unemployed, '...he's still looking for a job'. Her mother works as a nurse although this causes her some distress, '...coz she works all night and sleeps during the day...we don't get to see her much...'.

Dominant plot: Weak positioning within the story (uncertainty, unemployment, new culture/traditions), backgrounding assumptions (childminding and housework).

Stage Two – Deconstruction and Critical Questioning

Theresa remembered enjoying the SCP computer classes and how they helped to build her self-confidence in her computer skills, '...when I got to [senior primary] I learned about typing and all...'. She had good memories of the SCP Basketball Coach there, '...yea...he was really funny...' and that this had helped to build her self-confidence in her basketball skills, '...yea...I was pretty good at taking shots at basketball...'. She did not attend the basketball or summer camps held in the school, 'no...because my parents needed help with minding the younger ones...'.

Theresa made many friends in primary school and this helped her when she transferred to the post-primary school, '...I had my friends when I came to [post-primary school]...everyone knew each other...'. Her confidence in her basketball skills meant she could participate in a basketball demonstration in school with her friends, '...we had an idea and everyone came to watch'.

She did well in school until recently when she began to struggle academically, ‘...when I came to fifth year, the pressure was on...I was doing really well, but now the pressure is too much...and I’m starting to not do well...I need a bit of time off’. She worries about her grades and her parents do too, ‘yea they are...coz I always do well’. She is frustrated because, ‘...when it was the Junior Cert they say you have to work really hard, then when you go into fifth year, they say your Junior Cert doesn’t matter...your Leaving Cert is what matters’. Her friends tell her, ‘...you shouldn’t waste time in fifth year’.

Her family in Africa would like her to return there although she would like to finish her education here first. She knows she wants to go to college although she is uncertain about where, ‘...I cant really find one that does what I want...I’m not really sure yet...’. When the researcher asked about her younger sisters, she explained she is not sure about her future here at all, ‘yea...I don’t know...we don’t really know if we are going to be here or not in September...’.

Stage Three - Re-authoring Conversations and Unique outcomes

Unique outcomes emerged for her beginning in sixth class when she decided to change herself, ‘...when I was in primary I was a very quiet kid...I wasn’t very chatty...but when I got to [post-primary] I thought I better start to get chatty’.

As she went through post-primary school her self -confidence became stronger and she realises now, ‘...in first to third year you try to be cool...when you get to fifth year you don’t need to try so hard...’.

Her parents support her decision to go to college, ‘...yea they think I am really smart and should do something like law...’ although she has the self-confidence to say, ‘...I’m not really interested in law though...I want something that helps me get out of bed...’.

She knows that she wants to do her Leaving Certificate examination and that she would like to do something creative after this, ‘...like a fashion designer...I thought about taking a few years off to put a portfolio together...’.

Story three: Tara

The Problem Saturated Story

Tara moved from her home in Nigeria with her mother and younger sister when she was 6 years of age, when they arrived here they had no knowledge of the English language and no 'papers' (immigration). They met up with her father when they arrived here and lived in a hostel while they waited for their papers to come through. Shortly after, they were moved to a hostel in the west of Ireland where Tara began school, afterwards, when their papers had come through, they were moved again to the south of the country where they moved into a house and she went to school. She remembered that she had liked living there, '...it was good, I had good friends...'.

Her family moved again to live in this area when she was 9 years of age although she was uncertain about the reason why this had happened, '...I don't know...my Dad said my Mum's sister was living there...'. Her younger brother and sister were born after this and not long after this, her parents separated. Her father stays in touch although she is not happy about this, '...but we don't want anything to do with him...'. When Tara's mother goes out to work she helps to take care of the younger children and with the housework, '...yea, we mind the kids and everything...while she has to go to work...'.

Dominant Plot: Weak positioning within the story (uncertainty, parental separation, new culture/history/language), living traditions, backgrounding assumptions (childminding and housework).

Stage Two – Deconstruction and Critical Questioning

Tara had made strong relationships when she was in primary school and these helped her when she transferred into first year, '...I thought it was going to be scary...but it wasn't coz all my friends were here...'.

She continued to play basketball throughout first year although in second year she began to struggle academically and when the workload became too much for her, she quit playing. Maths in particular was a worry for her and she felt the need to focus more on her studies. Focusing on her studies helped her when it came to sitting her Junior Certificate (J.C.) examinations, '...coz I studied a lot...and I felt confident'.

She decided to skip Transition Year (TY) because, 'I don't know...I wanted to get finished...I didn't see the point...'.

Re-authoring Conversations and Unique outcomes

Although fifth year was difficult for her, '...the work is very hard', she was happy with the changes it had brought for her, '...I was happy as well coz I got new teachers and my maths is starting to improve now...' and she liked her new class, '...yea we all get along, there are TY's from last year and we all get along...'.

Tara plans to sit her L.C. examinations and then going to college and she has discussed this with her mother who is supportive of her decision.

Her family have no plans to move or return to Africa, '...yea, the plan is to stay on...' and she is hopeful her younger siblings will have the opportunity to attend college here. She knows what she wants to do after college and plans to travel to America and '...hopefully ...get a job there...'.

Story five: Megan

(Hereafter the research participants live in the local RAPID area).

The Problem Saturated Story

Megan is the eldest of two girls, her parents separated when she was young and she has lived with her mother and younger sister ever since. Her mother is a chronic alcoholic and this affected her attendance at school at different times. The tradition in her family is one of early school leaving. While she was in primary school, she did reasonably well despite her attendance being a cause of some concern. She participated in the SCP supports there and when she transferred to the post-primary school she was targeted for SCP attendance support. When she was in third year she became quite ill and in fifth year she had her baby.

Dominant plot: Living Traditions (RAPID area), Weak positioning within the story (parental separation, alcohol abuse, illness, teenage pregnancy, poverty, illness), backgrounding assumptions (tradition of early school leaving).

Stage Two – Deconstruction and Critical Questioning

She remembered the transfer programme had helped prepare her for the move into first year, '...yea, with our subjects and all that...it was good though...I was really

nervous going into first year...all the different things to get used to'. Although in third year her health deteriorated, 'I didn't know what was goin' on...a shock...doctors didn't know what was happenin either...I thought I was having a heart attack...!'. She was diagnosed with panic attacks and referred to counselling to help her with this and it helped when she understood what was happening to her, '...it was kind of got to do with stress and worrying...when I let it out I was grand...'. The techniques she learned helped keep her calm and relaxed and '...not to overwork...keep doing the same things...catch up on stuff...'.

Fifth year brought positive changes for her, '...yea it was good...' and she made new friends although during fifth year she became pregnant, she remembered calling into the SCP office at that time, '...me and my Mam didn't know what was happening...we came to you...I wanted to go to school'. The SCP was able to refer her to the Teen Parent Support Programme and this helped her throughout her pregnancy, '...yea that was because of you...that support was great...'. She continued to attend school during her pregnancy and used the SCP office for her locker, lunch vouchers and as a place to go if she needed to talk.

Re-authoring Conversations and Unique Outcomes

Megan returned to school after her baby was born although this was not easy for her, 'it was hard to leave my baby...'. She was determined to continue with her studies and to sit her Leaving Certificate examinations, '...I wanted my education...you'se helped me with that...I need my leaving cert...'.

She was so proud of herself when she received her mock examination results, 'I passed my mocks... even though I missed three or four months of school'. She believed that achieving her Leaving Cert is key to her future, 'I want my education...I need my leaving cert...!'.

Relationships with her teachers changed after she had her baby, 'yea, they gave me the work I needed to catch up on', she recalled, 'yea, I get treated the same as all the other students in the class...in a way its all right...but in a way, I am a Mam...they still talk to me like I'm a kid...in a way I am still a kid...'.

She wants a different life for herself and her baby, 'I'm so proud.... I just want a good background and a good life for us...'. She recognises that different people in her life helped her to make the decision to stay in school, '...you'se, my Mam, my friends, my baby...'.

Story six: Cathy

The Problem Saturated Story.

Cathy is the youngest of two girls and is from a settled Traveller family, she has lived with her paternal grandmother since she was a very young child although she had spent some time in care prior to this. Both her parents were chronic alcoholics and her father was also addicted to drugs. The tradition in her family is one of early school leaving. She participated in the SCP supports in primary school and when she transferred to the post-primary school she was targeted for SCP support in first year and had weekly mentoring, daily lunch vouchers and her locker space in the SCP office. At the end of second year her father was sent to prison and during the school summer holidays that year he died tragically there.

Dominant plot: Living traditions (RAPID Area, Traveller family), weak positioning within the story (death of close family member/parental separation, in care, alcohol/drug abuse, poverty), backgrounding assumptions (early school leaving).

Stage Two – Deconstruction and Critical Questioning

Cathy remembered the transfer programme, '...yea...to tell us about the school...yeah, I was nervous...'. In first year she had difficulties with some of her subjects, although the SCP supports helped her, '...but I knew I had you'se...you used to ask me how I was getting on...and I would tell you...'. While she had strong friendships in school she had difficulties building relationships with her teachers, 'I got on with everyone...the teachers you wouldn't talk to though...'.

Stage Three - Re-authoring conversations and Unique outcomes

She remembered first year went well for her, '...I was settled and I had the same class...'. However, at the end of second year her father had been sent to prison and had died tragically there during the summer holidays. Coming back to school was not easy for her, '...yeah...it was only two months after that...'.

Her relationships with her teachers in school changed after her fathers death and she realised they had been supportive of her, ‘...it was good because you’s and [the teachers] were really good as well...every day if I needed someone to talk to...you’s were there...you’s even came to my house as well...’. The support in school helped her, ‘yeah...just to help keep my mind off it while I was in school...’.

Her fathers death had made her even more determined to sit her Junior Certificate examinations, ‘yeah...to make my Dad proud...’. She is the first in her family to sit her L.C. examinations, ‘yeah...me Mam, Dad and [sister]...none of them did their Leavin’...’. Although she doubted her ability at times, ‘...I don’t know...I never thought I would last this long to be honest...but I think its coz of my Dad and my Mam, I just said I’m goin’ to keep my head down...’.

She was so proud when she was nominated as Student of the Year’, ‘you have to give it to me... this year I got more mature...and I don’t do what everyone else is doin’...I’m proud of myself...I cant wait till we get the results...’. She knows the college she wants to go to and the course she wants to take there and received a letter telling her, ‘...I got an interview...!’.

Story seven: Donal

The Problem Saturated Story

Donal is the second youngest of five boys, his father died tragically when he was two years of age, his younger brother was born two months later. He lives with his mother and brothers, his older brothers have had difficulties with alcohol and drug abuse over the years and this has lead to difficulties in the family home at different times. Early school leaving is the tradition in his family, in third year he became quite ill and in fifth year he turned to alcohol himself. In sixth year his paternal uncle, who was a father figure to him, died suddenly at the age of 39. Donal participated in the SCP supports in primary school and was targeted for support when he came into first year, he had weekly mentoring, a daily lunch voucher and was on the attendance support list.

Dominant Plot: Living traditions (RAPID area) Weak positioning within the story (death of close family member, alcohol/drug abuse, poverty, illness), background assumptions (tradition of early school leaving).

Stage Two – Deconstruction and Critical Questioning

Donal began to miss school in first year, ‘...it was making me not want to come to school...that sounds mad...I’m worried about my attendance but...’.

He remembered the weekly mentoring had helped him with this, ‘...she kept reminding me of what my attendance was like...ever since then I just came in regularly’.

In third year his health deteriorated, ‘...I started going downhill so I did...I started getting real bad pains in my chest and I couldn’t breathe properly...I didn’t know I suffered with anxiety attacks...’. His exams were that year and this was stressing him even more, ‘...I was panicking about the Junior Cert...’.

He remembered calling into the SCP office, ‘...yeah if I needed someone to talk to I would always go straight to you’s ...you were my first option’. Counselling for his anxiety attacks helped him overcome his anxiety. Fifth year went well for him however, during the summer holidays he turned to alcohol, ‘...I went mad on the drink...even, it was getting uncontrollable at home...’, he decided after this he would not return to school, ‘...so then I thought it was best not to come into school...just to leave school completely...’.

Re-authoring Conversations and Unique outcomes

His mother encouraged him to go back to school, ‘...she said I’m not letting you leave...you’re the only one that I know will do it to the end...and she’s right coz I’m doin my Leavin’ this year...’.

The techniques he learned at counselling helped him to change his perspective on life, ‘...I prefer to discuss it...and it has helped my mood and the way I go on...my view of life...the future...everything is more positive...I’m happier as well’. Although he still worries about the upcoming exams, he remains determined, ‘I’m dreading the Leavin Cert...with the anxiety attacks and all...but I’ll just have to deal with it...it’ll be worth it in the end...’.

He is the first person in his family to sit the L.C. examinations and this adds to the pressure, ‘...but it’s good pressure’ and makes him happy that his family are proud of

him and this in turn makes him ‘...try and push myself a bit more ...’. He knows in the past it has been difficult for his family, ‘...I know it means so much, ‘...growing up and all that...and my Dad dying...that’s why my family are so strong together...all my brothers...when I see the day they are proud of me...it makes me happier... I feel like I’m doing something good’.

He knows what he wants to do with his future, ‘...I just want to go to college and get a job...if there are no jobs here in Ireland I will emigrate and go where there are jobs...I just want to have a good future for my family and wife hopefully’.

In Summary

The dominant plot for the research participants who had moved to live here because of the influences of globalisation, had all experienced weak positioning within the story at some time or other and these involved moments of uncertainty particularly in relation to problems with learning of a new culture, traditions and language and separately had experienced problems in relation to developmental stage, parental separation and unemployment. The two research participants who were drawn from the local RAPID area and one drawn from a rural area, had experienced parental separation, poverty and three of them had experienced the death of a parent, two of these under tragic circumstances. Separately, matters in relation to sexuality, mental illness, being from a settled Traveller tradition, early school leaving and teenage pregnancy arose for them during their educational lives.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

The research in this study was carried out using a small scale ethnographic approach located within a postmodern critical, social constructionist paradigm and using a narrative approach as its primary mode of inquiry. Roscoe and Madoc Jones's (2009) framework provided the three key stages of engagement and rapport, critical questioning and re-authoring conversations and guided the researcher here to gather data on how the SCP supports have helped children achieve the three main goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) which are, briefly, that children;

- have a voice in matters which affect them
- be better understood
- receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development

In this chapter, the stories that were told using Roscoe and Jones (2009) framework are placed under the headings of the three goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) which helps identify that the SCP succeeds in achieving its three goals and provides a quality, unique, in-school support to some of the most disadvantaged children in our schools today. Hereafter follows the research recommendations, limitations of the research and final thoughts.

Children will have a voice in matters that affect them

The data collected in this study shows that the SCP succeeds to provide children with a space where they can develop positive relationships with adults, their self-confidence is developed and this in turn helps them to have a voice in matters which affect them.

When Thomas moved here he found the local dialect difficult to understand, and with the help of the SCP basketball coaching, he was able to learn the language and to make new friends. This was comforting for him at this difficult time because he could take the sport he loved to play in Latvia and use it here to help him to learn the language and to make new friends.

When John's mother died he found the weekly mentoring encouraged him to talk and to build his self-confidence and eventually helped him to find the courage to use his voice to tell his family and friends he was gay '...you always encouraged me to talk...I always wanted to say it...I was scared and you'se always talked to me...over the summer, I just said it...I was sick of hiding it...'.

When Megan was pregnant in fifth year she was uncertain about her future in school and found the SCP office was a place she could go for support and to talk, '...me and my Mam didn't know what was happening...we came to you...I wanted to go to school...'. Donal's attendance began to slip in first year and the weekly mentoring helped him with this and provided him with a place he could go to talk, this became very important for him when he was in third year and became ill, '...yeah if I needed someone to talk to I would always go straight to you'se...you were my first option...'.

Cathy found the SCP office was a place she could go to talk and this became very important to her after her father's death, '...but I knew I had you'se...you used to ask me how I was getting on...and I would tell you...yea, just to help keep my mind off it while I was in school...'.

Theresa's academic, sporting and social confidence was developed in primary school with the help of SCP supports like the basketball coaching and computer classes there, these helped her to make a change in herself in sixth class before she went into post-primary school, '...I was a very quiet kid...I wasn't very chatty...I thought I better start to get chatty...'. Finding her voice meant she was able to tell her parents she did not want to study law in college, '...I'm not really interested in law though...I want something that helps me get out of bed...'.

Children's lives will be better understood

Globalisation has resulted in a breakdown in the organizing structures as we knew them and a mass displacement of people around the world. The data in this study demonstrates some of the ways in which children are affected by these and how they

can become casualties within such an environment (Daniel and Quiros, 2010 cite Jordan, 2004).

Thomas, Tara and Theresa's families were affected by globalisation when their parents decided to move here in the search of work. When Thomas moved to Ireland he was just thirteen years of age and at a difficult developmental stage of his life, he had left his other family members and his friends in Latvia and was due to start school in first year, he had little knowledge of the language and had no friends.

Tara moved here when she was six years old with her mother and younger sister, they had no knowledge of the English language and had no immigration papers. They were moved from hostel to hostel, when they moved to this area to live, her brother and sister were born and her parents separated not long after, she does not have a good relationship with her father, she was uncertain as to why they had moved to this area.

Theresa's parents had moved to England for work with her older sister, not long after she was born as well as her two younger sisters. Her father became unemployed after this and her parents decided to move to Ireland to live in this area. Her father has become unemployed once again and her parents are now thinking of moving to another country. Theresa is not happy about this because she had planned to finish her education here, she is currently struggling academically and worries about her grades, '...I was doing well, but now the pressure is on...now I'm starting to not do well...'.

Cathy, Megan and Donal have lived all their lives in the local RAPID area and poverty, alcohol and/or drug abuse have featured in each of their family lives as well as a tradition of early school leaving. Cathy comes from a settled Traveller family and as such is recognised to be amongst the most at risk of early school leaving. Megan had a baby when she was in fifth year and meant she had missed a significant amount of time in school.

Traumatic event/death/ and parental separation affected all but one of the children in this study, John, Cathy and Donal experienced the death of a parent and for Cathy and Donal, these were under tragic circumstances. Donal's paternal uncle, who was a

father figure to him after his own father's death, died last year. Megan, Cathy and Tara's parents are separated.

Mental illness was an issue for Donal and Megan when they were in third year and John suffered from depression before he found the courage to tell his family and friends that he was gay.

Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development

Tara and Theresa attended the whole school computer classes and basketball coaching in primary school and could remember these had helped them develop their social, academic and sporting skills and in turn their self-confidence. When Thomas heard there was a Basketball Coach in the school this helped him before he had even started in school, '...I trained for this all summer...' and basketball training helped him to stay in school and become a better student, '...yea it helped me to stay in school longer...I would think of going home for a half day, but if training is on that day...so there's no point...so I just stay in school...'.

When Tara struggled academically in second year, she had the confidence to focus more on her studies and become a better student, this in turn has led to a better experience for her when she moved into fifth year, '...I was happy as well, coz I got new teachers and my maths is starting to improve now...'.

Megan and Cathy remembered being nervous when they transferred into first year and the SCP transfer programme had helped them with this, the strong social skills Cathy had developed in primary school helped her in first year, '...yea...I got on with everyone...'. Poverty was an issue for John, Cathy, Megan and Donal's families and the daily SCP lunch voucher support meant there was less for them to be worried about in school and in their family homes.

The supports they received led them to experience unique outcomes and provided them with moments they could be proud of, Megan remembered, '...I passed my mocks...even though I missed three or four months of school...'. Cathy was nominated as 'student of the year' and this helped build her confidence about the upcoming Leaving Certificate (L.C.) examinations, '...I cant wait till we get the

results...'. After her father's death, Cathy realised how supportive her teachers were of her, '...it was good because you'se and [the teachers] were really good as well...you'se even came to my house..'.

Megan's relationships with her teachers changed when she returned to school after having her baby and she too found them to be supportive of her, 'yea...they gave me the work I needed to catch up...', she liked that they treated her the same as the other students in her class, 'yea they still treat me like a kid...I'm a Mam....but I am still a kid...'. When John returned to school in sixth year he was no longer afraid to let people know he was gay and his relationships with his teachers also changed for the better as he found them to be supportive of his decision and this helped him as his male friendships deteriorated.

While Cathy, Megan and Donal's experiences had made each of them all the more determined to sit their L.C. examinations, although they recognised that the SCP supports had helped and supported them while they were in school. Cathy was still surprised she was still in school, '...I never thought I would last this long to be honest...but I think its coz of my Dad and Mam...'. Donal recognised it was his past which had helped him to keep going '...growing up and all that...and my Dad dying...that's why my family are so strong together...all my brothers...when I see the day they are proud of me...it makes me happier...I fell like I'm doin' somethin' good...'. After the birth of her baby, Megan became even more determined to get her education and believes the L.C. is key to her future success, '...I want my education...I need my L.C...'.

Thomas, Cathy and Donal know they want to go to college and what they want to study there, Tara plans to travel to America and, '...hopefully to get a job there...'. Donal will emigrate if he has to and just wants a '...good future for my family and wife...', Megan knows what she wants, '...I just want a good background and a good life for us...'.

John knows it was the small steps he took over the year that led him to where he is today, Theresa is currently faced with an uncertain future once again, although her self-confidence still manages to shine through, '...in first to third year you try to be

cool...when you get to fifth year you don't need to try so hard...', and it is this which will help her through these difficult times.

Research Recommendations

The Government's National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) recognises that our children matter and it is their status and wellbeing which 'speaks volumes about the values and quality of life within our society' (p.11) and for DEIS (2005), it not only reflects our society but helps 'shape its future development' (p.15). The former governor of Mountjoy prison contends that it is the State's responsibility that our children be supported, encouraged, and resourced and there to ensure their lives '...don't go wrong...' (Lonergan, Irish Times, retrieved, /09/2012).

The Government have shown a willingness to address the IHRC's desire for 'key reforms at constitutional, legislative, policy and service level to strengthen human rights in Ireland...' (IHRC, retrieved 14/04/2012). The recent announcement of the children's rights referendum marks only the beginning of a process which places children at the centre of decisions, however, in the current economic climate the question remains, if Government is prepared to resource the services and supports they need, '...that is going to be a real test as it cuts across every facet of society – housing, education, health' (Lonergan, Irish Times, retrieved, /09/12).

Analysis of the data shows that children's positioning within the story moves at times in their lives between weak to strong, strong to weak and can oscillate quickly between these two. The data demonstrates that the SCP supports children to achieve the three goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000-2010) and when they receive the right supports these can act as a bridge to 'unique outcomes' which are 'aspect of a person's lived experience that lies outside the dominant story' (White, 1989 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.7).

The evaluation of the SCP using the narratives of the children who use them provides us with the data to show that the provision of quality supports to children in school goes some way to help fill in the 'serious gaps' (IHRC, May, 2011) which were identified to exist in human rights protection in Ireland.

The data uncovered reveals that while children can receive supports from many sources in their lives, including family, friends, teachers and other professionals, however, the SCP is a unique, quality, in-school service which succeeds in supporting them to stay there thus ensuring their lives do not fall into crisis.

When they are provided with a place to go to talk, they become better understood which leads them to experience unique outcomes and this in turn helps build their self-confidence to remain in school and to experience outcomes which help them re-author their own dominant stories/plots and to remain in school thus avoiding the uncertainties associated with early school leaving (DEIS, 2005; National Children's Strategy, 2000-2010).

The use of a postmodern critical approach in this research provided a new perspective on the SCP and with ideas about how best to achieve a more positive climate in schools. The ESRI's (2011) study recognises that the punitive measures used in schools today serve only to fuel a cycle of misbehaviour and disengagement, particularly among working-class boys. It also recognises it is how a student's behaviour is handled that is central to the reduction of educational inequality and the enhancement of retention and achievement in school (Smyth and McCoy, 2011).

The data uncovered that when the children in this study, who are most at risk of early school leaving, were asked, they identified the SCP as being a place to go where they could have a voice, be better understood and provides them with access to quality supports, it was these that made a difference to their experience in school and provided them with opportunities of building self-confidence and stronger relationships with teachers and friends and provide us with new ideas of how best to handle student's behaviour in school.

The interview process was therapeutic for the research participants because the approach used gives them merit, acknowledges their experiences as human beings and provides them with the opportunity to share and make meaning out of life. As researcher and the Project Co-ordinator of the SCP in this study, I found myself at ease within this approach and could journey alongside the research participants since in this approach, 'there are no privileged positions' (Pease and Fook, 1999, p.11). The

approach is one which recognises that individuals can possess a number of identities across a range of social categories and that the continual reconstruction of reality plays a key role in their empowerment, particularly those of marginalized groups, who in creating their own narratives can take responsibility for the construction of their own identities, thus allowing for the restoration of a 'sense of agency' (Fook, 2002 as cited in Daniel & Quiros, 2010, p.288).

Limitations of the research

The researcher was aware that as researcher and Project Co-ordinator of this SCP, we can enter a study 'with our own biases and prejudices' (Sakamotoa and Pitner, 2005 as cited in Roscoe and Madoc Jones, 2009, p.11) and this can sometimes affect how we listen to problems and how we proceed to address them. The nature of the qualitative narrative research method and data analysis is intensive and meant the researcher kept the research sample small and invited only eight to participate, although due to illness just seven participated in the end. If there had been more time available, more research participants may have been able to be involved.

Working in a school presents restrictions regarding timetabling matters and the scheduling of the interviews, these intensified as examination arrangements were being put in place and placed considerable restrictions on the researcher in terms of available time to carry out the interviews. In addition, time limitations in terms of the completion of the research meant it was not possible to include anymore research participants in the study.

Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland, believes that 'mankind's future is rooted in the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights' (Haven, Stanford University, News, April 2010), the Ombudsman for Children argues when we fail to hear children's voices, 'they effectively become invisible' (Logan, Irish Times, 23/11/2011) and past experiences with our children demonstrates this is true. The decision to establish the DYCA demonstrates the vision of Government that growing up in Ireland means you have the best start in life, and to ensure this happens we must understand our children – their lives, their circumstances, their needs and the services and supports required to these. Holland, (Irish Times, 19/09/2012) reported that John Lonergan has warned, 'if the State was serious about vindicating children's right, it

must be serious about resourcing and supporting them to ensure their lives didn't fall into crisis'. It remains to be seen if the Government has the vision, the foresight and the will to develop the services provided by the SCP in schools today.

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Contents of Appendices

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Appendix A: Principal's Consent Form

Principal

DATE:

Dear Principal,

As you know, I am currently carrying out my dissertation in fulfilment of the final year of my Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies which I am doing in the Dublin Institute of Technology, Mountjoy Square, Dublin under the supervision of Dr. Matt Bowden. With your permission, I would now like to outline to you what it is I intend to do over the coming weeks in the school.

While remaining conscious of the upcoming examinations, it is my intention to interview between 6 or 8 students who will be drawn from either the 5th or 6th year classes, to ask them to tell me their 'stories' about their own school life and how the School Completion Programme may have helped them to decide to continue to with their education to Leaving Cert level.

I will talk to students who are known to me through my work in the School Completion Programme, and who have been supported in one way or another by it over the years. I will interview boys and girls, from a variety of settings, some of whom will be from the local area, which as you know is a disadvantaged one. I will interview someone from the gay and traveller community, and also some students who have come to our school from other countries.

I hope to uncover some of the benefits for them by being a part of the School Completion Programme. It is my intention that this study will go some way to fulfilling the Economic Social Research Institute's desire for more evidence and will provide policy-makers with additional and different source of information from

which they can gain further insights. This is particularly relevant for the School Completion Programme as the Governments 'integration process' is well underway.

I expect the interviews may uncover a deep need for such supports as those offered by the School Completion Programme in this school, and this may form the basis of an argument for its further development in our schools today. Investing in education has the unique potential to impact on generations to come and in the current context of globalisation and scarce resources, it makes it all the more important that decisions in relation to expenditure allocations are properly guided.

I wish to assure you that I will maintain the confidentiality of both the students and the school at all times. I am available at any time to discuss this matter further if you wish, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of my studies over the past two years.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully

Caroline O'Neill
Project Co-ordinator

Appendix B: Participant's Consent Form

DATE:

Dear _____ ,

I have already spoken to you about my study and how your opinion is important to me, and I would like to ask your permission to take part in my study to uncover some of ways that the School Completion Programme may have helped you to decide to continue with your studies to Leaving Certificate level.

To do this I will ask you to tell your own story about coming to the school and some of your significant experiences there to date. To help me with the analysis process, I will need to record your responses, however, I wish to assure you that the only person who will use the recorder will be me, the information you provide will be kept confidential at all times. Also, your own identity and that of the schools is guaranteed.

If you are happy to participate in the study, will you please sign your name below.

Thanking you in advance,

Caroline O'Neill
Researcher
Bachelor of Social Science

Consent Form

I, _____, consent to participate in this study.

Signed _____

Class/Year: _____

Appendix C:

Background and Policy Context

A Brief History of the Development of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1945) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

Post World War II left cities throughout Europe and Asia in ruins, millions of people were dead and millions more were left homeless or starving. In 1945, delegates from fifty countries met in San Francisco with the common goal of creating an international body to promote peace and prevent future wars. Its ideals were stated in the preamble to its proposed Charter and included a new determination to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’. The Charter of the new United Nations (UN) organization went into effect on October 24, 1945 and with it, for the first time in history, came a pledge to work together to promote its thirty Articles of human rights, with the result that many of these rights form part of the constitutional laws of democratic nations (UN Website, accessed 22/04/2012) including Ireland which became a member State in 1955. The UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) Article 26.2. refers specifically to education and states that:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was a by-product of international commitments to human rights and was unanimously adopted by its General Assembly on 20 November, 1989 (United Nations Childrens Fund, (UNICEF), accessed 14/04/2012). The UNCRC spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere are entitled to and according to UNICEF is ‘an international statement of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children’(accessed 14/04/2012). Article 28 and 29 of the Convention specifically refers to the right to education and states that:

The United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights (1945) developed as a result of World War and was ratified in Ireland in 1955, and the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was a by-product of international commitments to human rights and spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere are entitled to. Article 28 and 29 specifically refer to the right to education and states that:

All children have the right to a primary education...Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable...Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest.